



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

THE RAIL USER GROUP FOR BEDFORD AND FLITWICK

OCTOBER 2017 NEWSLETTER

I. BCA AGM

This year the BCA AGM will be held on Monday 6th November 2017 at the RAFA Club, 93 Ashburnham Road, Bedford commencing at 19.30 (3 minute walk from Bedford Station).

The following representatives will be present to give presentations and answer any questions you may have:

Stuart Cheshire	- Passenger Service Director, Thameslink
Peter Lane	- Thameslink Timetable Planner (Thameslink 2018 Timetable Consultation)
Duncan Cale	- Stakeholder Manager, EMT
Neal Henry	- Network Rail

The AGM is a great opportunity for you to question senior management of Thameslink, EMT and Network Rail about performance, the 2018 Thameslink Timetable, the EMT Franchise, fares and any other issue you may have so please attend and have your say. For members from Flitwick who wish to attend the AGM you are advised to show your ticket to the gate line staff at Bedford station who will allow you through without the need to pay.

Editor's note – After moving to Somerset four years ago, I am very keen to relinquish the post of BCA Newsletter Editor, as many other voluntary tasks are eating into my spare time. I would be grateful if someone would offer their services to the BCA Committee. It is not particularly difficult nor time consuming if you are computer literate and used to using MS Word or equivalent.

2. Christmas/New Year Blockade

As part of the Thameslink Programme upgrade there will be no Thameslink cross London service from Saturday 23 December to Monday 1 January inclusive, Trains from Bedford will terminate at St Pancras International Low Level. Trains from Brighton will terminate at London Bridge (platforms 10 to 15). Tickets will be accepted on the Tube and London buses to complete your journey. We are at present awaiting details of the train service to be provided, once we have it we will let you know.

3. 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.

If you think you have had good value from the BCA in the past year, 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.

4. GTR December 2018 Timetable Consultation

As we reported in the last newsletter the BCA responded to Phase 2 of the timetable consultation. Since then we have met with the Timetable Planners to further discuss the issues we raised. They have taken these away and will report back later. We will continue to update you in future newsletters.

5. EMT Franchise

On 25th September the DfT held a consultation meeting at the Park Inn. Over 200 people attended in what was a very lively meeting with many questions asked of the DfT regarding the loss of intercity services and concern about the journey time length of London to Corby services from Bedford and quality of the electric trains that will be used. I hope members attended and individually responded to the consultation. A copy of the BCA's formal response to the EMT Franchise Consultation is as follows:

East Midlands Consultation Co-ordinator
Department for Transport
2/21 Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

9th October 2017

Dear Sir/Madam

East Midlands Franchise Consultation Response

The Bedford Commuters Association (BCA) represents rail users from Bedford and Flitwick stations that use EMT and Thameslink services.

The BCA with input from its members has thoroughly reviewed the proposals set out in the EMT Franchise Consultation document and wish to make the following response:

- In response to Question 1** – It is essential that Network Rail (London North-Eastern and East Midlands) and TOC's work closely together to provide a good train service. Too often a regulation decision is made to prioritise an EMT service over a Thameslink service travelling south. Network Rail Derby can claim 'success' as both trains are within PPM at the edge of their Network Rail area (as the EMT Train terminates and the Thameslink train transfer to the Kent/Sussex Region). However, the late running Thameslink train then loses more time travelling through south London and also causes delay to other trains, finally arriving beyond the PPM limit. Regulation is key to good performance. It is essential that Network Rail East Midlands bears the full 'consequence' of the late running outside their region. It is essential that Network Rail East Midlands bears the full 'consequence' of the late running outside their region.
- In response to Question 3** - The Franchisee should be required to operate a 100% electric service south of Kettering therefore Network Rail must upgrade the OHLE south of Bedford as originally intended in the MML Electrification to allow electric trains to run up to 125 mph south of Kettering.
All Passengers should be able to use all their services - for instance support for passengers of reduced mobility is of high quality and reliably delivered and toilets are clean and available (for those who need to use them more regularly). Disabled people, and elderly people who are relatively frail, are particularly disadvantaged by needing to change train. Efforts should be made to maximise the numbers of through journeys that can be made without the need to change. The franchise specification should provide a financial incentive for the operator to improve the travelling conditions for disabled and for frail people.
The franchisee should be expected to engage particularly with Local Government and equivalents such as LEPs, and the wider rail user community such as Railfuture and Rail User Groups.

