



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

THE RAIL USER GROUP FOR BEDFORD AND FLITWICK

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2016 NEWSLETTER

1. Membership Renewals

As always, the falling leaves of September will see BCA Committee members take to Bedford and Flitwick stations in an attempt to persuade existing members to renew and new members to join the Rail User Group. The membership fee will remain at £5.

Please remember that the BCA regularly represents the views of its members in both local newspapers and broadcast media, as well as our meetings with the Govia Thameslink Railway and East Midlands Trains, Passenger Focus/London Travelwatch, Local Authorities, MPs, etc.

Why not suggest to a fellow traveller or a friend that they sign up too! The more members we have, the better able we are to influence the policies of the railway companies. The BCA is the only officially recognised Rail User Group for the people travelling from Bedford and Flitwick on EMT and Govia Thameslink services.

You will find a membership application form with this newsletter. It will save BCA volunteers a great deal of work if you can bring it to the station on the days listed below with your payment (cheques made payable to Bedford Commuters Association or complete the Standing Order details on the form) and hand it to a BCA representative at:

Tuesday 13th September (AM & PM) Bedford Station

Thursday 15th September (AM & PM) Flitwick Station

2. Future Performance

I thought I would take the opportunity to update you on the current performance level which continues to be bad. In overall terms, here is my expectation on performance:

- **Rest of August:** As is, no real change.
- **September:** Driver availability improves, Class 700 reliability improves.
- **October:** Unreliable Class 319s out of use, Class 700 reliability continues to improve. Driver availability continues to improve.
- **November:** Class 700 reliability continues to improve. Driver availability improves.
- **Christmas:** Class 700 reliability continues to improve. Driver availability improves. All Class 319s out of use, Class 700s operate the majority of Thameslink services, fourth approach line at London Bridge improves performance.

At my last meeting with Thameslink management to discuss performance, the following reasons were given for the continuing poor performance:

Class 700 driver refresher training (Until end August): The delays in Class 700 introduction has resulted in drivers who have been trained to drive them not having driven one and needing to take one out for a drive – if they do not do this, then the standards will require them to retake the full conversion training;

Driver shortages (Until early September): Although more drivers are being trained, the school summer holidays have been a pinch point for the last few years due to more drivers wanting to take holidays with their children. I am somewhat hopeful that this issue will reduce after September, although Sundays are going to remain a risk day for some time – it is not part of the drivers' required working week. Whilst a typical Sunday should soon be OK, I think we will be at risk on special occasions like Bank Holidays for another 6 – 12 months – it seems to me that there need to be enough drivers so they are asking for overtime, rather than being asked to do overtime by Thameslink. **Note: We are told that more drivers are arriving than leaving (thus the driver count is increasing) and that the leave rate is low and stable.**

Class 319 reliability (Until end September / end December). Delays in the introduction of Class 700s have meant that more of these have been retained in service for longer than expected. We understand that heavy maintenance was reduced in anticipation of an imminent retirement – a not unreasonable decision given a franchise agreement that puts heavy emphasis on cost control (even at the start of the year, the expectation was 'spring 2016' for Class 700 introduction). A noticeable number are due to leave service on Thameslink by late September and these are the ones with the greatest reliability issues. Others are due to be in service until towards the end of the year and these are having some investment in them to improve reliability (as regards those due to go in the next few months, lead times on improvement mean that there is now little point in investing).

Class 700 performance (Ongoing issue but improving). Class 700 performance has been problematic and I have noticed (a) a considerable number of pre-departure cancellations; and (b) en-route early terminations. My general observations:

- The rail industry talks about the 'bath tub' curve on performance – an initial period of settling in with bad performance, followed by a sustained period of good performance, finishing with deteriorating performance as trains get older. Unfortunately we have trains at both ends of the bath tub – Class 700s at the start and Class 319s at the end!
- There is undoubtedly a learning period, and this is inevitable, as lack of familiarity leads to more checking before responding;
- Some problems have only become apparent in passenger service – for instance a Neutral section just north of St Albans has proved problematic for in-service trains;
- On a positive note, other Siemens trains on the network have proven to be very reliable, often topping performance tables, so there can be optimism for the future;
- The current intention is that Thameslink will operate an all Class 700 service by the end of the year. Class 319s will go to Northern or storage, Class 377s will go to South Eastern (they are slated to receive class 377s from GTR, but not necessarily 'our' ones) and the Class 387s to Great Northern.

In addition to the above, we still have our 'old favourites':

- **London Bridge (Until January 2017 / January 2018)**. Over Christmas this year, a fourth approach track for the Southern platforms at London Bridge will be reinstated. Although not directly relevant to Thameslink services north of the river, this should improve Southern reliability, with a beneficial knock on to Thameslink services.
- Thameslink services will return to London Bridge from January 2018, removing the slow running in south London and the conflicts with Southern & South Eastern services at locations like Tulse Hill and Herne Hill. In addition Thameslink services will no longer be in conflict with South Eastern services and less in conflict with Southern services (when compared to the old track layout).
- **Brighton Mainline Network Rail performance (Ongoing but improving)**. I am told that Network Rail performance on the Brighton Main line is improving, although I have no statistics to show whether this is the case or not.

3. Another Blast from the Past!



Midland Mainline HST at the former Oakley Junction, north of Bedford

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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BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

JOIN BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION ----- JUST £5.00 pa

Membership of the Bedford Commuters Association (BCA) brings a number of advantages. BCA's committee of volunteers is always campaigning for the rights of commuters (and other users of passenger transport) using both Bedford and Flitwick stations. We regularly meet representatives of Govia Thameslink Railway and East Midlands Trains. We constantly lobby for improvements to facilities and services in the industry at large and at Westminster. Members receive 5/6 newsletters per year, keeping them updated with the latest developments from a traveller's perspective.

Please join/rejoin and help us to increase our membership by encouraging your friends and fellow travellers to join as well.

Notes on completion of the form:

1. Please write clearly in block capitals - especially your e-mail address. If we can't read this, we won't be able to send you newsletters and other correspondence by email.
2. The information will not be sold to or shared with any third party organisation. It will only be used by the BCA for the administration of your membership and for sending out newsletters, etc. Your details will not be passed onto anyone else without your prior permission.

Title _____

Forename _____

Surname _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

I am a NEW/EXISTING member (delete as appropriate)

Please make any cheques payable to "Bedford Commuters Association". Alternatively, you can pay by standing order, quoting the following details:

Bank:	National Westminster	Sort Code:	60-04-04
Account:	Bedford Commuters Association	Account No:	24011495

Please put your **surname and postcode** down as the "Reference".

Please send this form to Steve Floyd, BCA Treasurer, 4 Turnpike Gardens, Bedford MK42 0AU (preferably enclosing an SAE) or hand it to the BCA representatives at:

**Bedford Station on Tuesday 13th September 2016; or
Flitwick Station on Thursday 15th September 2016**