



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

THE RAIL USER GROUP FOR BEDFORD AND FLITWICK

MAY 2014 NEWSLETTER

1. Thameslink Programme

London Bridge Update

The first two new platforms at London Bridge station opened on Monday 31st March as the Thameslink Programme works move into the next phase. Platforms 14 and 15 will be the first of the redeveloped platforms to enter service and this will allow Network Rail and main contractor Costain to switch their attention to platforms 12 and 13.

The changeover meant some interruption to train services from Friday 28 March. On the Saturday no Southern or First Capital Connect Thameslink route trains served the station and on Sunday there were some alterations to Southeastern services. London Bridge platforms 8-13 were closed during this period. On Monday 31st March platforms 14 and 15 opened, giving passengers the first glimpse of the undulating steel and aluminium canopies that will eventually cover all platforms and, by offering protection from the weather along the full length, will encourage passengers to board carriages along the full length of each train.

However, to allow work to continue behind hoardings, the platform widths on 11, 14 and 15 will be narrower than when the station upgrade is completed. Platforms 12 and 13 will remain closed for redevelopment until August 2014.

There is much more work still to do affecting FCC and Southern passengers at London Bridge in 2014 for which detailed information on travel options will be provided - particularly for the closures between 23 and 31 August.

Shutting platforms for refurbishment in sequence forms part of plans to alter the number of terminating and through platforms to provide more capacity to, from and through the station. When complete in 2018 there will be nine through and six terminating platforms. At this point London Bridge will have the biggest station concourse in the UK and will be fully accessible with lifts or escalators taking passengers to every platform. The station will have new entrances on Tooley Street and St Thomas Street with improved access to local cycling, walking and bus routes.

London Bridge Blockade: Reduction in Service Levels

In our last newsletter we outlined the proposed changes to service levels from December 2014 as a result of the London Bridge Blockade. The BCA and APTU have now sent a letter to Patrick McLoughlin MP, Secretary of State for Transport and local MP's, Passenger Focus and London Travelwatch outlining our objections to the proposed service levels. The text of this letter is as follows:

Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin MP
Secretary of State

Dear Secretary of State

First Capital Connect Thameslink services between Bedford, Central London, East Croydon and Gatwick Airport during the 3 year diversion from London Bridge.

The Association of Passenger Transport Users (APTU) and the Bedford Commuters Association (BCA) represent users of Thameslink North rail services between Bedford and Kentish Town (inclusive) to Central London, East Croydon, Gatwick Airport and Brighton.

At present in the off-peak and at weekends there are 4 trains per hour between Bedford, Luton, and St Albans to Central London, East Croydon, Gatwick Airport and Brighton. As from the December 2014 timetable change these services will no longer be able to serve London Bridge for 3 years while it is remodelled and rebuilt. We are concerned to learn that during this time the off-peak service to East Croydon, Gatwick Airport and Brighton is to be reduced from 4 trains per hour to 2 trains per hour with the other 2 trains per hour terminating at Elephant & Castle.

We believe that this is wrong for the following reasons:

- With the present 4 trains per hour a cancellation will result in a delay of between 15 and 29 minutes, but with 2 trains per hour this delay could be anything up to one hour which if travelling to Gatwick Airport could cause major problems.
- The Thameslink North to East Croydon and Gatwick Airport corridor is very busy with Commuters, Airport traffic and leisure travel to the coast. Any reduction in service will cause severe overcrowding.
- It will cause a reduction in revenue to the TOC and put people off using the train for journeys to East Croydon, Gatwick Airport and Brighton.
- It will reduce journey opportunities with increased waiting times and missed connections at East Croydon and Gatwick Airport to other services.
- It will reduce journey opportunities for travellers south of the river wishing to travel to Luton Airport

It is the view of the APTU and BCA that the service provided by FCC during the 3 year diversion should be as follows:

- 2 Trains per hour between Bedford and Brighton via Herne Hill
- 2 Trains per hour between Bedford and Gatwick/Three Bridges via Herne Hill
- 2 trains per hour between London Bridge and Brighton.