3. **In response to Question 4** - We **totally reject** the proposal to withdraw inter-city services from Bedford station. Indeed we would ask that the present 1 train per hour from Bedford to/from Leicester and the north be increased to 2 trains per hour.

Our reasons for rejecting the proposal are:

- Many travellers from Bedford use EMT services to commute to work in places such as Leicester and beyond and they cannot be expected to have to change trains at Kettering to continue their journey.
- Many business and leisure travellers from Bedford use EMT services to places north on Kettering and they cannot be expected to have to change trains at Kettering to continue their journey.
- By having to change trains at Kettering travellers would incur an increase in journey times and the possibility of missing connections at Kettering and further up the line which in any case means a further change of train. An example is that at present a journey from Bedford to Sheffield requires one change of train (at Leicester); under your proposal this will be two (at Kettering and Leicester).
- As a consequence of the East West Rail link, Bedford will become the major interchange Station for the Midland Mainline. Travellers changing at Bedford must have access to direct train services to all the main stations on the Midland Mainline. It must not be forgotten that it is widely accepted that the Oxford/Milton Keynes/Bedford/Cambridge corridor is a fast expanding technology area with increasing numbers of businesses and homes and that it will require excellent transport links which can only be provided at Bedford if inter-city trains continue to stop there.
- Forcing travellers to change trains at Kettering will dissuade people from travelling by rail and hence have a negative effect on revenue.
- Bedford attracts many tourists from the North who arrive by rail and the need to change trains would be a great disincentive to visit Bedford.

Regarding the proposal to have a commuter service from Corby to St Pancras that would serve Bedford. We understand the arguments behind this proposal and feel that in principle the majority of travellers from Bedford to/from London would welcome an electric train of up to 12 cars in length at peak hours. It would provide more capacity than at present and hence would probably mean getting a seat. However for the BCA to accept this proposal we would require the following assurances:

- That the rolling stock provided for this service would be of a high quality modern electric train capable of 125 mph.
- That the current running time between Bedford and London is maintained at its current level throughout the day (at present this is 35 to 38 minutes depending on the number of station stops).
- That the service provided would be half hourly from first to last train at a minimum.

Regarding capacity outside the peak a minimum of 8 cars per train should be run to cater for the increased demand for these services.

4. **In response to Questions 6** - More seats are required for services both to/from London and to/from the north not just at peak times but also off peak as these trains are often full and standing.
5. **In response to Question 7** – It is essential to provide travellers from Bedford with modern, comfortable and high quality carriages for all services.
6. **In response to Question 8** – To make travel attractive to disabled people at least two disabled toilets should be provided per train as a minimum so that if one is not available there is another one available.
7. **In response to Question 9** - There is a need to improve connection times at both Bedford (Marston Vale line/EMT services) and at Leicester.
8. **In response to Question 10** – The BCA would like to see two direct trains per hour to Leicester and the north.
9. **In response to Question 13** – Whilst we recognise the importance of services stopping at Luton Airport Parkway to provide connections to the airport any additional EMT services that call at Luton Airport Parkway must not be at the expense of EMT services calling at Bedford.

10. **In response to Question 14** – Provision should be made for direct services to East Midlands Parkway from Bedford so that travellers can have access to East Midlands Airport.

11. **In response to Question 17** - We object to the proposal to split the Liverpool – Norwich service. Our members favour a 'joined up' railway with the minimum of connections for a wide range of destinations.

12. **In response to Questions 20 & 21** – No comment as Thameslink are the station operator.

