



# BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

THE RAIL USER GROUP FOR BEDFORD AND FLITWICK



## DECEMBER 2016 NEWSLETTER



The Chairman and Committee of the Bedford Commuters Association would like to wish all Members a very Merry Christmas and a Prosperous 2017.

### I. BCA AGM

The AGM took place on October 31<sup>st</sup> at the RAFA Club. Representatives from Thameslink, EMT and Network Rail were in attendance including Stuart Cheshire, Larry Heyman & Peter Lane (Thameslink), Duncan Cale (EMT) and Muz Haque (Network Rail).

The meeting approved the Chairman's Report, Treasurer's Report and the 2015 AGM minutes. The new (but rather familiar!) Committee was appointed as follows:

Arthur Taylor	Chairman	Martin James	Committee
Stephen Floyd	Treasurer	Mark Spurgeon	Committee
Alison Crompton	Membership Secretary	Ben Foley	Committee
Jim Allwood	Newsletter Editor	John Henderson	Committee

Larry Heyman and Peter Lane gave the Thameslink presentation of which the main points were as follows:

Capacity and Modernisation	Delay Repay 15
Performance Update	New Class 700 trains
Network changes and impact on punctuality	Consultation on new 2018 timetable
Greater consequential impact of delays	

Duncan Cale gave the EMT presentation of which the main points were as follows:

The recent Prospectus published by EMT - A railway for growth	Bedford – Kettering/Corby additional track
Required investment	New bi mode trains
	Timetable of the new East Midlands Franchise

Muz Haque gave the NR presentation of which the main points were as follows:

Overview – NR Incident Count	MML Electrification
Asset Improvements	Seasonal Preparations – Autumn and Winter Possession Overrun – Belsize Tunnel 24.10.16
Overhead Line Failures	
Southern Network Improvement Measures	

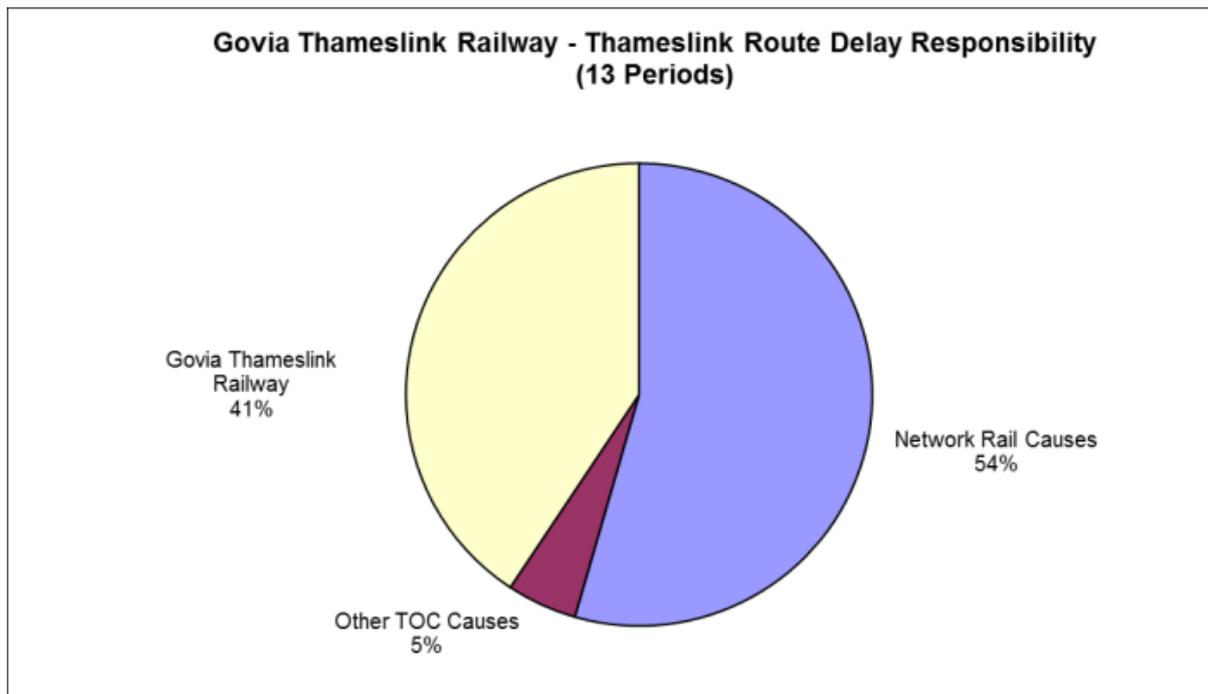
The complete Thameslink presentation can be viewed on our website.

