



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

THE RAIL USER GROUP FOR BEDFORD AND FLITWICK

JULY 2016 NEWSLETTER

I. Modernising Our Stations

As we outlined in our last newsletter the BCA, along with other rail user groups, responded to GTR's consultation on "Modernising Our Stations". One of which to be affected is Flitwick (attached to our last newsletter was the BCA response). As a result of these responses and feedback from both London Travelwatch and Transport Focus, GTR has revised its plans. They issued the following statement:

"GTR has improved its station modernisation plans following discussions with the two rail consumer groups Transport Focus and London TravelWatch, and feedback from passengers during a public consultation. Both consumer groups have welcomed the changes. GTR wants to modernise the way it operates 83 of its busier stations on Great Northern, Southern and Thameslink for the benefit of passengers, many of whom now buy their tickets online, or use Oyster, contactless and smartcards. Where sales from ticket offices are low, GTR wants to bring staff out from behind the windows and on to the concourse to work where they're needed most, as Station Hosts, providing assistance and helping sell tickets. All the modernised stations will be staffed from the very first train the very last, seven days a week. This will drive other customer benefits – GTR will also be able to increase the opening hours of facilities passengers have told us are important, such as waiting rooms, toilets and lifts.

A key concern raised during the public consultation into the plans was that stations predominantly within the London Travelcard zone would not have equipment allowing passengers to buy the full range of tickets that would normally be available from a ticket office. GTR says that this equipment will now be made available. Consequently, GTR's new commitment is that ticket availability will not be reduced from current levels - passengers will continue to be able to buy the same range of tickets and railcards that they can today, but will have a person who can help with buying tickets, for longer, especially in the evenings and at weekends.

There were also concerns about queuing times at all the modernised stations. GTR has given a commitment that station staffing levels will ensure passengers do not have to wait longer than they do today – and the extension of new smart ticket technology means that passengers will soon be passing through stations even faster. GTR is also going to keep ticket offices open in the morning peak at an additional 10 stations on the list to cope with demand and keep passengers moving. Furthermore, 63 new ticket machines will be installed.

Finally, there is a commitment to 'soft launch' the concept at a select number of stations towards the end of the summer and if necessary make any changes to reassure passengers, staff and stakeholders that the concept works and will improve the service provided at stations."

Transport Focus Chief Executive Anthony Smith said: "We are pleased to see that GTR has listened to passengers' concerns and changed their plans to reflect these. The pilots are an opportunity to test these plans and monitor their impact."

GTR Passenger Service Director Keith Jipps said: “We appreciate the assistance and views of Transport Focus and London TravelWatch and for their support for our plans going forward. We think the consultation has been a success as we’ve been able to listen to our passengers and modify our proposals to meet their needs now and in the future. We believe our new Station Hosts will be of great benefit to our passengers, providing assistance for more hours each day with the same tickets available as today.”

GTR is also in discussions with disability user groups who sought reassurances during the consultation that provision for disabled passengers would not be reduced. The increased visibility of the Station Hosts, as well as their longer availability, should mean that GTR not only meets, but improves the station experience for people with disabilities.

GTR has published on its train company websites a summary of the consultation feedback along with its response www.thameslinkrailway.com/public-consultation and www.southernrailway.com/public-consultation.

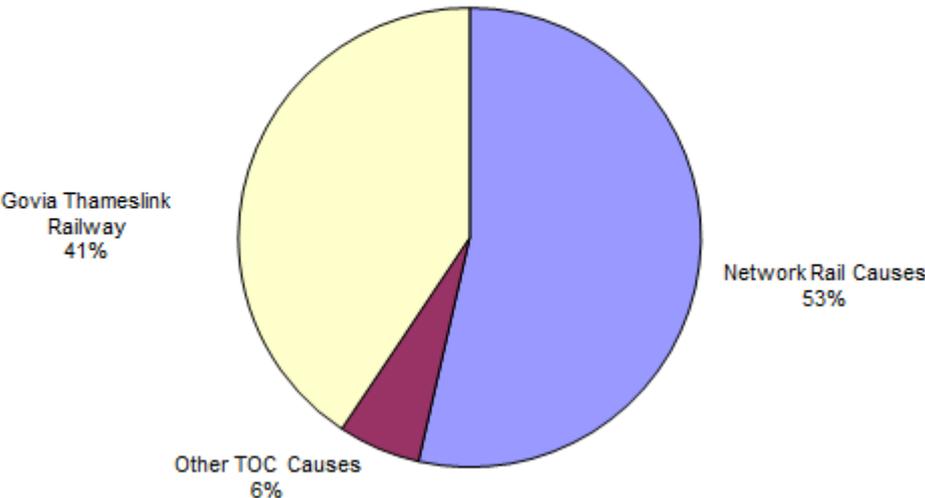
Keith added: “I’d like to thank passengers for responding to the consultation and feel confident that these changes will reassure them that our proposals will improve passengers’ experience in our stations.”

