



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

THE RAIL USER GROUP FOR BEDFORD AND FLITWICK



DECEMBER 2018 NEWSLETTER



The Chairman and Committee of the Bedford Commuters Association wish all their members a Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year

1. December 2018 Timetable

Thameslink:

Monday to Friday - We have been informed that from December 10th the full May Monday to Friday service will be reinstated. This means that at peak periods the following trains for Bedford and Flitwick will be reinstated:

06.34 Bedford to East Grinstead (06.43 Flitwick)
18.56 St Pancras to Bedford

The 18.51 from St Pancras to Bedford will call additionally at Harpenden and Flitwick. This will address capacity issues at both these stations.

Weekends – We have been informed that the full weekend timetable will be reinstated from May 2019 so the present half hourly service will continue from December. The Committee were not happy with this and the Chairman, along with the APTU Chairman, met Thameslink timetable planners to push for a better service on Saturdays. We have suggested that additional trains are run at the busiest times - both morning and evening on Saturdays. Thameslink agreed to look at this and at our recent AGM intimated that additional trains will be run so the Committee is hopeful that our lobbying has proved successful, but we still await an official confirmation of this from Thameslink.

EMT

We have been informed that there will be no changes to the December timetable. We have asked that they fill the gap on Saturday evenings between the 20.05 and 21.30 departures - they have taken this request away and are looking to see if they can make the necessary change from May 2019. We continue to lobby for the reinstatement of stops at Bedford during both AM and PM peaks.

2. Christmas Timetable and Engineering Work

We have been advised that over the Christmas/New Year period engineering work will be taking place at Kentish Town and north of Bedford.

EMT

Monday 24th December – half-hourly service all day including the peaks between St Pancras and Bedford. For those travelling north of Bedford a bus replacement service will operate between Bedford and Corby for onward train services. The last train from St Pancras is at 20.01.

Thursday/Friday 27th/28th December – hourly service all day including the PM peak, however no AM peak with the first train to St Pancras at 09.31. The last train from St Pancras is at 20.01. A bus replacement service will operate between Bedford and Kettering for onward train travel from 20.41.

Monday 31st December – half-hourly service all day including the peaks between St Pancras and Bedford. For those travelling north of Bedford a bus replacement service will operate between Bedford and Corby for onward train services.

Tuesday 1st January – half-hourly service all day between St Pancras and Bedford. For those travelling north of Bedford a bus replacement service will operate between Bedford and Corby for onward train services.

Wednesday 2nd January – a normal weekday service will operate.

Thameslink

On the 24th/27th/28th/31st December – the following service will operate all day: Two trains per hour all stations to St Albans then St Pancras and stations to Gatwick Airport and two trains per hour all stations to St Albans then West Hampstead, St Pancras and stations to Gatwick Airport and Brighton.

Last train from St Pancras on Monday 24th December leaves at 21.51.

Tuesday 1st January – a Sunday service will operate.

Wednesday 2nd January – a normal weekday service will operate.

3. Additional Industry Compensation – A Reminder

You could be eligible for additional industry compensation. Thameslink and Great Northern are inviting eligible passengers to claim additional compensation for the May 2018 timetable disruption. Industry compensation is being offered in addition to the usual Delay Repay and enhanced compensation. Passengers who held season or non-season tickets between 20 May and 28 July 2018, and travelled on those parts of the route where Thameslink or Great Northern operate a significant proportion of services, could be eligible for compensation for one to four weeks' worth of fares.

Key dates

- Season tickets holders can make a claim online until 30 November.
- **Non-season ticket holders will be able to start making claims online from 26 November 2018 to 31 January 2019 at: railcompensation.thameslinkrailway.com**

4. Cash Machine Charges

We have received the following statement from Thameslink regarding cash machines at stations:

We have been informed you that our ATM provider, Cardtronics had taken the decision to charge for cash withdrawals at all of its ATMs, including those in stations run by GTR. This message is copied in below. It is part of a wider decision largely caused by proposals made by key Link Network members to reduce the interbank Link fee paid to providers of cash machine over five years.

