



# BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

THE RAIL USER GROUP FOR BEDFORD AND FLITWICK

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## MARCH 2017 NEWSLETTER

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### 1. EMT Franchise

The consultation document for the franchise should have been published at the beginning of December 2016. However this has been delayed and at present there is still no publication date. We will of course update you on this very important document.

### 2. EMT May Timetable Changes

We have recently been advised by EMT on some proposed changes to the Sunday timetable which will adversely affect people travelling from Bedford to/from the north. It is proposed that three Sheffield services which currently stop at Bedford will be rerouted to terminate at Corby. Similarly three services from Sheffield that stop at Bedford will now start at Corby. The BCA has responded to these proposals saying:

*We find the proposed changes to the current service **totally unacceptable** and cannot agree to them. Our reasons for this are as follows:*

- a) Loss of three direct through services from Bedford to Leicester, Derby and Sheffield.*
- b) The reduction in the service level to an hourly service.*
- c) For travellers going to Derby and Sheffield and further north the need to change trains possibly more than once.*
- d) For travellers needing to change trains at Leicester the connection time will be 30+ minutes both northbound and southbound.*
- e) An increase in journey times by 30+ minutes.*
- f) Travellers will seek alternative means of travel meaning a reduction of travellers using your trains and a subsequent loss of revenue.*

*It is for these reasons that we object and would ask you to reconsider your proposals as a matter of urgency.*

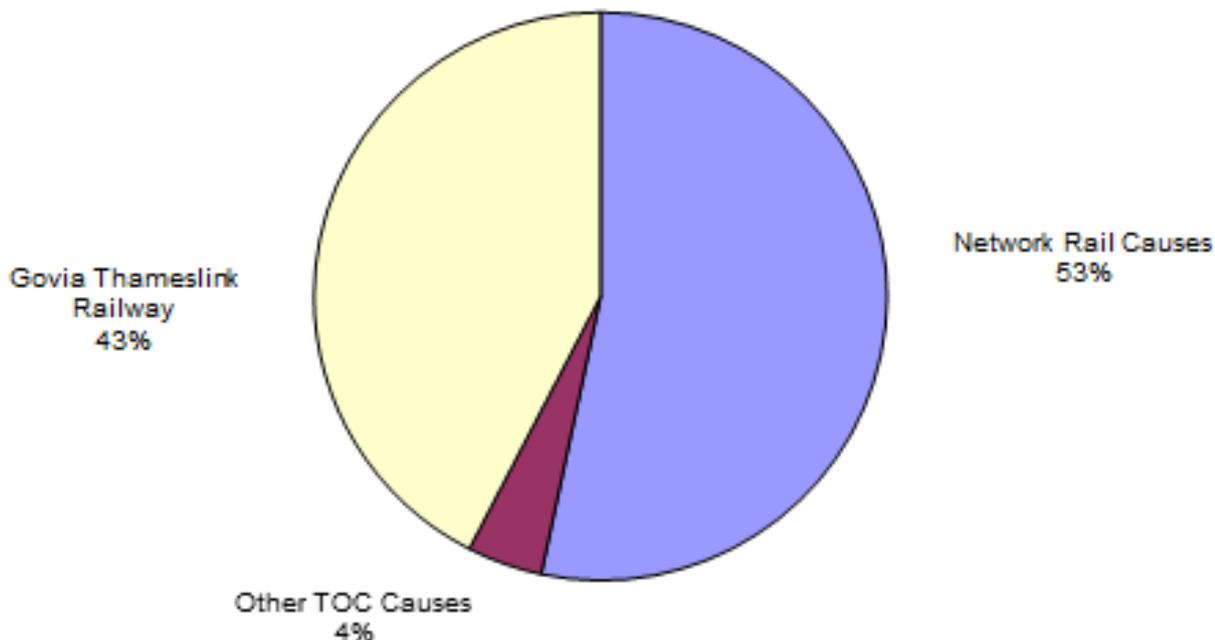
*The BCA would suggest the following to alleviate the problem:*