On Modernising stations see also: <http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/your-journey/improving-your-railway/improving-your-stations-public-consultation>

GTR will now proceed with a soft launch at selected stations later this year. Thameslink stations selected for this launch are Cricklewood and City Thameslink. The BCA will continue to be active ensuring that travellers will not be disadvantaged by these changes.

2. Performance

Govia Thameslink Railway - Thameslink Route Delay Responsibility (13 Periods) Year ending 28/05/2016



Major incidents that affected performance in P2:

- 2 May 2016: Emergency services dealing with an incident at Luton Airport
- 3 May 2016: Signalling problems at London St Pancras
- 10 May 2016: Overrunning engineering work at St Albans City
- 10 May 2016: Signalling problems at Cricklewood

Performance continues to disappoint. After a series of improving performance from Autumn 2015, performance has now dropped again significantly. The main reason for the deterioration is the ongoing staffing issues at Southern, which are having a significant impact on Thameslink. For instance, trains are crowded, extending station stops or platforms are blocked awaiting staff. BCA sees no evidence that Thameslink is being directly dragged into the issue, and such rumours as it does hear suggest that this won't change. As you may know, Southern switch to a new temporary timetable on Monday 11th July and this will hopefully reduce some of the delays (eg waiting for platforms) – but could increase demand for Thameslink services leading to station delays. The network is highly sensitive to late arrivals from the south at East Croydon and the reductions in service volumes north of there are limited (meaning no meaningful improvement in running times).

Whilst the BCA sees no evidence of links with the Southern issues, it does wonder (subjectively) if there has been an upswing in Thameslink owned failures. On drivers, we have asked for some data on net growth (ie newly trained, less leavers) – all we get is the former. There has been a slight increase in cancellations recently and we are led to believe this is due to the need for drivers to receive Class 700 refresh training. Sundays remain vulnerable, however, as evidence of progress it does seem now to be restricted to special Sundays – recently Fathers' Day. The latest figures from GTR show that there are 92 drivers in training for Thameslink.

Update on improvement activities

Our latest briefing from Thameslink highlighted the following:

Service Recovery and Command & Control:

This work is about ensuring that we return to normal service as quickly as possible after disruption, whilst minimising the impact on our passengers. We are working on improving response times in the case of infrastructure equipment or train failures. We are also developing our team in our Control room further (where service decisions are taken during disruption), taking into account the large geographical spread of our network. Teams are being aligned and trained to speed up and improve decision making, involving both Network Rail and staff from GTR. Recruitment for key positions to strengthen our ability to respond in times of disruption is underway.

The Basics – right first time:

Last period we started an action team on Gatwick Express, which is working with local teams to uncover issues and address them locally. This is led by the Passenger Service Director, supported by teams from across GTR and Network Rail. Another cross-functional team will focus on addressing issues that prevent us from delivering a punctual service in the early hours, starting with investigations overnight at Victoria. Network Rail is strengthening the teams responsible for responding to track faults and track circuit failures, with a special focus in the London area. These teams will also enable more rapid response to assets which fail more frequently and cause the largest impact.

Network Rail monitoring showing results

An assessment of the effectiveness of Network Rail's remote condition monitoring equipment on points in the Sussex route area has shown strong results. The equipment is set up on 956 sets of points and an alarm will sound if the equipment looks set to fail. This prompts a visit from a Network Rail technician. This proactive approach as seen the number of points failures fall by a third in two years — from 256 in 2013/14 to 169 in 2015/16.

3. Thameslink Programme – Class 700 Launch

The Chairman attended the official launch of the class 700 at Blackfriars on May 24th and travelled on it from Blackfriars to East Croydon. The following is the GTR press release of the event:



Thameslink this morning (Tuesday) showcased the future of commuting when it unveiled the spacious new Siemens Class 700 Thameslink train at London Blackfriars station.

Fifty per cent longer than almost every train in the Thameslink fleet, the train put on show to media and stakeholders can carry up to 1,750 people seated and standing – the equivalent of 21 double-decker buses – and will be running on many routes to London from Sussex, Surrey, Kent, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

The design is essential to meet the huge growth in passenger numbers that has soared 40% in the past decade.