This would maintain the link between Bedford, Central London, Gatwick Airport and Brighton and also maintain the existing very important frequency of 4 trains per hour between Bedford, Central London, East Croydon and Gatwick Airport.

Yours faithfully

Neil Middleton
Arthur Taylor

A reply has just been received from the Department for Transport, which suggests the final decision rests with the new franchisee! The full reply is attached. Both the BCA and APTU will continue to lobby for the best possible service to be provided. Confirmation of the exact changes to the December timetable is not expected until later in the summer.

London Bridge: No FCC services in late August

Again, as a result of the building work, Thameslink route services will not be able to stop at London Bridge between Saturday 23 August and Sunday 31 August and will instead be diverted via Elephant & Castle. Some services via Blackfriars will operate with 12 carriages which will run fast from East Croydon to Blackfriars. Other services will call at Elephant & Castle. Some weekday services are expected to be much busier than usual, especially between East Croydon and central London.

Class 319 Units

Thameslink Class 319 trains are to be transferred to Northern Rail to provide the new electric service between Liverpool and Manchester via Newton-le-Willows from December 2014. By the end of 2015 Northern will have access to 14 x 4-car Class 319s. Two (yes, just two!) of these trains will be available by December 2014 in time for the completion of phase two of the North West electrification programme. A further two of the 14 trains will be used for driver training and are not currently earmarked for passenger service. According to a spokesman for DfT, the trains to enter service with Northern will be "lightly refurbished" before beginning passenger duties. This is somewhat less than what the passengers in Lancashire were promised by Andrew Adonis (Transport Minister in the Labour Government) some while ago!

The transfer of the 319s is being made possible by the transfer of a further six 377/2 units from Southern in May 2014 and new Bombardier Class 387 Electrostar units due to enter service on the Thameslink/Southern network. These will, of course, be followed by new Siemens Desiro City trains, destined for Thameslink routes in 2015 onwards.

3. FCC Issues - Franchise Extension

FCC have finalised their agreement with the Department for Transport for an extension to their current franchise from 1 April 2014 until 14 September 2014. Informed sources suggest that it also caters for the possibility of a further extension should the DfT not be able to award the new TS&GN franchise for a start date of 15 September 2014. FCC have provided us with this update:

"I am pleased to inform you that FirstGroup has signed an agreement with the Department for Transport to operate the First Capital Connect franchise for a further six months. This means that FCC will operate from 1 April 2014 until 14 September 2014 when the new Thameslink Southern and Great Northern franchise is anticipated to start. This is a testament to the hard work my team have put in over the last year to improve the railway. The new franchise period gives us the opportunity to continue delivering our programme of improvements, in order to change our customers' experience of FCC services for the better.

Last year brought challenges including two large storms and several significant infrastructure failures, which tested our resilience plans. I am pleased that we were strong in providing continuous and consistent information to customers during what were difficult times. In the face of these challenges, we also successfully delivered an investment of £350,000 to improve the internal cleanliness of our trains, which showed an increase in passenger satisfaction.

The work we have done to improve specific business areas has been successful as we have seen marked improvements since last year's National Passenger Survey (NPS) including with the cleanliness of trains (67% inside up by 2% and 63% outside up by 7%), the upkeep and repair of stations (75% up by 8%), the attitude and helpfulness of staff (75% up by 5%), and value for money (37% - up by 5% since spring 2013). We also introduced a number of improvements to customer information and the way we handle disruptions, which led to the latest NPS results going up by 10 points in the way we deal with delays (now at 43%).

With this in mind, we are prioritising the following key objectives for 2014:

- Improving operational performance, by working closely with NR to reduce infrastructure failures
- Providing passengers better value for money, by improving services and information and delivering major programmes to improve stations and trains
- Continuing to enhance employee and customer safety, through our Injury Prevention and etiquette campaigns

We have already launched the new Class 700 train, and are now pressing ahead with the roadshow to ensure a maximum number of employees and passengers get the chance to see the model of the train and find out more about the project.

