



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

June 2006

WELCOME to the June 2006 Newsletter of Bedford Commuters Association.

1. Newsletter : Introduction

Firstly, apologies for the lack of Newsletters lately. This is two fold - one is that there is a problem e-mailing it to you - which we are at present trying to rectify; secondly (and much more importantly) Dan Levene our Communications Officer and Newsletter Editor has had to step down due to personal reasons, so at present the BCA do not have an Editor. **If anyone would like to join the Committee, to help out and edit our newsletter, this would be most welcome, as we are unfortunately not at full strength on the committee. Please contact the BCA Chairman on 01525 715454 if you are willing to help.**

2. June Timetable Changes

First Capital Connect (FCC) : Very minor changes as follows : -

Morning Peak -

06.26 Bedford to Wimbledon is diverted to Moorgate and becomes 4 cars

06.36 Bedford to Moorgate is diverted to Wimbledon and becomes 8 cars

Evening Peak -

17.23 Brighton to Bedford (19.02 from Kings Cross Thameslink) becomes 8 cars

19.08 Moorgate to Bedford calls additionally at St.Albans, ceases to stop at Luton Airport

MML : No changes that affect Bedford.

3. AGM

The BCA AGM was held on May 10th at Dom Polski in Bedford. Hugh Clancy (Commercial Director) and Keith Jipps (Head of Stations) gave a joint presentation on behalf of FCC and Duncan Fraser a presentation on behalf of MML. The main points from these presentations are as follows : -

First Capital Connect

Overview of Plans/Performance: commitments to customers, which includes improving customer service, meeting performance targets, implementing station improvements,

improving customer information, staff training, tightened security, bringing engineering 'in house', tackling the overcrowding issue, improving fleet performance and investing in the Class 319 interior refurbishment.

Performance: is improving, however 56% of TOC-on-self delays are caused by the fleet which needs to be addressed.

Timetable Proposals: the June changes were outlined. The SLC (Service Level Commitment) agreed with DfT is SLC1, which basically is the continuation of the present timetable, and SLC2 which would introduce all 8-car peak operation on TL North. Due to the additional Class 319 units not yet being available from Southern TOC, this enhancement cannot be introduced until June 2007 at the very earliest.

Class 319 Upgrades - crowding/interior/reliability: for overcrowding FCC is in discussion with DfT about obtaining the remaining 13 x Class 319 units from Southern. These discussions are ongoing at present. As for the interiors, design work has been going on to "refresh" them and a mock-up of a refreshed 319 was at Bedford, Cauldwell Walk depot on Sunday 14th May. The Chairman of the BCA received an invitation to attend and is commenting on the proposals. Finally engineering modifications are being undertaken to improve the reliability of the trains.

The BCA would have preferred a full half-life refurbishment of the trains rather than a refresh - the outcome is regrettably cost-constrained. The refresh will include a new interior colour scheme, better lighting, more grab-rails, different flooring, new seat covers and more luggage space (possibly by the removal of the single seats adjacent to the doors in some carriages). First class is likely to be retained. In standard class 2 + 3 seating will predominate, but adjacent to the toilets 2 + 2 seating has been requested to allow disabled passengers easier access. Work is likely to begin on the trains this autumn (but will take until 2009 for every unit to be completed!).

Tickets: FCC would be looking into the possibility of introducing 'early bird' tickets. Also from the 11th June, Cheap ticket restrictions will be introduced on evening peak services. This will cover the period from 16.30 to 19.00. The aim is to reduce overcrowding. Specific details will be published within the next 2 weeks. Member should enquire at ticket offices about the restrictions.

Communications - CIS/train announcements/regulation: the replacement of all Customer Information Screens by Network Rail is to commence October 2006. Other initiatives are improvements to train announcements and better information by station staff.

Station improvements: these to include increased security by creating a new CCTV Control Centre and employing more security staff, cleanliness, new waiting shelters, better toilet facilities and ticket sales.

Finally Hugh gave a brief overview on the latest situation on the "Thameslink Programme" (formerly known as Thameslink 2000), which was more positive now than for many years. It is hoped that if the Inspector's Report to Government is favourable, funding for the project could come as early as this summer. The London Olympics may also influence the outcome.

Midland Mainline

St Pancras Station move: this is planned for Weekend 15th/16th July. MML will move from the east side to their final home on the west side of St Pancras (new platforms 1 to 4). During the weekend of the move all MML trains will terminate at Luton (FCC services are not affected). The main entrance will remain as now, and passengers will access the new platforms via a subway under the main station. There will be a new ticket office, but this will not open immediately, so temporary facilities will be made available. All other facilities that are currently available, will be provided at the new platforms.

Performance: Excellent results, the best of the Inter City franchises, reaching 92% on time. In an NPS survey MML had excellent customer feedback.

Meridians: all Meridians now in service i.e. 16 x 4 car and 7 x 9 car formations. The 9 car Meridians have displaced HSTs. Meridians are a very popular train - at the Rail Business Awards the Meridian picked up the "Best Train" award.

Catering : there will be new catering contract with an enhanced product range including freshly baked products.

The AGM concluded with a Question and Answer session.

4. Compensation

Please note that if your Season Ticket was purchased from Thameslink you are still entitled to the old Thameslink compensation scheme. For those who buy tickets from FCC their new compensation conditions apply. Details at ticket offices.