13. **In response to Questions 23 & 24** - Fares in 'Our' Area are determined by Thameslink. Our main expectation is that the Franchisee will accept all ticketing methods – for instance:

- Thameslink's Key product – including the PAYG option

The current Franchisee does not accept the GroupSave product widely available in the South East. The new Franchisee should be required to accept this product from Franchise start for the ex Network South East Area (ie between Bedford and London).

14. **In response to Question 25** – The BCA would like seat reservations to be extended and made available for all travel between Bedford and London.

15. **In response to Question 27** – The next operator must have in post a Stakeholder Manager to liaise directly with Stakeholders including regular meetings to discuss any issues Stakeholders may have. Stakeholders must also be fully consulted on any changes to timetables.

16. **Further Comments** - To ensure a better service to travellers from Bedford using EMT services the BCA would propose the following to be provided in the franchise:

- A half hourly fast service to/from London St Pancras from first train to last seven days a week.
- A half hourly direct service to/from Leicester and the north from first train to last seven days a week.
- To allow both the London to Corby services and a regular inter-city services to call at Bedford consideration should be given to making the inter-city services pick up only northbound and/or set down only southbound at Bedford. This would allow inter-city services to provide a service between Bedford and the cities of the East Midlands and at the same time free up capacity on these services as travellers to/from London would use the Corby service.
- More good quality rolling stock to increase capacity.
- A robust contingency plan to cover for train cancellations. At present a cancellation of the hourly Nottingham services which causes much annoyance to travellers as they are delayed by one hour and consequently may miss connections further up the line or be late for a meeting.
- Network Rail must upgrade the infrastructure south of Bedford to allow electric trains to run up to 125 mph.

Yours sincerely

Arthur Taylor
BCA Chairman

The franchise process will now continue as follows:

April 2018	Invitation to Tender issued to all Bidders
July 2018	Receipt of Bids from Bidders
Spring 2019	Contract award to winning Bidder
August 2019	Start of the new Franchise

6. Farewell to 29-year-old trains on Thameslink

At the end of August, GTR said farewell to the 29 year old Class 319 trains on Thameslink, marking another major milestone in the Thameslink Programme. The final 8-car service ran on 27 August and was greeted by crowds of enthusiasts at Brighton station.

Class 700 trains are now being introduced into passenger service at a rate of two a week. While reliability has improved since the fleets' initial introduction in 2016, it took a recent dip during August due to software issues. However, GTR say they have worked with manufacturers Siemens to address this and to ensure that there is a rapid and sustained improvement in the current miles between failures. Current weekday Thameslink trains that run off-peak between Brighton and London Bridge are nearly all 4-car 377s, but from 18 September these will be replaced with 12-car Class 700s, creating lots more room on these busy services. By the end of September, all trains on the Thameslink route will be Class 700s.



The last 8-car Class 319 at Brighton station

7. Farringdon Station

Thameslink issued the following regarding the Southbound lifts:

"Passenger lifts to Thameslink's southbound platform at Farringdon will be taken out of use from Saturday 9 September until next spring as Crossrail begins work to create a step-free route to the new Elizabeth line. Lifts to the northbound platform will remain in operation.

Thameslink passengers able to navigate an eight-step staircase will be able to use lifts to and from Farringdon's main London Underground station entrance.

Thameslink passengers travelling south from Farringdon who are unable to use the stairs are advised to take a local bus or walk to City Thameslink station instead. City Thameslink has lifts and is approximately 500m away. Alternatively they can use Farringdon's lifts to northbound Thameslink services, travel to St Pancras and change there for southbound Thameslink services.

Thameslink passengers travelling south to Farringdon who are unable to use the stairs should also use nearby City Thameslink, one stop further on, and take a lift to catch a northbound train going back to Farringdon.

All these options will be publicised on posters at Thameslink stations, and by passenger announcements at stations and on board trains.