Whilst we have made strong progress in 2013, performance and the reliability of our infrastructure remains a key issue to tackle. Network Rail has publicly apologised for the continued disruption and I am leading discussions with them to drive more improvements in the short term so we can offer our passengers the service that they deserve.

We have a number of exciting projects coming up, including:

- The launch event for the second Class 365 train due to come in service in March. With each refreshed train, passengers' experience of FCC will improve as they enjoy a more comfortable journey.
- FCC will deliver a £2.5 million improvement plan providing passengers better value for money. This will see the following improvements being delivered: WiFi at key stations, extra cleaners on trains, enhanced customer service training, a new website rainbow board providing an at a glance view of our services, better customer information at stations through new and enhanced customer information systems, improved graffiti removal measure and additional staff to provide customer information and assistance.
- We will continue our role as the Thameslink Programme delivery partner on behalf of the DfT. Having concluded the design and initiated manufacture of the trains, we will be commencing dynamic testing of the trains at the dedicated test centre in Wildenrath, Germany, in March. Work is also progressing well with the construction of the two depots and the changes to stabling locations to support the new fleet of trains. Preparations are also underway with the development of training packages and the safety assessments associated with the introduction of a new fleet of trains.
- FCC will deliver a programme of heavy maintenance without having to reduce the number of trains in service. We will receive six class 377 Electrostar trains to cover the heavy maintenance of 83 class 319 units and will also receive two class 317 trains to cover the class 365s that are being overhauled. We will give back three class 319s to Porterbrook trains as part of the industry cascade.

- A series of station improvement plans are underway, and others are planned for completion by the end of the franchise period. These include: refurbishing subways at Elephant and Castle and Hertford north, replacing canopies at Gordon Hill, introducing lifts at Hitchin, Hatfield, Letchworth, Elstree & Borehamwood and Stevenage, resurfacing the car park at Bedford and refurbishing King's Lynn.

We believe that the next six months and beyond will be an exciting time for First Capital Connect passengers and hope that you will agree. Please do get in touch with me or my team if you need any more information on any aspect of today's announcement.

Best wishes,

David Statham
 Managing Director - First Capital Connect

4. FCC Issues - Performance

FCC recently announced its latest performance figures:

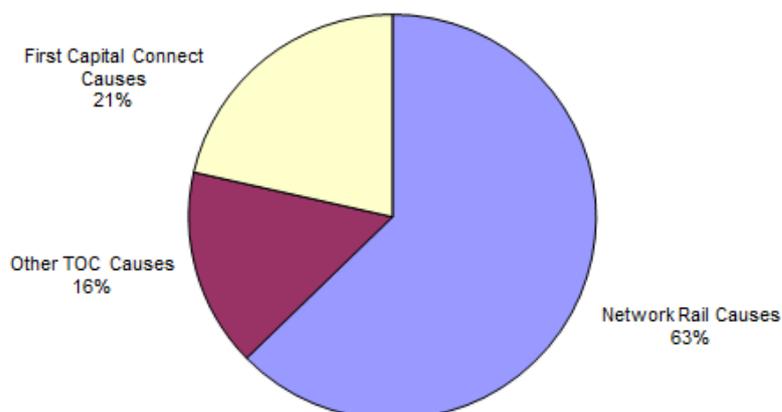
"Our PPM figures for the final period of the year have shown some improvement. The combined PPM for the period was 86.75%. On the Thameslink route our Public Performance Measure (PPM) was 86.08% while our target was 92.15%.

On the TL route on the 5th of March, a train had a pantograph damaged by the overhead wires near Bedford. This caused all lines to be blocked.

On the 26th of March there was a train fault at City Thameslink, with a train unable to raise its pantograph. This train was later moved to Herne Hill sidings, which cleared the line for movements.