*The trains departing London St Pancras at 12.37, 13.37 and 14.40 for Corby go forward from Kettering to Leicester or Derby and the Corby shuttle is reintroduced from Kettering. Similarly in the southbound direction the 13.10, 14.10 and 15.10 from Corby are started back from either Derby or Leicester and the Corby shuttle to Kettering is reintroduced. This would allow a change of train at Leicester or Derby with a connection time of approx 10 minutes into the Sheffield train.*

Services to/from London are not affected. We now await their response.

### 3. Performance

#### Govia Thameslink Railway - Thameslink Route Delay Responsibility (13 Periods)



#### Major incidents that affected performance in P10:

- 12 December 2016: Points failure in the Streatham area
- 17 December 2016: Over-running engineering works in the Balcombe area
- 19 December 2016: Train failure in the St Pancras International area
- 3 January 2017: Emergency services dealing with an incident in the Luton area.

#### Major incidents that affected performance in P11:

- 12 January 2017: Signalling problem in the London St Pancras area
- 24 January 2017: Derailed train in the Lewisham area
- 2 February 2017: Emergency services dealing with an incident at East Croydon
- 2 February 2017: Train failure in the Tulse Hill area

#### Storm Doris

Recently Storm Doris caused major disruption to Thameslink services (along with many other train services) from 23 – 24 February:

23 Feb: 2,413 delay minutes were attributable to the damaged Overhead Line Equipment (OHLE) in the St Albans/Harpenden area and 1,073 minutes to bad weather in Sussex

24 Feb: a further 924 delay minutes resulted from the same damage, which was repaired over the weekend of 25-26 Feb and handed back approximately 07:30 on Monday 27 Feb

Please see the following letter from Stuart Cheshire:

*Dear stakeholder,*

*On behalf of Thameslink and Great Northern I would like to apologise to our passengers who had very difficult journeys yesterday and this morning because of the widespread disruption caused by Storm Doris. Almost all rail networks in the country were affected.*

*The number and severity of incidents across our network was unprecedented in recent years. Damage to overhead lines near St Albans had a devastating impact, exacerbated by trees and debris on the line at Harpenden. Unfortunately we were unable to run any trains north of St Pancras for much of the day while Network Rail cleared the route and made repairs. Bedford station was also closed for some time. On the Great Northern, trees and debris were blown on to the line in many places and at one point we could only run trains between Letchworth Garden City and King's Cross. What we believe was a large section of a warehouse roof was blown onto the line at Sandy; a tree fell across the line at Meldreth; and overhead lines at Downham Market were damaged. The Fen line between Cambridge and King's Lynn had to close, as did the route into Moorgate, and we could not access the Hertford Loop section of our route for much of the day. Speed restrictions were in place north of Hitchin for much of the day.*

*We brought in buses where we could and arranged for our passengers' tickets to be accepted on local buses and other rail operators, including the Underground for people travelling closer to London. The national impact of the storm meant there was a shortage of buses to call upon. In some locations e.g. Cambridge, we were able to call upon a large number of taxis to assist with onward journeys.*

*We regret that the effects of the storm continued into this morning, with speed restrictions owing to damaged overhead lines, and displaced trains unable to reach their normal starting points, resulting in a number of cancellations. Network Rail engineers are planning to carry out the major repairs to overhead lines at St Albans on Saturday night, and some speed restrictions will remain in place until Sunday morning. As you will appreciate, after such a major incident we always review, with Network Rail, how we coped and what process improvements we could make for our passengers in such circumstances, particularly the flow of information to them. We encourage passengers who were delayed to claim compensation at [www.thameslinkrailway.com/delayrepay](http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/delayrepay).*