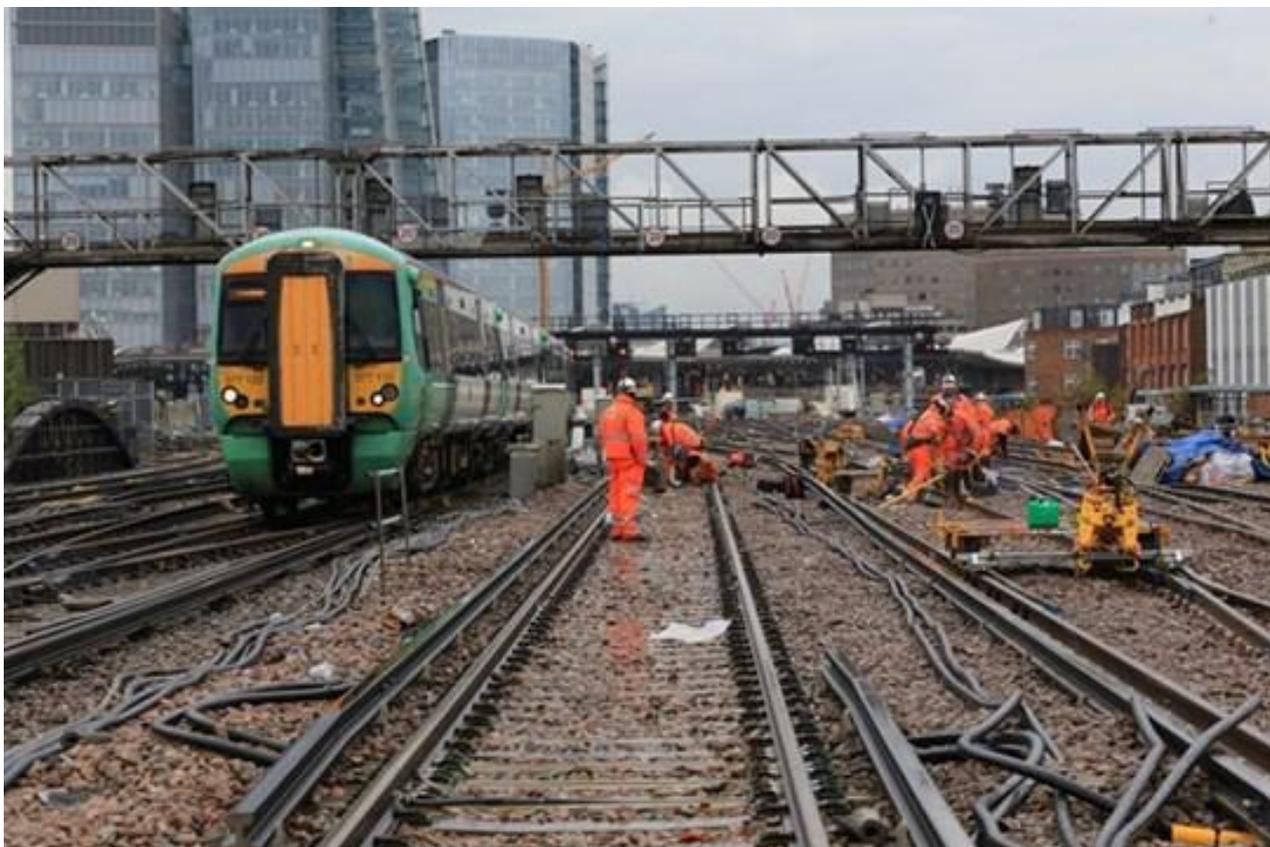
Crossrail's work to extend Thameslink lift shafts to the platforms of the new Elizabeth line will create step-free access for passengers with restricted mobility, including those with buggies and heavy luggage.

Farringdon is set to become a major transport hub in December 2018 when Thameslink introduces an upgraded high-intensity service of up to 24 trains per hour, north-south through the heart of London, and the new east-west Elizabeth line opens with similar service frequencies.

These will all intersect with the station's London Underground services (Metropolitan, Circle and Hammersmith & City lines) and together improve journey times across London, easing congestion and offering better connections while providing easier, quicker and more direct travel opportunities across the capital."