Network Rail advised us on the 31st of March that the planned possession of the track at Three Bridges and Haywards Heath would over-run. This resulted with the rails being clamped and an emergency speed restriction being imposed. The line was handed back at 06.12 and efforts were made to restore the train service."

**First Capital Connect - Thameslink Route Delay Responsibility
 (13 Periods) Year ending 31/03/2014**



5. FCC Issues – Free Wi-Fi

FCC recently announced that free Wi-Fi is coming to 17 key stations on the First Capital Connect (FCC) rail network as part of a £2 million-plus investment the company is making in service improvements over the next six months to mark its eighth anniversary. Wi-Fi will be rolled out starting this summer at the following FCC-managed stations:

- Bedford
 - Blackfriars
 - City Thameslink
 - Elephant & Castle
 - Elstree & Borehamwood
 - Finsbury Park
 - Harpenden
 - Hertford North
- Hitchin
 - Huntingdon
 - Luton
 - Luton Airport Parkway
 - St Albans
 - St Pancras International
 - Stevenage
 - Welwyn Garden City
 - West Hampstead



6. FCC Issues - Link up with Nectar

First Capital Connect passengers are being given the opportunity to earn Nectar points when booking their journeys online thanks to a new partnership between Nectar and FirstGroup. A recent press release from FCC said the following:

"As of 9th April passengers who purchase train tickets online through firstcapitalconnect.com will earn two Nectar points for every £1 they spend, getting more value for their money Through this fantastic and ground-breaking partnership, we are able to reward our loyal customers further, by giving them something extra when they book their tickets online. We know how valuable Nectar points are to the people and communities we serve and we are delighted to be Nectar's first ever UK rail operator partner.

Approximately 180,000 people travel with First Capital Connect every weekday meaning there's great potential for passengers to collect Nectar points when travelling, by simply buying tickets in advance online instead of on-the-hop. Regular rail commuters will also earn Nectar points, with 2,500 points given for annual season tickets and 200 points for a monthly ticket.

Passengers who purchase their tickets online will be able to simply link their account with a Nectar card account to start receiving points on all tickets they buy online. In addition, customers will gain 100 bonus Nectar points for linking their accounts."

7. FCC Issues - Etiquette Campaign

FCC have launched the second round of their etiquette campaign ("Ed Ticket"), providing this update:

"First Capital Connect launched its 'Modern Day Guide to Train Etiquette' last October. The guide proved extremely successful and 77% of surveyed passengers indicated it would change their behaviour in relation to safety and etiquette on the railway. Having listened to this feedback, we have now launched the next phase of this campaign. The next phase of the campaign was presented to the travelling public at an event at King's Cross station today (10/3/14) alongside an animation video of the previous ten messages which can also be found on the company's [website](http://www.firstcapitalconnect.com). You can find a link to the video at [youtube.com/watch?v=j6HPnOU0tEw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6HPnOU0tEw).

The latest etiquette issues addressed by the campaign are:

- Putting feet on seats
- Bringing bicycles on trains
- Being more considerate to FCC employees
- Giving up your seat for those who need it most

The popularity of 'The Modern Day Guide to Train Etiquette' was unprecedented when compared to any awareness campaign we have done before. The challenge then was to build upon this using our passengers' feedback and that is what we have done with the introduction of four new images as well as unveiling an animation video that is entertaining yet relays important messages."

8. FCC Issues – New Telephone Number for Customer Service

First Capital Connect's customer relations contact telephone number has changed to 0345 026 4700 meaning that those dialling it will be charged at a cheaper rate. Updates have been made online and the printed material will be updated as part of the normal print cycle. People who dial the previous number, 0845 026 4700, will still get through to the customer relations team and will be charged at the new rates, however this diversion will expire in six months. The customer relations team are available seven days a week between 07.00 and 22.00 to answer any queries passengers have. Following customer feedback a dedicated team has been introduced in Plymouth to handle the more complex correspondence – this work was previous undertaken in Mumbai.

