



# **BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION**

**THE RAIL USER GROUP FOR BEDFORD AND FLITWICK**

---

## **DECEMBER 2020 NEWSLETTER**

---

**Welcome to the December newsletter. The Chairman and Committee would like to wish all BCA members and their families a Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.**

### **I. Christmas and New Year Train Services**

#### Thameslink

**Thursday 24th December** - Current weekday service, with earlier finishes

**Friday 25th December & Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> December** - No services will operate

**Sunday 27th December** - Amended Sunday service will operate,

**Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday 28/29/30th and 31st December** - Amended Saturday service will operate

**Friday 1st January** - Amended Sunday service will operate

**Saturday 2nd January** - Amended Saturday service will operate

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> January** - Amended Sunday service will operate

#### EMR

**Thursday 24th December** - Current weekday service, with earlier finishes. Kings Cross closure due to East Coast Upgrade engineering works will have a knock on impact to EMR services

**Friday 25th December & Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> December** - No services will operate

**Sunday 27th December** - Kings Cross closure due to East Coast Upgrade engineering works which will have a knock-on impact to EMR services. Corby-Kettering services extended through to St Pancras, to provide additional capacity to / from London. Some Intercity services between St Pancras & Nottingham/Sheffield amended with additional stops at Bedford, Luton & Luton Airport Parkway

**Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday 28/29/30th and 31st December** - Current weekday service but Kings Cross closure due to East Coast Upgrade engineering works will have a knock-on impact to EMR services.

**Friday 1st January** - Current weekday service, with some early morning trains not operating. Kings Cross closure due to East Coast Upgrade engineering works which will have a knock-on impact to EMR services

**Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> January** - Current Saturday service. Kings Cross closure due to East Coast Upgrade engineering works which will have a knock-on impact to EMR services

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> January** - Current Sunday service. Kings Cross closure due to East Coast Upgrade engineering works which will have a knock-on impact to EMR services

## **2. December Timetable**

The new timetable commences on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December.

### Thameslink

More peak hour fast services have been reinstated from Bedford and Flitwick including some Thameslink Expresses from Bedford calling at Luton and St Albans then St Pancras. There are no changes to the off peak and weekend services. Full details are now available on the Thameslink website.

### EMR

There are no changes to the timetable that was introduced in September.

## **3. Midland Mainline Electrification**

Electrification work is now complete with the handover of the electric sidings at Kettering from Network Rail to EMR. Testing of the overhead line equipment is now taking place.

There are now six Class 360s at Cricklewood with the remaining 15 units expected to arrive by the middle of January. Class 360 running has now commenced between Kettering and Kentish Town, presumably as part of driver training.

We have still to receive details of the internal refurbishment but the Committee's aspirations are as follows:

- Wifi
- Tables in Bays and seat back tables in Airline.
- 2+2 seating in a mixture of Bays and Airline.
- No seats directly opposite toilet doors.
- Ensure that there is clearance on each side of every seat for elbows and knees.
- The window seats must not be hard against the wall, and there must be a gap between the window and aisle seats.
- Good quality standard class seats with adequate leg-room.
- Ability to have social distancing.
- Adequate luggage space (to cater for passengers travelling to Luton Airport)

- Cycle storage next to carriage doors
- PSI screens to Thameslink standard.
- Plenty of waste bins so the floor is not covered in rubbish.
- Carpet or vinyl flooring
- Air conditioning
- USB power or 220V sockets

#### 4. EMR NEWS

The following information relevant to the Midland Main Line has just been received from EMR:

**Welcoming our Class 180's into Service** – This weekend saw the introduction into passenger service of the Class 180 fleet, following a 12 month programme to prepare the fleet for service following its cascade to EMR from First Hull Trains. This programme was extensive, involving additional recruitment, a significant amount of maintenance work, re-livery work to turn the fleet Aubergine and internally the fleet has had both its Wifi and PIS systems reconditioned; as well as receiving a deep clean. Further work will continue in the interiors in the New Year. We hope you are looking forward to seeing the Class 180s across our Intercity network.



**A fond farewell to our Blue HSTs** – On Friday our last iconic Blue HST took its final journey, from our Neville Hill depot in Leeds travelling on the Midland Main Line to London St Pancras International, fitted with a commemorative headboard to celebrate the event. I have no doubt that all of you will have travelled on these iconic units at some point over the past 42 years, and I know that many of you will be incredibly sad to see them go. It really is the end of an era!



