



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

THE RAIL USER GROUP FOR BEDFORD AND FLITWICK

2019 AGM - CHAIRMANS REPORT

Once again 2019 has been another challenging year for the BCA Committee. The three biggest issues have been the ongoing problems with the Thameslink May 2018 timetable change, the East Midlands Franchise and its future ramifications for Bedford and the failure to gain Access For All Funding for Lifts at Flitwick.

Committee - Once again I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the committee for their help and support over the last year. **However we still need volunteers to serve on the committee to ensure that we can provide the best service to the members. If you are interested please let me know. You can contact me at admin@bedfordcommuters.org.uk, or by telephone on 01525 715454 or see me at the AGM.**

Communications – We continue to give our views on matters that affect members to the local media, newspapers, Radio and TV and publish Newsletters approx every two months with up to date information and news items of interest to members.

East Midlands Franchise - The successful bidder for the franchise was announced in April, the winner being Abellio. I attended the official launch and took the opportunity to speak to several senior managers and conveyed the BCA's serious concerns regarding the proposed changes to their timetable from December 2020 which will mean no intercity services stopping at Bedford and the need to change trains at Kettering if travelling to Leicester and beyond. The only EMR services to serve Bedford will be the Corby services. I also indicated our concern about the electric trains for the Corby services which will be nearly 20 years old and will need to be comprehensively refurbished. I will continue to lobby EMR to ensure that the intercity services continue to stop at Bedford.

Prior to Abellio taking over the service I met several times with the EMT Timetable Planners in an effort to get some peak hour stops at Bedford reinstated earlier than planned. To date I have not been able to accomplish this but I will continue to press EMR. It is intended to reinstate stops for peak hour trains from December 2020 with the introduction of electric services.

Thameslink - Issues with the May 2018 timetable change continued into 2019. From December 2018 the full weekday timetable was reinstated. This was followed in May 2019 by the reinstatement of the 4 trains per hour Saturday and Sunday timetables. There are continuing issues with the timetable which are affecting Harpenden. The performance of the timetable has continued to improve over the year although there have been issues with the infrastructure mainly south of the river, however there have been some issues north of the river with on one occasion the overhead wires coming down due to the very hot weather and also the failure in early August of the power from the National Grid which caused severe issues with the Class 700's. A review has been undertaken as to the causes of this. We are also concerned about the high level of failures north of the river recently and are monitoring the situation closely.

As a result of the disruption caused by the May 2018 timetable it was announced that GTR was making £15m available for improvements as suggested by passengers and Stakeholders. This Passenger Benefit Fund meant that £80k was available to stations which included Bedford and Flitwick. The BCA responded with 8 ideas in priority order for both Bedford and Flitwick as outlined in our October newsletter. These ideas are now being evaluated and we await the outcome.

Midland Mainline Electrification - We understand that the electrification is on schedule and will be completed on time to allow electric trains to run from December 2020. These electric trains will be maintained at Bedford Caudwell Walk depot. Work has started on the Bromham Road Bridge culminating with it being demolished and rebuilt from October. This will mean the loss of a considerable number of car

parking places for up to 9 weeks from October. The bridge is scheduled for reopening in the spring of 2020. We are concerned about the length of time it is taking to do this work and the loss of so many car parking.

Flitwick Access For All -In April the DfT announced that 73 stations would receive funds to make them fully accessible. Unfortunately Flitwick was unsuccessful despite Thameslink saying it was the top priority station on Thameslink North for this funding. I emailed the DfT on 3 occasions asking why we had been unsuccessful. I received 3 replies which did not answer my questions satisfactorily. I then emailed the Rail Minister who again did not give me a satisfactorily reply. Nadine Dorries MP obtained a debate in Parliament but again no reasons were given. We will continue to strongly lobby for funds to make Flitwick accessible to all travellers.

Bedford to St Albans Community Rail Partnership - The Bedford to St Albans Community Rail Partnership (CRP) was set up earlier this year with the aim of getting the community more involved with their local station, and to use the rail services more often. Also improvements to stations, better integrated transport with better bus connections and cycling facilities would follow. The first meeting of the Bedford to St Albans CRP Steering Group was held in March which I attended. The BCA is now represented on this Steering Group. The official launch took place in June. Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) and station adoption groups play an important role in engaging communities with their local railways, they are involved in social inclusion projects, community wellbeing activities, economic development, enhancing station gardens, local information provision and enabling people to access sustainable, healthy travel.

Fares - Once again the government has announced that regulated fares would increase by 2.8% from January 2020. The BCA continues to call for the increase to be cancelled like the Fuel Duty increases have been in recent years. Also the government should use of CPI rather than the RPI measure to fix the level of fares increase each year. We would urge all members to contact their local MP to voice their displeasure at the fare increase.

Bedford Station – The BCA continue to attend and play an active role at the Bedford Station Travel Plan Steering Committee. Late last year the lifts were taken out of service for 9 weeks to facilitate a complete refurbishment to improve reliability. As members will probably be aware since the refurbishment the reliability has vastly improved.

Flitwick Station – Positive news was the completion of the new heated Waiting Room on Platform 1 in June. There was some initial problem with the electrically operated door which has now been fixed. We are now awaiting the installation of a CIS in the Waiting Room which is anticipated in late November. There is still no updated news on the Station Regeneration Scheme proposed by Central Bedfordshire Council.

East West Rail – The BCA responded to a consultation on the routing of East West Rail between Bedford and Cambridge. Our preferred route would be via the existing Bedford Midland Station to allow interchange between East West rail services and Thameslink/East Midlands Railway services.

Other Matters - BCA representatives attend the following meetings:

Thameslink and EMR Stakeholder Events.

Thameslink Programme Stakeholder Reference Group

Bedford Station Travel Plan Steering Group

Thameslink Senior management

EMR Senior management

APTU Rail User Group

Railfuture – London & South East

Bedford to St Albans Community Rail Partnership

Arthur Taylor - BCA Chairman