FCC's Customer Service Director Keith Jipps said:

"These changes will better suit our customers. With the number we swapped one digit to make the change as easy for our customers as possible and to give them a cheaper rate. The introduction of a team dedicated to the handling of the more difficult cases will give our customers better customer service in general."

9. Flitwick Matters

Steppingley Road Car Park

Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) recently announced that from the 31st March it would take over full control of the Steppingley Road Car Park which is adjacent to the FCC Car Park. Some resurfacing work was carried out and ticket machines installed. The tariff would be £5 per day Monday to Friday and £1 per day at weekends. A weekly season ticket is also available at £25.

The BCA is concerned about the lack of longer season tickets for this car park and would like to see the introduction of Monthly, Quarterly and Annual Season Tickets as is provided at the FCC car park. As a result of not being able to obtain these Season Tickets we have calculated that by paying the £5 per day charge this equates to:

£105 Monthly (£93 in FCC Car Park)
£325 Quarterly (£268 in FCC Car Park)
£1150 Annual (£850 in FCC Car Park)

The BCA had a meeting recently with CBC to outline our concerns and ask that the Monthly, Quarterly and Annual Season Ticket rates be implemented as soon as possible. They agreed to take our proposal away and look into it and report back. If anyone is affected by this it would help our argument if you could get in touch with your local CBC Councillor and ask him/her to lobby for the introduction of Season Tickets at this car park.

Cycle Parking

As a result of recent vandalism all the upper tier of cycle parking has been taken out of use until further notice. The BCA is in discussion with FCC to get the parking restored as soon as possible and to find ways of curbing this vandalism.

10. Bedford Matters

First Capital Connect has fully re-opened Bedford station car park after three months of resurfacing work. The project was spread over six phases, so that only one-sixth of the 595-space car park (about 110 spaces) was closed at a time to minimise the disruption to motorists. The start of the work was initially delayed back in December due to the discovery of drainage problems during inspections carried out by Network Rail.

11. East Midlands Trains

Stagecoach's East Midlands rail franchise has been extended by the DfT. The company has operated the East Midlands franchise since November 2007 after being awarded a contract for seven years and four months which included provision for an extension - due to run until April 2015. However in March 2013 the DfT announced changes to the franchising schedule including further extensions or direct award contracts for a number of UK rail franchises, including the East Midlands franchise. This is now set to continue until October 2015. Stagecoach is continuing discussions with the DfT on a planned direct award which would cover the period from October 2015 through to October 2017.

The BCA was asked, along with other Rail User Groups representing areas served by EMT for its comments on possible initiatives. Below is the text of our response:

East Midlands Trains – Franchise Extension

Thank you for your letter dated 30th January 2014.

The BCA welcome the opportunity to assist in helping to develop proposals for the future. Our views and thoughts on the three areas you have identified are as follows:

55. Since the start of our franchise in November 2007, what initiatives delivered by East Midlands Trains do you think have worked well?

From the perspective of travellers from Bedford the following have worked well:

- a) The reinstatement of the Bedford stop on the 17.30 St Pancras to Nottingham service which provided a half hourly service throughout the evening peak from London and to stations north of Bedford which matches the service during the rest of the day.
- b) Providing an additional stop at Bedford on the 06.37 St Pancras to Sheffield service thus plugging a 70 minute gap in the northbound service from Bedford during the morning peak.

Both of the above initiatives were instigated by the BCA and agreed by EMT after discussion to provide a better service for travellers from Bedford.

- c) The recent line speed improvements.
- d) Station improvements.

56. What could we do further to improve our services?

As you are aware the BCA has since the commencement of your Franchise been lobbying for the reintroduction of the half hourly service from Bedford to/from Leicester and the north. In our view this is the top priority for further improvements to your services.

We are aware that from December 2017 a sixth train per hour is due to operate to/from St Pancras and we would hope that this opportunity would be used to reinstate the half hourly service from Bedford to/from the north.

The BCA would like to see a review undertaken of the morning peak service to see if it would be possible to provide a half hourly service to London from Bedford to match the service during the rest of the day. At present the morning peak service is approx every 40 minutes.