**The Continuation of Red HSTs** – The introduction of the Class 180s is what allows us to remove our blue HSTs from passenger service. As a result, we will be operating a small number of red HST's through until May 2021. The red HSTs are the trains transferred from LNER which were significantly refurbished at the start of 2016. They provide better comfort, facilities and – most importantly – greater accessibility.

We are also taking the opportunity to amend the remaining HST fleet from eight to six carriage trains, removing one standard and one first-class carriage, at the same time. There are a number of reasons for doing this:

- 1) Performance - As the trains will be lighter they will be quicker to accelerate and brake which will help them to recover sub-threshold delays.
- 2) Cost - This reduces the amount EMR (and therefore the taxpayer) pays in heavy maintenance, fuel and lease charges and also reduces the capital cost of the transfer of the red HSTs.
- 3) Cost (continued) - It also reduces the VTAC EMR pays to Network Rail. VTAC stands for Variable Track Access Charge and is essentially a fee paid per vehicle mile of use. Fewer vehicles mean less charge.
- 4) Capacity - Our passenger loadings on Intercity services remains at around 10%. As a result, it is very likely the vast majority of customers will never notice this change which between now and May but for the reasons given above, it is sensible to do.

The number of services affected is very small – we now only have six HSTs in the fleet, compared to four Class 180s and 27 Meridians. From Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2021 our new timetable brings the sixth train per hour to/from London with a corresponding significant capacity increase. This will be more seats than ever to/from London and which would certainly help any on-going requirements for social distancing and hopefully a significant uplift in patronage.

## 5. AGM

The Committee for 2020/2021 is as follows:

Chairman - Arthur Taylor

Treasurer - Stephen Floyd

Membership Secretary - Alison Crompton

Other Committee Members - Mark Spurgeon, John Henderson, Howard Pile, Martin James, Courtney Lee

Acting Newsletter Editor – Jim Allwood



Photo – Steve Floyd

As we stated in the last newsletter - along with the APTU, the Annual meeting was held on November 17<sup>th</sup> (on line via Zoom) from 19.30 to 21.00. The following senior managers attended:

### Thameslink

Tom Moran – Managing Director Thameslink & Great Northern

Jenny Saunders – Customer Service Director Thameslink & Great Northern

Patrick Ladbury - Stakeholder Manager Thameslink & Great Northern

### East Midlands Railway

Will Rogers – Managing Director East Midlands Railway

Andrew Commons – Head of External Relations & Stakeholder Engagement

Laura Etheridge – Stakeholder Manager

Network Rail

Gary Walsh – Route Director East Midlands

Rachel Lowe – Head of Communications East Midlands

Transport Focus

Linda McCord

The meeting opened with opening statements from Tom, Will, Gary and Linda.

**Tom** – Passenger numbers in April were 5% of the normal April figure but this has now increased to 20% of normal weekdays and up to 50% at weekends. During the first lockdown Thameslink run 50% of normal scheduled services which has now risen to 90%. Another timetable change will take place in December with more peak trains operating. The May 2021 timetable change that reinstates EMR peak services at Luton and Bedford plus more Thameslink services is still going ahead as scheduled.

**Will** – Impact of the pandemic has had a profound impact on passenger numbers with passenger numbers reducing to 12% of normal. Since September the Intercity service at Luton and Bedford has been restored to the pre Covid levels. The start of electric services is on schedule for May 2021. All electrification work is complete and class 360s are now arriving at Cricklewood with driver training commencing shortly.

**Gary** – for the last 12 months a passenger first programme has been running to allow a more responsive railway. The first 50 mile plan (St Pancras to Bedford including “the Core”) has been designed to improve reliability of the infrastructure with new 650v cabling (for signalling) being installed at Harpenden, Leagrave and Flitwick junctions, the Core being re-railed and vegetation clearance undertaken at various locations. The overhead wires are now in good condition for hot weather.

**Linda** – Doing weekly interviews of transport users. Generally passenger satisfaction is high with travellers feeling safe. The perception of those not travelling is that at present they feel that rail is not safe. Users are saying that trains are now much cleaner with users saying they want this to continue. Users are also indicating that wish to see more staff visibility. Transport Focus is now starting to ask about the use of rail post Covid.

Question and Answers

Q1 What is being done to tackle fares for part time commuters?