## 2. Membership Renewals

Members are reminded that membership renewal was in late September - the subscription remains at £5. It is hoped that the Association continues to give good value for money and is informative. The BCA regularly represents the interests of its members in both local newspapers and broadcast media, as well as at meetings with the Train Operating Companies Thameslink and EMT, Transport Focus/London Travelwatch, Local Authorities, MPs, and EWRL.

Please suggest to a fellow traveller that they sign up too! The more members we have, the better able we are to influence the policies of the railway companies as the only officially recognised Rail User Group for users from this part of the line on Thameslink and EMT services. **Please see attached membership renewal form.**

## 3. Performance



### Recent Performance

Performance continues to be a big problem. The recent incidents at Luton and Kentish Town are but two. Regarding these two incidents please see the following issued by GTR:

*"I would like to offer my wholehearted apologies for the severe disruption on Thameslink services this week. I appreciate that this has been immensely frustrating to our customers on the back of the extended disruption last week after a power surge damaged signalling systems in the Luton area.*

*This week there have been further major incidents affecting Thameslink services. On Wednesday evening following a fatality near Elstree and Borehamwood, with services held for around 80 minutes while emergency services attended, and subsequent services delayed or cancelled.*

*Yesterday [...Thursday..] evening one of our trains came to a stand near Kentish Town at 1842. Our provisional findings are that there was a loss of overhead electric power which caused a 'tripping' in of the circuit breakers in the train involved. With the train unable to receive power, a rescue train was sent from Cricklewood. However, when that train was attached the same problem affected the rescue train. Our priority was the comfort and safety of our passengers, so the trains were decoupled in order for passengers from the original train to be evacuated on to the rescue train. This took place at around 90 minutes after the original incident began. After that, the stalled train was cleared once engineering assistance arrived.*

Investigations are on-going with Network Rail, and we will update you further on this next week. The location and timing exacerbated the seriousness of the incident, with all lines blocked for its duration. The complexity of the situation made it difficult to give clear information to customers about how long the disruption would last. Whilst we have had some positive customer feedback about communication from the drivers involved, we are reviewing how we could have done better in terms of the flow of information to customers during a challenging and uncertain situation.

Ticket acceptance was put in place on alternative routes including London Midland (routes via Watford and Bletchley) and Great Northern (route via Hatfield, Welwyn Garden City, Stevenage). With replacement buses unavailable at short notice passengers were advised to use local buses or taxis to complete their journeys home. We are aware that some communications had not reached some bus drivers regarding ticket acceptance, however claims will be accepted along with Delay Repay claims.

Once again I extend my apologies to all those affected this week and last. My team and I are determined to learn any lessons for our handling of major incidents and a great deal of work is already underway.

Yours sincerely,

Stuart Cheshire  
Passenger Services Director for Thameslink & Great Northern”

#### Broken Down Train Kentish Town – 17<sup>th</sup> November

The following was issued by GTR regarding the above incident:

*“Following on from my email the other week I wanted to update you on the findings of the investigation into the broken down at Kentish Town on Thursday 17 November, and the way the incident was managed.*

*The investigation carried out ascertained that the root cause of the incident was a power supply failure as no faults have been identified on the train involved. However it is not yet clear what caused the power supply issue with the overhead line equipment - an investigation into this is on-going. Notification of the nature of the incident from Network Rail East Midlands Route Control to the Regional Operating Centre which controls the Thameslink network was slow, and delayed a response to the incident. Other incidents on the network also hindered the time it took for operational response staff from both Network Rail and GTR to arrive on site. We are jointly reviewing procedures and resource plans to ensure future robustness.*

*There was a lack of bottled water available to distribute to passengers at West Hampstead Thameslink as supplies had been previously depleted due to other incidents on the network earlier in the week. We are reviewing how provisions are stocked and re-ordered at stations and looking at how we can best provide free refreshments in these exceptional circumstances.*