When the first train enters service, passengers will notice:

- *Wider doors and aisles to make getting on and off easier*
- *Spacious walkways between carriages to make it easier to move through the train to give a greater sense of security Two-by-two seating to create more room*
- *Lots of luggage space – essential for airport travellers*
- *Adaptive climate-controlled air conditioning which adjusts to the number of passengers to keep things comfortable*
- *Electronic signs showing which carriages have more space to sit or stand Screens with real time service information*
- *Fully accessible toilets for disabled passengers and those with pushchairs or needing baby changing facilities*
- *Spaces for full-sized bikes in the off-peak; storage for fold-up bikes in the peak*

Govia Thameslink Railway CEO Charles Horton said: “Not only will many of these trains be longer and be more spacious, they’ll be cutting edge with real-time information from around the network and the Tube, and excellent facilities for people with disabilities. These trains have been designed to carry up to 1,750 people in climate-controlled comfort, which is essential to meet the huge growth in passenger numbers that have soared 40% in the past decade. Their wide doors, open interiors and state-of-the-art real-time passenger information systems will help us run a high frequency, high intensity service with over 80% more seats across the heart of London in 2018.”

Rail Minister Claire Perry said: “This is another significant milestone for the multi-billion pound Thameslink Programme. Projects like this show how our record £40 billion investment in the railways is delivering better journeys for passengers across the South East and beyond. “This impressive new fleet of hi-tech trains will make a real difference to commuters and leisure travellers, with more space and better information screens. I look forward to seeing the improvements to passengers’ journeys as these trains are introduced to the Thameslink network.”

Sabrina Soussan, CEO of Mainline Transport at Siemens, said: “We at Siemens are delighted to be showcasing the Class 700 train today; it’s yet another example of our innovation and investment in the Thameslink Programme. Today’s event gives commuters the first real insight as to what their future journeys will look like and we are excited at how our innovations in terms of technology and capacity will transform passenger journeys across the network. Passengers will benefit from easier access made possible through the wider doors and greater space – changes that will make a big difference to everyday travel.”

Andy Pitt, Executive Chairman of train owners Cross London Trains (XLT), said: “This showcase event marks another important milestone in the Thameslink Programme. Cross London Trains is delighted to have provided the finance for this new state-of-the-art Class 700 train fleet which will bring significant benefit for passengers. I am really looking forward to seeing the first of these trains in passenger service in the next few weeks.”

Nick Gray, Network Rail’s Thameslink Programme Sponsor, said: “Launching this new generation of trains at such an iconic station symbolises what the Thameslink Programme is doing to transform rail travel across London. We have worked closely with our colleagues at Thameslink and Siemens to get the infrastructure ready for these trains to create a more reliable, regular and modern service.”

Class 700 into Public Service

The first day of the class 700 in public service was Monday 20th June. The following is the press release issued by GTR:

“Thameslink’s new Siemens-built Class 700 has performed well as it enjoyed its maiden voyage in passenger service on the 10.02 service from Brighton to London Bridge. Unit 700108, one of the 55 12-carriage trains to be built, made a total of four trips on this route in the off-peak on Monday (20 June) as it was given a “gentle introduction” to passenger service. On Tuesday the train, which is capable of carrying up to 1,750 in air conditioned comfort, ran nine times between the two stations helping move passengers caught up in the Southern conductors’ strike. The train continues to be used on the four off-peak journeys after which it will begin service on the wider Thameslink route through central London to and from Bedford.”

Govia Thameslink Railway's Engineering Director Gerry McFadden said: “We are thrilled that our new Thameslink train is performing well. In future, as the train continues to prove itself, we will begin running it across London to Bedford. Ultimately the train will give passengers much-needed additional capacity with longer trains throughout the rush-hour, creating at least 1,000 extra standard class seats. On board the very first service on Monday was Brighton’s

Middle Street School which was taking a group of 35 six-year-olds dressed as pirates to see the Golden Hinde in London. Teachers said the new train really added to the excitement.



Photo above of the very first public service at Earlswood by Alex Dasi-Sutton

Anita, a Brighton businesswoman on board, was pleased to hear that peak hour services from Brighton would be run in fixed formation with 12-carriages – half as long again as most Thameslink trains today. Another passenger, Roger Felkis of Haywards Heath, said: “The wide gangways mean I can get past suitcases without problems. The train’s smooth and comfortable.” There were also cyclists returning from Sunday’s London to Brighton bike ride who made use of the dedicated bike storage area.