A1 Tom – GTR have a management contract with HM Government. Costs are covered by Government and it is up to Government/H M Treasury to decide as they receive all the revenue. Regarding Carnet, it will be available on the Key smartcard shortly at existing stations, but no information on it being rolled out at Flitwick. He would like to see flexible season tickets but there was a potential trade off with revenue modelling. Peak travel times have changed and are less pronounced which will need timetable/fares to be considered.

Will – all risk is now with Government but he agreed with Tom on flexible season tickets. EMR are considering Demand Led Pricing but again this will be determined by DfT. They need to understand travel patterns in the future.

Linda – TF will be asking what would entice people back to rail travel. Tom said that they are doing research on this but they rely on government funding at present.

Q2 Are you confident that the May 2021 timetable will go ahead on time?

A2 Will – Yes, we are confident it will go ahead on time and we have the resources.

Tom – Thameslink is dependent on EMR timetable and are planning and working with them.

There will be more fast trains stopping at Flitwick and Harpenden.

Gary – All overhead line equipment is up with dynamic testing now taking place. The electric sidings at Kettering have now been handed over to EMR. They are confident all is on track but are aware of problems with big timetable changes (May 2019) and the continuing issue of staff being absent due to Covid.

Q3 Will enough Class 360s be available from May?

A3 Will – yes we are confident we will have enough class 360s and drivers to operate the service.

Q4 When will we see the specification and details of the Class 360 refurbishment?

A4 Will – the specification is a live issue at present and will be fed back to stakeholders for comment when completed.

Q5 Will EMR peak services resume calling at Luton and Bedford from May 2021?

A5 Will – Yes

Q6 Will Intercity services to/from the north continue to stop at Bedford from May 2021?

A6 Will – The DfT specified separation of services to Intercity and Electric services so no Intercity services will call at Bedford. However, we are looking at whether some contra peak flow Intercity services can call at Bedford and Wellingborough but no decision has been made at present.

Q7 What is the trade off between Performance/Reliability and Cost Savings?

A7 Tom – Before Covid performance was worsening; however, reducing services during the initial lockdown to meet reduced demand had a positive effect on performance which improved dramatically to the best ever. We need to identify the maximum number of trains we can run and achieve good performance and reliability. The GTR network is very large so any problem can result in disruption to services a long way away. The Government funds the railways so they will look at cost savings where prudent. As GTR have a management contract with Government they have to operate within the terms of that contract so our authority is constrained on what we can do.

Will – We are contracted to deliver what the Train Service Requirement (TSR) states and all revenue goes to the DfT. EMR runs the railway day to day and decision making has been devolved to Senior Managers on the ground. Our aspiration is to build back better.

Linda – Agreed with all what Tom and Will have said but reiterated that collaboration was the way forward and not to forget there were other modes of transport.

Q8 How do we get people travelling again on the railways?

A8 Linda – Transport Focus will be asking people what would make them come back to rail. Reliability will need to be high and timetables adjusted to meet new travelling patterns.

Tom – I am more optimistic now that a vaccine is imminent. We will need to continue with the new train cleaning regime, welcoming stations and staff, a reliable service and fares will need to be looked at but we are not in control of this so the Government will need to give a lead. At present the take up rate of people wearing masks is 95% so we will need to continue to ensure this remains the same or better. Independent tests have been made on trains to detect if Covid is present and to date no Covid has been detected.

Will – It will require the whole industry to work together to deliver a safe railway and provide confidence.

Gary – His role is to have a high level of infrastructure reliability to keep disruption to a minimum as this can create overcrowding on both stations and trains. My one concern is that at present we are seeing a significant increase in trespass/vandalism.

Q9 What is the latest situation on provision of WiFi and seat back tables on the class 700's?  
A9 Tom – There is no change with some units with WiFi and Seat Back Tables.

Q10 Will Class 360s be provided with WiFi?  
A10 Andrew – Yes they will.

On conclusion of the Q&A both Arthur and Neil thanked all the railway staff that allowed the railways to continue to operate and deliver the services for passengers especially key workers throughout the pandemic.

At this point Neil concluded the meeting at 21.00 and thanked everyone for attending and to have a safe Christmas and New Year.

**STAY SAFE**



A different blue HST – photo Steve Floyd

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)

This newsletter is published by the Bedford Commuters Association.

---

Chairman: Arthur Taylor, 6 Chaucer Road, Flitwick, Beds, MK45 1QG  
Acting Editor: Jim Allwood, 25 Church Close, Martock, Somerset, TA12 6DS

---