8. Thameslink Programme—August engineering works

The Thameslink Programme engineering works that took place over the August bank holiday and the first week of September were successfully completed on time. The 'Orange Army' worked hard to install new track and signalling equipment including new points, gantries, and rails. The Charing Cross lines are now situated in their final alignment for 2018 and beyond. Southeastern's Charing Cross services have begun to use the Bermondsey Dive-under on their approach to London Bridge and are able to use Platform Six at London Bridge. The final big blockade will take place over Christmas/New Year at London Bridge and through the Thameslink Core. The work at London Bridge will then be complete and the station will be fully operational as will Blackfriars.

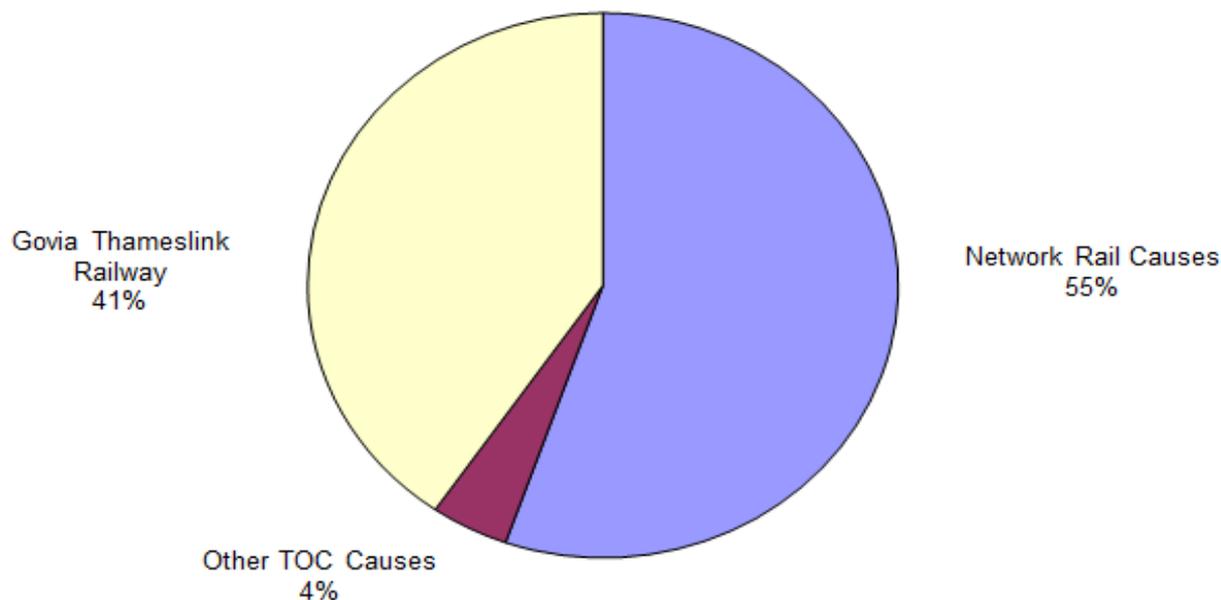


The 'Orange army' at London Bridge in August

Once the work at London Bridge is completed Thameslink drivers will be trained on the route through London Bridge to Blackfriars ready for the start of the Thameslink timetable in May 2018.

9. Performance

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



Major incidents that affected performance in P5:

26 July 2017:	Fault on a train at Peckham Rye
30 July 2017:	Fault with the signalling equipment at St Albans City
11 August 2017:	Trespasser on the line in the Balham area
14 August 2017:	Train fault in the London St Pancras International area

Overall performance continues to improve and we hope this trend will continue into the New Year. All Thameslink services are now operated by class 700s. Reliability continues to improve, however there will be further software upgrades in the future to allow for a continuation of the improvements. We continue to monitor the situation and continue to have regular meetings with Stuart Cheshire.

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

CAMPAINING FOR YOU

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 email 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 0AJ (preferably enclosing an SAE).