This was the first of the trains to enter service. GTR’s intention is to run the 12-carriage trains in the peak from Brighton. It means Thameslink will have at least 1,000 extra standard class seats from the town in the morning peak once the new fleet and timetable is introduced. Ultimately there will be 115 new trains running on an expanded Thameslink network to additional destinations such as Peterborough and Cambridge. In total, 55 of these will be in 12-carriage formation and 60 will have eight carriages.

Siemens Thameslink Programme Director Dave Hooper said: “This success represents a step change in cross-London commuter train experience with the latest state-of-the-art train design and on board systems equipment. This has been achieved by many people across our European in-house team and supply chain in design, testing, train manufacturing and depot construction. The service team at Three Bridges depot is very proud to take over the leadership of these new trains from the development phase into passenger service operation and we look forward to entering more new trains into service over the coming months.”

Andy Pitt, Executive Chairman of Cross-London Trains, said: “I am delighted that the new Class 700 trains are entering into passenger service. It’s great to see that passengers are starting to benefit from the massive investment in this brand new train fleet which will deliver much needed additional capacity to the rail network.”

Now that the class 700 is in public use we expect them to start running north of the river to/from Bedford. We anticipate that the first trains will start running week commencing 11th July with 3 trains and progressively introduce a further 2 trains into service every fortnight. If you do travel on a class 700 the Chairman would be very interested to know your thoughts of the new train.

Class 700 Diagrams

The on-line enthusiast fraternity have suggested the following services will be diagrammed for Class 700s between Bedford and the former Southern Region, starting this week (11th July):

TB501 SX

5Y91 02+14 Jowett Sidings to Bedford
2W91 02.40 Bedford to Brighton

TB502

5W93 05.10 Three Bridges Depot to Three Bridges
2W94 05.20 Three Bridges to Bedford
1W13 07.34 Bedford to Brighton
1W24 10.35 Brighton to Bedford
2W41 13.24 Bedford to Three Bridges
1W92 15.59 Three Bridges to Bedford
2W61 18.24 Bedford to Three Bridges

2W66 20.43 Three Bridges to Bedford
5Y68 23+00 Bedford to Jowett Sidings

TB503

5Y11 06+32 Jowett Sidings to Bedford
1W11 06.58 Bedford to Three Bridges
2W22 09.11 Three Bridges to Bedford
1W29 11.40 Bedford to Brighton
1W40 14.35 Brighton to Bedford
2W57 17.20 Bedford to Three Bridges
2W62 19.43 Three Bridges to Bedford
5Y62 22+00 Bedford to Jowett Sidings

Class 700 Driver training

Briefing note from GTR:

“With the introduction of the new Class 700 trains in the next few months, comes a substantial training programme of Thameslink drivers. The recently opened Three Bridges Depot has been the scene of the first round of training, with drivers undertaking an eight day course of classroom and practical experience. Classroom learning covers areas such as the location of on-train equipment, train preparation, train driving and door operation to dealing with faults, failures and alarms. Additionally time is spent training on the state of- the-art simulator, with its highly advanced software, allowing drivers to experience driving thorough key central London stations.

Then it's time to take the Class 700 out on the tracks. For the drivers, the first big difference in the train is the cab, which our own drivers worked alongside Siemens to create the design and layout, so that it was designed and built with the driver in mind. They recommended that the seat be positioned in the centre of the cab/dashboard, allowing for improved visibility, a more ergonomic seating position with adjustable DSD pedal, an impressive headlight beam at night and a crystal clear PA system. Importantly, the requirement was for a train that was enjoyable to drive. Drivers, accompanied by a Testing and Commissioning Driver, then take the train out to experience the operation of the train over a two day period on the main line and a day's slow speed operation at the Three Bridges depot. Since the start of training, 28 drivers have completed the course, ready to take the train into passenger service.”

To date 124 drivers have been trained on the class 700.



4. Thameslink Programme - London Bridge

In May the new Control Room was opened. The big changes come in over the August Bank Holiday when the new platforms for Charing Cross services open and become operational. At the same time the Cannon Street platforms will be taken out of use and Cannon Street services will not stop. Also the southern half of the new street level concourse will open allowing access to platforms 7 to 15 via stairs/escalators along with a new ticket office, new gate line and customer information point.

The Bermondsey Dive Under - Still on schedule for completion in 2017 with the first track becoming available at Christmas 2016.