5. Cheap Ticket restrictions

FCC announced that from June 12th restrictions will be introduced on evening peak trains between 16.30 and 19.01 for customers with cheap tickets, eg. day returns.

The Chairman along with the Chairman of APTU (user group for stations between Kentish Town and Harlington) meet with Elaine Holt (MD FCC) to discuss our objections. It was felt that these restrictions would do very little to resolve the over crowding issue, were discriminatory to customers outside the London Travelcard Area, length of restriction period and would lead to a loss of revenue and possible bigger increases in non regulated fares at a later date.

FCC felt that the restrictions would lead to an easing of the overcrowding and give a better quality of journey to Season Ticket holders. FCC confirmed that it would affect return journeys from the London Travelcard Area only. Therefore cheap tickets to places outside the area like Brighton are NOT restricted. However FCC stated the following:

- 1) they will monitor loadings and review the period of restriction and may change this if need be.
- 2) After our suggestion to lift restriction at school holidays when loadings are lighter they will look into this and report back.
- 3) An additional 40 revenue protection officers are being employed.
- 4) These restrictions will not be lifted if the remaining Class 319 units are returned from Southern TOC as overcrowding will still exist.
- 5) They will be starting a communications programme from Monday 5th June for customers explaining the restrictions.

Although FCC are still to introduce the restrictions we hope that some of our concerns will be looked at and some changes made in the future. The BCA will monitor the situation very carefully.

6. King's Cross/St. Pancras Underground ticket hall unveiled

An underground ticket hall which will serve passengers using the new St. Pancras International 'Eurostar' terminal and those heading to the 2012 Olympic Games at Stratford, has been completed.

The Western Ticket Hall at the front of St. Pancras (adjacent to the Euston Road) is the latest phase in a development to transform King's Cross/St. Pancras into a major transport hub.

Stair-free access, extra routes to street level and bigger subways will allow thousands more people to pass through the Tube station and interchange with both King's Cross & St. Pancras mainline stations.

A second (northern) ticket hall is due to be completed by 2010. This will have a link directly into the Thameslink "Box" station.

Passenger trains on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) are expected to start running from

the new terminal at St Pancras next year. Services between St Pancras and Stratford International station, serving the Olympic Games site in east London, are also due to begin in 2007.

The work at King's Cross/St.Pancras is part of Transport for London's (TfL) £10bn investment programme and was funded by the Department for Transport (DfT). Mayor of London Ken Livingstone and the Secretary of State for Transport Douglas Alexander toured the ticket hall on Thursday 25th May ahead of its opening on Sunday 28th May. Mr. Alexander said it will be a fitting gateway to London for passengers from the UK

and abroad and will help to create a fully integrated transport hub in the heart of the capital. Mr. Livingstone added: "The station is state-of-the-art, providing a blueprint for the future and a building fit for a world-class city hosting the Olympic Games."

7. Thameslink "Box" Station at St.Pancras

Following approval from Government earlier this year, work has now commenced on this new station for FCC services. It should open for the 'Thameslink' route in December 2007. However, no agreement has yet been given to complete the connections to/from the GN route, which almost certainly awaits the approval (or otherwise) of the "Thameslink Programme". Hence GN services from east Bedfordshire stations will continue to use the King's Cross mainline/suburban station adjacent to St.Pancras.

8. Rolling Stock availability.

The BCA are very concerned that the new franchisee is not addressing the overcrowding problem. An easy solution for FCC would be to lease the 20 x Class 319 units currently with Southern TOC. Whilst seven of these trains are hired out to FCC, Southern retains 13 of them to ease overcrowding on its own services. The BCA understand that the DfT "half-promised" these trains to First Group when awarding it the FCC franchise last December.

The ability to operate all 86 Class 319 units as part of the FCC (Thameslink) fleet would certainly ease overcrowding. Some current 4-car trains could quickly be made up to 8-car.

Understandably, GoVia (the losing franchisee at Thameslink) is keen to retain them on its Southern network and has gone as far as to "stake a claim on them" by repainting them in their green livery!

The FCC line to Bedford is one of the most grossly overcrowded on the network and scandalously many of its peak/shoulders of the peak services are still only four cars long! The overcrowding position has not been helped by the recent commencement of work on M1 widening by the Highways Agency south of Luton to the M25, nor by the growth of Luton Airport.

The 13 x Class 319 units from Southern would go a long way to making travel conditions on the route more tolerable.

In "Rail Manager On Line" of the 8th May, the BCA urged action on overcrowding : -

"Users of FCC services to Bedford, which were run as Thameslink until 1 April, are urging a major reallocation of rolling stock to deal with overcrowding. The BCA says the obvious solution is to transfer redundant Juniper units (Class 458s) from South West Trains to Southern TOC, thus releasing a further 20 four-car Class 319 units for the Bedford line. The Group has the support of London TravelWatch, which has said leaving the Junipers in sidings would be a "disgrace". The BCA is also urging the Porterbrook ROSCO to help work out a viable leasing deal to permit the swap to go ahead".

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For more information you can access our website - www.bedfordcommuters.org.uk
If there's something you want to tell us about, e-mail - admin@bedfordcommuters.org.uk

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