Cardtronics are now implementing this decision in more stations with all their cash machines in stations due to charge passengers by the end of October.

We are discussing this at a senior level with Cardtronics particularly their lack of notice before implementing the change which means that passengers have been surprised to find that a fee will be charged without being told about it. As part of our duty to passengers we will also be ensuring that posters are put up in stations and Cardtronics will put stickers over the 'free cash withdrawal' signs on their machines.

If you receive any queries on where the nearest Free to Use machine is, the attached link may help <https://www.link.co.uk/consumers/locator/>

5. Performance

Below are the latest performance figures available:

Date	Thameslink
30 September - 6 October	87.80%
7 October - 13 October	86.20%
30 September - 13 October	87%

Date	Great Northern
30 September - 6 October	72.30%
7 October - 13 October	82.00%
30 September - 13 October	77.20%

Date	Combined
30 September - 6 October	82.60%
7 October - 13 October	84.80%
30 September - 13 October	83.70%

Since the introduction of the July timetable reliability and performance have both improved. However we will continue to monitor performance.

6. BCA AGM

The AGM took place on October 29th, at the RAFA Club. Representatives from Thameslink, EMT and Network Rail were in attendance including, Larry Heyman, Peter Lane, Joe Healy, Sara Turner, Patrick Ladbury from Thameslink; Dan Lucas & Rachael Rundell from EMT; and Nick Sandham from Network Rail.

The meeting approved the Chairman's Report, Treasurers Report, 2017 AGM minutes and the new committee was appointed as follows:

Arthur Taylor	Chairman	Mark Spurgeon	Committee
Stephen Floyd	Treasurer	Howard Pile	Committee
Alison Crompton	Membership Secretary	John Henderson	Committee
Martin James	Committee		

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

The unique GTR contract:

All farebox revenue is passed to the DfT who determine the level of all fare increases

All performance income from NR is passed to the DfT

The DfT funds all payments against Delay Repay claims but GTR funds the necessary administration costs

GTR receives a payment from the DfT for running the franchise which varies and depends on performance against Service Delivery, Customer Experience and Ticketless Travel benchmarks

GTR has a 7 year franchise ending in mid September 2021

May 2018 – Lessons learned and next steps:

Larry apologised for the consequences and disappointments associated with the May timetable

Independent enquiries by ORR and Transport Select Committee into industry timetable process and May readiness

National Programme Management office set up to oversee all TOC's future timetable changes

No major changes in December 2018-11-05 Priority is maintaining train service reliability

Compensation:

Open to season ticket holders and non season ticket holders (travelled 3 days a week)

Industry funded

Phase 1 completed 63,000 people contacted; Phase 2 underway allowing season ticket holders not contacted to apply

Performance – Period 7 85.7% PPM (19/9 to 13/10) improving but trespass incidents a concern

Dan Lucas gave the EMT presentation of which the main points were as follows:

No changes in the December timetable

From May 2019 may be able to fill the gap between the 20.05 and 21.30 trains Saturday evenings

Looking at capacity issues

Not looking to add a few peak hour trains because of capacity issues

Will reinstate peak hour trains in 2020

Nick Sandham gave the NR presentation of which the main points were as follows:

A slower roll out of timetable

Performance is improving but a bit short of annual target

Incidents of trespass and fatalities are the top concern. Staff are being trained to identify potential suicides

More fencing being installed

Bromham Road Bridge work to start in the New Year. Ford End Road Bridge completed over the summer

Lifts at Bedford being totally refurbished to improve reliability and on target for completion on 3rd

December

There followed Q&A session where questions were put to the Thameslink, EMT and NR representatives.

Q1 Can the off peak EMT service be improved from the present 10/50 minute service?

A1 No changes are planned at present, it being an industry led process and not an EMT decision but a half hourly service would be reinstated from 2020. The Chairman said he had identified a possible improvement and will be passing this to EMT later that week.