57. What are your priorities for train services and stations in the future?

As outlined in our reply to question 56 top priority for train services is the reintroduction of the half hourly service from Bedford and the north with good connection at Leicester/ Derby/Nottingham for onward travel to destinations further north.

The BCA welcomed the announcement to electrify the MML. We realise that this work will mean some disruption to services from time to time but we would expect that these are managed and that any disruption to services is kept to a minimum.

Although EMT does not maintain Bedford station we would expect that EMT managed stations provide an excellent environment to passengers with up to date travel information especially during times of disruption, clean and heated waiting rooms and a place for refreshments. Good examples of this are Leicester, Derby and Nottingham stations.

Other Points

Although the reliability of the Toilets on Meridian's has improved further improvements are required. At Bedford station the scheduling of all southbound EMT services into Platform 1 would be a great benefit.

I hope these comments are helpful.

12. May Timetable Change

There are no major changes to either the FCC or EMT May timetable.

13. New Committee Members

An **URGENT APPEAL** to any of our members who would like to help. The present Committee includes one member who lives over 150 miles away and doesn't have the pleasure of commuting along the Thameslink route any longer! It is very important that to ensure that we can represent you effectively we have a full Committee and would welcome any member who would wish to join the committee to contact the Chairman. We hold committee meetings every 2 months for approx 1.5 hours and attend meetings with FCC/EMT management 3/4 times per year to discuss issues that arise. If anybody is interested please contact the chairman on 01525 715454 or email arthur.taylor19@btinternet.com.

14. And Finally - "Melanie's Musings" - the word from Bedford Borough Council

Hello everyone. It's been a busy few months for the Transport Policy team at Bedford Borough Council. As well as working on specific schemes and measures from our Access to Stations Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) project, we continue to work to improve transport across Bedford Borough. We are also liaising with the train operators and Network Rail on both short and long term initiatives.

Many of you will have seen that cycle logos have recently been applied to the bridges over the railway on Ford End Road and Bromham Road. The idea is that these will alert drivers to the presence of cyclists and encourage them to be a bit more considerate, hopefully making the journey to and from the station easier for everyone. Please do let us have your comments on these logos. We welcome all views, although we can't promise to be able to act on them immediately.

The new bridge across the river by the Britannia Ironworks development is nearing completion and should be open soon. This is the first of several new bridges across the river, with the Riverside North bridge anticipated early next year. These bridges will reduce the need to use the busy road bridges to cross the river for those who don't use a car, helping to improve access routes to the station from around Bedford.

As part of our ongoing work on station access, the Council continues to host and support the Stations Travel Plan Group. This Group, consisting of train operators, station users and the Council, works on ways to improve access and reduce the reliance on the car to get to the station. Several projects and initiatives are making good progress and we will continue to facilitate the work of the Group.

The new TSGN franchise is due to commence in September. At the time of writing the successful bidder was unknown, but the Borough Council is looking forward to working with the next franchise operator to continue to improve both the rail services and the station environment. The next franchise will see a period of enormous change for rail services from Bedford, including diversion away from London Bridge for several years and the introduction of the long-awaited new rolling stock.

Also due over the next 5 years is electrification of the Midland Main Line and the introduction of East West Rail services to Oxford. Both of these major projects, whilst led by the rail industry, could have significant impacts on the residents and rail users of Bedford. The Borough Council is actively working with Network Rail to understand these impacts, and find a way to minimise them. Where rail infrastructure is involved, it is important to plan several years in advance to make sure that things go smoothly when the time comes. On that note, we are also engaged in Network Rail's Long Term Planning Process – looking at the infrastructure and services required in 20 years time. More information on the outputs of all of this work will be published when it is finalised.

As always, comments and suggestions are welcome. We will do our best to implement as many as we can.

For more information, see our website - www.bedfordcommuters.org.uk

If there is something you want to tell us about, please email: admin@bedfordcommuters.org.uk

This newsletter is published by the Bedford Commuters Association.

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