Canal Tunnels (St Pancras to the East Coast Mainline) - Test trains will commence using the tunnels at the end of July.

Hornsey Depot - on schedule to open at the end of July. The signalling has been commissioned, a new Control Room has become operational and final checks are being undertaken on facilities.

5. Thameslink proposed 2018 timetable

The BCA is awaiting the Consultation Document from GTR outlining the proposed changes to the December 2018 timetable. This consultation will last three months. However we were given an outline of these changes at the recent GTR Annual Stakeholder Conference. Key points to note are:

- The off peak service from Bedford and Flitwick will stay the same, ie two trains per hour to Brighton and two trains per hour to Three Bridges (station calling pattern will also remain the same)

- All Wimbledon loop services will terminate at St Albans (station calling pattern - St Albans and all stations to St Pancras)
- A new two trains per hour service from Rainham via Dartford to Luton (Luton, stations to Mill Hill Broadway, West Hampstead Thameslink and Central London)
- As a result of above, the Thameslink off-peak service pattern will increase from eight to 10 trains per hour.

We will keep you updated on the consultation.

6. National Rail Passenger Survey

The results of the spring 2016 survey have recently been released. Field work for this took place between 11 January and 20 March 2016 – so do reflect Southern's current problems, but will include the impact of the poor service we suffered earlier in this year. Key highlights are:

- It measures satisfaction with individual journeys – not overall performance
- Nationally satisfaction is at 80% - the same as Spring 2015- with a 3% increase gained (Autumn 2015) and then lost;
- London & South East trend is 78% > 81% > 78%;
- Thameslink is 70% > 73% > 74%, with the bigger increases coming from handling delays and station staff, and train outside cleanliness and car parking the biggest decreases.
- By service area the Spring 2016 scores were TL North: 75%; Wimbledon Loop: 75% and Thameslink South 72%.

More at <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/news-events-media/news/rail-passengers>

7. Flitwick Station – CBC Car Park

As you are probably aware Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) recently demolished one of the warehouses by the station car park. Since demolition the site has been granted a 'change of use' to a car park. Car parking spaces have been outlined and the car park opened. The BCA had hoped that the opportunity would have been taken to introduce monthly, three monthly, six monthly and annual season tickets for users, but unfortunately CBC has not done so at present due to the temporary nature of the car park pending redevelopment. The BCA's view is that we recognise that there will be redevelopment of the site but the present charging structure (£5 per day and £25 per week) disadvantages regular commuters. As an example a commuter who parks all year (approx 230 working days) would pay £865 for an annual car parking ticket at the GTR car park but using the CBC car park it would cost £1150 per year equating to **£285 more. This is totally unacceptable.**

The BCA is in contact with CBC and has asked that the daily rate be reduced to £4. Using the example above, this works out to £920 per year - still £55 more than GTR but a better deal. We now await the response from CBC and we will keep you updated on progress.

8. New Bus Service to Bedford Station

On Monday 4th July Stagecoach started to operate a new bus service which will serve Bedford Railway Station. Numbered 11 it operates from the Town Centre to Great Denham via the railway station and Biddenham Road. Buses will run every 30 minutes from early morning to 20.00.

9. Remember to lock your bikes!

Here's a good news story from a BCA member, who arrived late at Bedford Station to find his bike missing. Feeling somewhat distressed at losing a nearly new bike, he contacted the BT police and managed to report the loss shortly after midnight. The following morning, after a mere seven hours, he got a call from them to say that a bike answering the description had been left "unsecured" at the station and had been found by a BT police patrol. After verifying with Thameslink lost property the serial number, he was able to collect the bike from the station later the same day. Being very apologetic that he remembered to remove the lights, but forgot to lock it, he congratulated the staff involved and sent a donation to the Railway Children charity by way of thanks. So whilst it is reassuring that regular security patrols take place around the station, with the summer weather approaching and an increase in bike use, a timely reminder to remember to lock it securely to the racks provided!

10. GTR Stakeholder Conference

GTR held its annual stakeholder conference on 15 June which the Chairman attended. This covered Southern, Gatwick Express, Thameslink and Great Northern; there is a second one for Thameslink and Great Northern only later in the year.

Items raised at the conference included:

- Revisions to the planned 2018 Thameslink timetable (see above) Class 700 launch
- Wi-Fi confirmed for Class 700s as a retrofit
- "Pay as You Go" smart card launch in October
- Performance.
- The "Modernising Stations" Programme

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

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