Q2 I moved to Bedford from London because of the 35 minute service. Will it come back?

A2 As a result of the Thameslink timetable services were removed which will be bought back in 2020.

However the journey time of 35 minutes is uncertain at present and depends on the type of electric train that is used.

Q3 Do we need political pressure to ensure a good EMT service?

A3 No. The two trains per hour is in the new Franchise. However these services only go to Corby and travellers for stations further north will have to change at Kettering.

Q4 When will weekend Thameslink services be fully reinstated as at present they put pressure on the EMT services?

A4 Weekend services on Thameslink will be fully reinstated from May 2019. However some services will be reinstated at the busiest times before then. A formal response on this is awaited from Thameslink.

Q5 Why can you not buy a daily ticket on the Key but season tickets are ok?

A5 Key Go allows you to travel on a daily basis and at the end of the journey the cheapest fare is applied and taken from your bank. This can only be used to and from GTR stations only and does not accept railcards at present.

Q6 Some overnight trains have been replaced by buses. When will the trains be reinstated?

A6 They should be back from May 2019.

Q7 What changes are proposed for future timetables?

A7 It is still the aspiration for 24 trains per hour through the core.

Q8 Will all peak hour trains be 12 car?

A8 No there will still be some 8 car trains but all the busiest trains are targeted for 12 cars.

Q9 What is the reliability of the 700's?

A9 Thameslink are still not happy with the present reliability with the majority of problems being software related. Siemens who maintain the class 700s are presently resolving outstanding software issues.

Q10 Skip Stopping of stations between Luton and Bedford which are the worst affected. What is the latest?

A10 This issue is at present being looked at and is only used as a last resort. Please feedback to Arthur any examples.

Q11 Are there any major infrastructure works we need to be aware of?

A11 Work will be taking place over Christmas at Kentish Town that will mean reduced EMT services. Details of the timetable are awaited. Electrification work continues on the MML to Corby, with work commencing on the Bromham Road bridge in the New Year. At present no details on work affecting Thameslink services.

Q12 Vaping on trains, signage/announcements to stop travellers vaping?

A12 This will be looked at.

Q13 Can GN Printed Timetables to be made available at Thameslink stations and vice versa?

A13 Agreed this would be a good idea.

Q14 Can something be done to stop taxis parking in the bus bays as it impacts on bus services?

A14 GTR are talking to Bedford Borough Council regarding this issue but no decisions have yet been made. Only Hackney carriages can use the station to pick up, private hire operators can only drop off.

Q15 Can the Council Car Park be double decked?

A15 Yes it can be considered but this would not be a short term project but long term.

Q16 Could consideration be given to exit only from platform 1?

A16 At present there are no proposals for this.

Q17 Why does it take ten extra minutes each day to get into Bedford station?

A17 We have Train Service Operations Managers who are based at Bedford Midland Station from 06:30 to 21:30 Monday to Friday. If services were regularly arriving at the station 10 minutes late or more, the evening peak Public Performance Measure would be destroyed. The actual arrival times do not reflect this. Very occasionally a train may be held by the signaller outside the station if the platform it is due to arrive at is still occupied, e.g. by a train that is to be moved empty into a carriage siding. Very occasionally a late running southbound East Midlands Trains service might be using a platform allocated to a Thameslink arrival, but that rarely happens.

Q18 As the second busiest station on the network, why on a weekend are they not addressing the issue of queues for tickets?

A18 Thanks for flagging this up. Joe Healy, our Station Manager, is reviewing this. The lack of space within the ticket hall is a major constraint on having separate queues for the ticket office windows and for the ticket vending machines. We would encourage passengers to book tickets online and then collect them at the station.

Q19 Were you satisfied with the way that consultation with stakeholders was carried out in relation to the May timetable changes? What lessons have been learnt and what improvements are planned for future consultations?