*While we have received some good feedback about the information given to passengers, our review has highlighted that advice to make alternative travel could have been briefed earlier. We also could have better managed passenger expectations for alternative travel as we were unable to source replacement buses on the Great Northern route, passengers should have been clearly advised to use local buses where available.*

*The recommendations from our investigations will be implemented across the business to help us better respond to incidents that occur in the future.*

*The period between 16 October to 12 November was an extremely challenging time on Thameslink and for this I am sincerely sorry. Quite simply, these figures reflect the catastrophic signal failure at Luton that cancelled all trains across central London and stopped most of our services north of St Pancras for the best part of three days. This and a track fire at Blackfriars, engineering over-run at West Hampstead, vandalism at Wivelsfield and the man who took off his shirt and jumped down on to the tracks at Norwood, delayed or cancelled a huge number of trains. I acknowledge that our passengers deserve better, and are working hard in-house and with Network Rail to improve.”*

We continue to have regular meetings with Stuart Cheshire to discuss the ongoing performance problems. A meeting has been arranged before Christmas.

#### 4. Thameslink December 2018 Timetable Consultation

Firstly please see the following Summary of Proposals and stopping patterns for Bedford and Flitwick as stated in the consultation document.

AM Peak Bedford/Flitwick trains arriving at St Pancras International

Station	07.00 – 09.59	08.00 – 08.59
Bedford	22 (18 at present) +4	8 (7 at present) +1
Flitwick	18 (15 at present) +3	8 (6 at present) +2

PM Peak Bedford/Flitwick trains departing St Pancras International

Station	16.00 – 18.59	17.30 – 18.29	19.00 – 19.59
Flitwick	18 (21 at present) -3	6 (8 at present) -2	4 (6 at present) -2
Bedford	22 (21 at present) +1	8 (8 at present) 0	4 (6 at present) -2

The stopping pattern of trains both AM and PM peak will be a combination of the following:

- Bedford, Flitwick and all stations to St Albans then St Pancras and stations to Gatwick Airport and Brighton via London Bridge;
- Bedford, Flitwick and all stations to St Albans then St Pancras and stations to Gatwick Airport via London Bridge and Redhill.
- Bedford, Leagrave, Luton, Harpenden, St Albans then St Pancras and stations to Gatwick Airport via London Bridge.
- Bedford, Flitwick, Luton, Harpenden, St Albans then St Pancras and stations to East Grinstead via London Bridge.

The off peak service remains the same as follows:

- Bedford, Flitwick and all stations to St Albans, then West Hampstead Thameslink, St Pancras and stations to Gatwick Airport and Brighton via London Bridge – 2 trains per hour.
- Bedford, Flitwick and all stations to St Albans then St Pancras and stations to Gatwick Airport via London Bridge and Redhill – 2 trains per hour. (See Note)

Note : this service stops at many stations between East Croydon and Gatwick Airport and arrives at Gatwick Airport approx five minutes later than the following Brighton service from Bedford. For travellers requiring stations between St Albans and Kentish Town a change of train will be required at either Luton or St Albans as is the case at present.

**Please see the attached document showing the BCA response to the relevant questions on the Consultation Response Survey.**

#### 5. “Modernising Our Station” Update

As you are aware Flitwick Station has been selected to be one of the stations that will use “Station Hosts”. Following talks with staff associations a trial was agreed to be run at several stations prior to a full rollout. Thameslink have issued the following update:

*“On 14 November we began to test the station host concept. The first three stations are: Chichester, Enfield Chase and Sandy, as agreed with union representatives and passenger bodies. These trials will give us the opportunity to thoroughly test all aspects of our proposals, including ticket office layout, technology supporting the change and what training our station colleagues need. The remaining stations (Battersea Park, Balham, City Thameslink, Cricklewood, Queens Road Peckham) will be live by the start of December and will be trialled for six months. Initial feedback on the training from colleagues who have volunteered for the trial has been very positive. A union representative has also agreed to take part in the secondment as well, this provide a useful insight into the role.*”

Passengers using these stations will see our seconded station hosts on the concourse area, they will be able to assist passengers using the ticket machines, journey advise and sell tickets from a hand held device. There have been no reductions in staffing levels at stations trialling the concepts and station users will be kept informed of updates via local communications, including station posters.