**We would be interested on any feedback on how you felt the situation was handled.**

#### Kentish Town – early service terminations

Thameslink have a policy of not running 'poorly' units through the central London "core" between Kentish Town and Blackfriars, as should they break down in a way that the train refuses to move again, the disruption they cause will be very significant. We can support this approach, but have been unhappy for some time with the process. Following a recent termination of a 12 car service at Kentish Town platform 3, we (and the APTU) took the issue up with Thameslink again and they have now agreed that Kentish Town is unsuitable, particularly for 12 car services. The default will now be to terminate these services at West Hampstead instead. We think this is much better – onward transport options are better; there are (mainly wider) 12 carriage platforms, staff and lifts.

That is not to say there will never be another Kentish Town termination – the rule continues to apply for eight car trains (which hopefully we can get changed after a few 'successful' early terminations at West Hampstead) and the decision on the need to early terminate could occur very late. Whilst we do agree with the approach of not running through the Core with 'poorly' units, we do wonder if, from time to time, they are too risk averse as regards early service termination.

Please do let us know of any occasions when your service early terminates at Kentish Town and there was not the opportunity to alight at West Hampstead – we will follow these up.

### Class 700 Reliability

Although we are (fortunately) past the awful performance of last summer, there are still noticeable reliability issues – some mainly irritating (eg refusing to open doors at the rear of the train); others with noticeable impact (incorrect handling of neutral sections in the overhead power supply). We have been told that many of the problems are software related and that there will be two software upgrades commencing in February which we hope will fix the problems. At least with a software problem, once the issue is resolved, it can be deployed to the entire fleet quickly.

### £300 million funding for Southern and Thameslink rail improvement works

Chris Grayling, Secretary of State for Transport, has secured £300 million of funding for improvement works, to be delivered by Network Rail, to boost the resilience of the infrastructure on the Southern and Thameslink railway networks. The package of work will improve reliability for passengers along the Brighton Main Line and associated routes, funding the replacement of old tracks, points and signalling and dealing with structural repairs in tunnels.

Work will include:

- improving the resilience in areas known to cause delays;
- replacing signalling and rebuilding old bridges;
- building specific teams to coordinate upgrade work;
- improving security by the railway to help prevent trespass;
- improving drainage in old tunnels to prevent water damage to electrical equipment;
- shoring up cuttings and embankments to reduce the risk of landslides.

## **4. Thameslink December 2018 Timetable Consultation**

As detailed in our last newsletter the BCA responded to Phase 1 of the above consultation. The responses have been analysed and a report sent to the DfT. We now await Phase 2 which will commence in late spring. This will include full timetables – Monday-Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Further news will be sent once we have it. We recently had a follow up meeting with the Timetable Planners to further discuss our response.

## **5. Thameslink Programme**

### Bermondsey Dive-Under opens

A milestone of the Thameslink Programme and the redesign of the track and layout of London Bridge were achieved on 27 December 2016, when the first Southern train went through the new Bermondsey ‘Dive-Under’. Similar to a motorway underpass, it is a new railway junction that will ‘untangle the tracks’ on the eastern approach to London Bridge station. Currently, as trains from Sussex and Kent approach London Bridge, the railway lines intersect at a series of junctions, causing congestion and creating delays. The new line, which is now in use by Southern, offers a glimpse of the future.

In 2018, this new layout will also give Thameslink services a clear run into London Bridge, reducing delays and enabling the 24 train-per-hour high intensity service between Blackfriars and St Pancras. From 2018, the new junction will allow Southeastern trains travelling from Kent to ‘dive under’ the Sussex lines used by Southern and Thameslink trains, relieving the bottleneck of trains and

improving the travel experience for millions of passengers travelling to and through the landmark new station.



*The first Southern train through the Bermondsey Dive Under*

### Christmas Engineering Work

We have been informed that over Christmas and the New Year there will be a blockade at London Bridge and the Thameslink Core to allow final commissioning of the infrastructure at London Bridge and Blackfriars for the Thameslink Programme. This will also include the final commissioning of the Bermondsey Dive-Under allowing access for Thameslink trains to London Bridge.