A19 Yes. Feedback from both main user groups between Bedford and London (the BCA and the APTU) has been positive. East Midlands Trains late decision to cease calling at Bedford and Luton in the AM and PM peaks was not part of Thameslink's consultation and resulted in unanticipated late changes to our timetable.

Q20 Before the advent of air conditioned trains commuters often used to complain it was too cold or draughty when the windows were open. At least we had some control over it...

With the introduction of the new trains, who decides on the temperature setting and why is it always so cold? My nose literally goes numb most trips home once the carriage thins out and I cannot believe this isn't a regular subject of complaint. In the summer I had to wear a jumper just to remain vaguely comfortable when it was 70+ degrees outside.

A20 The air conditioning is set at 19C. I have looked at the complaints statistics for the last year and we are receiving very few of them. There are currently more people saying that the trains are too warm rather than that they are too cold.

7. Flitwick Waiting Room – Platform 1

Thameslink have advised us that due to new additional Driver Depot Accommodation being late the work to demolish the Waiting Shelter (in recess at northern end of platform 1) and construction of a new heated Waiting Room in its place will now not commence until January 2019.

8. 2019 Fare Increase

The government announced that fares would increase in January 2019 by 3.2%. The Committee feel that this increase is totally unwarranted due to the meltdown of the May timetable. As a result the Chairman has written to all the local MPs asking them to lobby for a cancellation of this increase as follows:

6TH October 2018

Rail Fare Rise 2019

As you are aware the government has announced that Regulated Rail Fares will rise by 3.2% from January 2019.

I write to you on behalf of our members to urge you to lobby the government to cancel this rise. Our reasons for this are as follows:

1. Between May and July after the introduction of the new Thameslink timetable to accommodate additional services and destinations not only on Thameslink but Great Northern the service went into meltdown with many cancellations, long gaps in service, increased journey times and intolerable conditions on the remaining trains that run. This caused members to be greatly inconvenienced being late for work, late for picking up children from day care and generally making their home life a misery. Also for travellers from Bedford and Flitwick the number of peak services was cut as a result of the decision by EMT not to stop at Bedford during peak hours. After having suffered all this, then to be asked to pay more for their journey (many pay over £4000 per year) is quite frankly insensitive and totally unjustified.

2. It is noted that for the last nine years the Road Fuel Tax increase has been cancelled and indeed only last week when the Prime Minister announced yet another cancellation of the tax increase to (as she put it) "to help hard working families". Are not rail travellers hard working families! Do they not deserve to be treated the same and have the rail fare increase cancelled.

3. Why does the government persist in using the RPI figure instead of the CPI figure?

To sum up the government should recognise the misery of rail travellers as a result of the timetable change and do the right thing and cancel this years increase. A level playing field should be adopted for rail travellers and road users when it comes to fare increases and Road Fuel Tax.

On behalf of my members and rail travellers in general could you please lobby the government on this very important subject.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely

Arthur Taylor
BCA Chairman

9. Flitwick – Book Club

A plea from Thameslink: Flitwick station needs you! Trudy and her colleagues in Flitwick ticket office have set up a free book exchange for passengers and the local community. Station users are encouraged to take a book and replace it with another. The team have made a great start with collecting books, but if you're able to add to the collection please drop into the station and either put the books directly on the book club shelves, located next to the ticket gates or speak to one of the station team.

10. The Rail Ombudsman

The Government recently launched the Rail Ombudsman. It's role is to offer an independent, free and expert service to investigate unresolved complaints about train companies and rail service providers who participate in the Ombudsman scheme. They also support the rail industry to raise standards and improve services for customers. For more information please visit their website: www.railombudsman.org or pick up a pamphlet at the station.

11. Bedford Lifts

After nine weeks out of service for a complete refurbishment all the lifts were bought back into operational use on the 3rd December; however the following day the lift on Platform 2/3 failed! The fault was on the control panel which was fixed at 22.30 the same day. We will monitor the reliability of the lifts very closely.

12. 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.

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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