We have a number of measurement methods in place, not only to see if the trial has been a success, but to monitor and make improvements for the duration of the trial. We will be working with Transport Focus, monitoring the National Rail Passenger Survey data as well as gathering our own data through an independent researcher. We will also be gathering detailed feedback from our Station Hosts both through the unions and our own managers, and will be asking our customer cabinet and access advisory panel to monitor the trials.”

## **6. Thameslink prepares to take the railway digital with Traffic Management system**

The following has been received from Thameslink:

“Jointly, we currently run the busiest railway in the country with Network Rail and we’re about to get busier. When Thameslink ramps up its service to 24-trains per hour through the “core” from Blackfriars to St Pancras, our staff are going to need help to make sure the right trains turn up in the right place at the right time. Traffic Management is the answer. Traffic Management is a decision-supporting tool that will help us by predicting and managing conflicts proactively, maximising capacity and minimising the time that one train has to wait for another . Our Traffic Management for Thameslink team is focusing on how the system will work on the route when it goes live in 2018. They are working with the Thameslink Programme and suppliers Hitachi, preparing for their system to be tested from mid-2017.

The system will help our people by automatically setting the train routes in the core Thameslink area, and make sure trains are in the right order at the right time as they enter the area. It will also identify and recommend changes to the timetable to prevent potential conflicts across the Thameslink area. This area covers an approximate 20-minute radius of key operational locations from the core, as well as the Brighton Main Line.

The Traffic Management System will also connect to other technology, including Automatic Train Operation (ATO), European Train Control System (ETCS) and the Connected Driver’s Advisory System (C-DAS), to track trains on the network and enable our drivers to run at optimum safe speed. This is the first deployment in the world that combines these technologies on a busy mainline railway. This will improve our train performance by helping us to recover from disruption, reduce delays and minimise congestion.”



Control team at Three Bridges control centre



## 7. Class 700 Update

Class 700 performance is much improved from the dark days over the summer – the latest update given to us at the last Stakeholder meeting said that MTIN (Miles Per Technical Incident [costing more than five minutes]) had improved by a factor of 40 (that's 40 times better, not 40% better!). We know that there are still noticeable issues with the Passenger Information System, but these are not stopping the train running. It is also fair to allocate some of the improvement to the drivers – they now understand the trains better so know how to avoid issues – and fix them quicker!

We still await a delivery timetable for Wifi and seatback tables and we also await a decision on the provision of seating bay tables and power sockets. Class 700s have now started appearing on Sevenoaks services.

## 8. Driver Training Update

Cancellations due to driver shortages remain an issue; in particular there seem to be very regular cut backs applied to the overnight service.

The situation was as follows on 15 October:

- Since January 2015: 70 new drivers have qualified
- Trainees currently in training: 106
- Current driver numbers: 348 out of 371

One of the challenges faced by Thameslink at present is that they don't have enough driver trainers and that existing drivers are loathe to take up the training role. A second challenge is the need to continue to train drivers to drive Class 700s.

We have been told that the current expectation is that drivers will be at establishment around Summer 2017. We have also been tipped off that there will be risks to the service this Christmas / New Year break. I suspect this will be most noticeable on New Year's Day (it is a Sunday this year); I can also see problems on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> December.

## 9. Smartcards & Carnets

The latest we have from GTR on the rollout of Smartcard technology and Carnets is:

### Smart Cards

*“Expecting to extend KeyGo (Key ‘Pay as You Go’) to Thameslink Great Northern and to the national stations we serve in London in the next couple of months*

*Our overall plan is to eventually have everyone move to the Key with either a pre-purchased season and/or KeyGo. However, that will of course involve a series of developments over the next few years.*

*Our general expectation is to incrementally enhance the system with steady releases rather than trying to do too much at once.*

### Carnet Ticketing

*We continue to discuss this issue with DfT to try to proceed to launch carnet at least in trial form.*

*There is a fundamental issue around ensuring that any changes do not lose revenue for DfT given the expectation that we must maintain value for taxpayers.”*

## 10. EMT Stakeholder Conference

The Chairman attended the EMT Stakeholder Conference on 8<sup>th</sup> November. Items raised that affect the Midland Main Line were as follows:

### Electrification

The latest dates are completion to Corby by December 2019 and completion to Nottingham and Sheffield by 2023. However since the conference the Rail Minister Paul Maynard when pressed in a recent debate in the House of Commons refused to commit to completion to Sheffield by 2023.