The Core Blockade will be from 0100 Saturday 23rd December to 0400 on Tuesday 2nd January. Thameslink north services will run between Bedford and St Pancras Low Level. Also although not part of the Thameslink Programme East Midlands trains will also be impacted by a Fast Line block at Kentish Town from 0020 Saturday 23rd December to 0545 Tuesday 2nd January. Full details of the service changes will be published later in the year.

## **6. Modernising our station Update**

Thameslink have issued the following update:

*All of the eight trial stations for the Station Host concept are now up and running with volunteer staff in the Station Host role. Our retail team has been gathering feedback and are continuously making improvements during the trial to make it as effective as possible. Our Station Hosts are selling tickets on the new handheld devices, which enables customers to pay using their Apple or Android phone. We have decided to extend our station host trial for a further three months. So far they have received a positive*

reception from passengers at these stations but we still have more work to do before we are ready to extend the trial further. The extension will allow us to fully test the concept across more scenarios and continue to work with the unions and our station host colleagues to ensure our proposals meet the needs of all our customers.

## **7. Class 700 Update**

As mentioned under 'Performance', reliability is slowly improving, although we hear it remains significantly below target. As regards features, the DfT has now confirmed in open forum that Wifi and seat back tables will be fitted to these units; in part this will be dealt with during the initial build and in part by a retrofit. No dates have, as yet been given for first availability ~ I therefore suspect that negotiations with Siemens are yet to conclude. Even if the announcement is imminent, it would seem to be sometime before these two facilities will be widely available. We are also lobbying along with APTU for some form of table to be available for bay seats – and to explore options for more bay seating, as these are popular with family and other groups.

There are now 11 No. 12-coach trains and 17 No. 8-coach trains in regular service between Brighton and London Bridge or Bedford; between Wimbledon, Sutton, St Albans and Luton; and on the Sevenoaks route – that is 28 in total out of the 115 new trains that will ultimately run on an expanded Thameslink network.

## **8. Driver training Update**

The following table outlines how the number of qualified drivers has improved:

Date	No of qualified drivers	No of driver trainees	Driver Target
Jan-15	327	18	356
May-15	327	59	366
Dec-15	330	83	371
May-16	343	96	371
Aug-16	354	91	371
Dec-16	370	134	390
31-Jan-17	369	148	390
14-Mar-17	372	159	390

It is now noticeable that the number of cancellations due to drivers not being available is very low compared with the situation last year.

## **9. Smartcards & Carnets**

### **Smartcards**

GTR have just informed us that they will be launching Key Go at the end of May. Initially it will be for Point to Point Day Tickets between stations served by GTR services only and will operate in a similar way to the Oyster Card where you tap in/out at stations and the system calculates the cheapest ticket for the journeys made. Further details will be become available shortly on the GTR Website.

If you have not already applied for a Key Go card, now may be a good time:

<http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/tickets-and-fares/the-key-smartcard/>.

## **Carnets**

There is no news as regards extension to other stations ~ we consider this to be a realistic goal only after Smartcards are in use for day tickets. We will start to lobby for this once the Key Go for day tickets has been launched. We will focus on 'fairness' – why should some travellers benefit, but not others.

### **10. Delay Repay 15**

From last December Delay Repay 15 was introduced. If any members have had trouble with applying for and receiving this payment would they please let us know.

### **11. Membership**

We are always keen to increase the BCA membership as more members improves our credibility with TOCs, Network Rail and MPs, etc. If you know any fellow travellers who would like to join, please pass the last page onto them. Many thanks.

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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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# BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

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## 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 3/4 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 Arthur Taylor, BCA Chairman, 6 Chaucer Road, Flitwick, Beds MK45 1QG (preferably enclosing an SAE).