### Major Projects

Provision of four tracks between Bedford and Kettering to commence March 2017;  
Provision of double track plus signalling from Kettering to Corby is under way with completion by 2018;  
Provision of four stabling sidings for electric trains at Kettering to be completed by 2018;  
Straightening track through Market Harborough station to improve line speeds (and hence journey times);  
Derby station remodelling; and  
Leicester station capacity improvements.

### Franchise

The timetable for the new franchise was confirmed as :

December 2016 May 2017	3 month consultation Issue ITT	March 2018 July 2018	Contract award Franchise start
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The Rail Minister indicated that the plan for the new franchise was to create two distinct services, one for long distance travellers and the other for commuters travelling to London from Corby, Kettering and stations south thereof. As a result long distance services would be speeded up. The BCA are very concerned with this plan as it could well affect Bedford. We now await the publication of the consultation document which is expected very soon.

We will continue to argue for the reinstatement of the two trains per hour from Bedford to Leicester and the north as we are well aware that many people commute to Leicester and many people use the direct services to the north throughout the day. We would expect that the present half hourly service to London is maintained and extended to the morning peak.

**The Chairman would urge all members who would be affected by these changes to personally respond to the consultation document and also let him know your views so they can be reflected in the BCA reply.**

### Rolling Stock



EMT have raised the need for new rolling stock for the Midland Main Line to cater for increasing numbers of people travelling and the need to replace the 40 year old HSTs with the DfT urging them for a quick decision.

## 11. 2017 Fares and Delay Repay 15

Please see the following GTR press release on the 2017 fares increase and delay repay 15 minute compensation on Thameslink and Great Northern - <http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/about-us/news/improved-compensation-for-thameslink-and-great-northern-passengers/>

*“Fares on Thameslink and Great Northern will rise by an average of 1.8% next year, in line with the annual increase of other train operators, but the good news is they will benefit from an enhanced compensation scheme for delays.*

*From December 11<sup>th</sup>, passengers on these routes, along with their counterparts on Southern and Gatwick Express, will be the first in the country to benefit from Delay Repay 15. This will enable passengers to claim compensation for delays to their journey of 15 minutes or more, rather than the current 30 minute threshold.*

*Govia Thameslink Railway CEO Charles Horton said: “Our passengers will be the first to benefit from this enhanced delay repay scheme. It is something our passengers have been telling us they wanted for some time so I am delighted we are able to deliver it to them. Our aim is get passengers where they want to go on time, but if we don’t, it is right that they are compensated.”*

We are now awaiting further details on specific fare increases.

## 12. Christmas/New Year Train Services



There are inevitably significant changes to services during the Christmas and New Year period:

Fri 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec Normal service  
Sat 24<sup>th</sup> Dec A normal Saturday service will run with trains finishing earlier so no trains run after midnight  
Sun 25<sup>th</sup> Dec No service  
Mon 26<sup>th</sup> Dec No service  
Tue 27<sup>th</sup> Dec A Saturday service will run  
Wed 28<sup>th</sup> Dec A Saturday service will run with additional trains during the peak  
to Fri 30<sup>th</sup> Dec  
Sat 31<sup>st</sup> Dec A normal service will run with minor alterations in the late evening. Additional early morning New Year’s Eve special services will run between Farringdon and St.Albans (between 01.17 and 04.47) and also between St.Pancras International and Sutton via Micham Jc (between 00.38 and 04.38)  
Sun 1<sup>st</sup> Jan A normal service will run with minor alterations to some late services. Thameslink services will not run between Haywards Heath and Brighton from 22.00 until 05.50 Monday morning due to engineering work.  
Mon 2<sup>nd</sup> Jan A Saturday service will run with minor alterations to some late evening services  
Tue 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan Normal service

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For more information, see our website - [www.bedfordcommuters.org.uk](http://www.bedfordcommuters.org.uk)

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

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