



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

THE RAIL USER GROUP FOR BEDFORD AND FLITWICK



DECEMBER 2021 NEWSLETTER



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

I. December Timetable Change

The December timetable changes commence on Sunday 12th December. The changes that affect Bedford and Flitwick are:

Thameslink

Monday to Friday

AM peak: the 07.22 Bedford departure is retimed to 07.15 and will call additionally at Flitwick and Harpenden
The 07.44 departure from Flitwick is started back at Bedford at 07.32.

These changes were asked for by the BCA to address a 26 minute gap in services at Bedford and a faster service from Flitwick.

PM Peak: No changes

Off Peak: No changes

Weekends: No Changes

EMR

There are no changes to EMR services that affect Bedford.



2. Christmas Services

Kentish Town Upgrade work



Between Christmas Day and Tuesday 4 January 2022, Network Rail engineers will work around the clock to remove the last section of slab track on the route, which was installed in 1979.

This type of track has reinforced concrete slab underneath it. Over the festive period, it will be removed and replaced with ballasted track – with stones and sleepers to support it. The complex project, which began in 2017, will bring a more modern railway for passengers and boost reliability. These improvements will also help to reduce the amount of maintenance and future disruption required. With no timetabled train services on Christmas Day and Boxing Day on this part of the railway, Network Rail is taking the opportunity to make major progress on the project, which has been carefully planned to avoid disruption at busier times.

Work will continue after Christmas and trains will keep passengers moving, but reduced Thameslink and East Midlands Railway services will be in place between Monday 27 December and Tuesday 4 January.

The reduced services are as follows:

Thameslink

Six trains per hour with four to/from St Albans and stations to Bedford and two all stations to/from Sutton and Luton.

EMR

One train per hour St. Pancras to/from Sheffield, one train per hour St Pancras to/from Nottingham and one train per hour St. Pancras to/from Corby.

3. Annual Meeting

On Tuesday 30th November along with the APTU we held our Annual Meeting on Zoom. Present were:

Tom Moran - MD Thameslink & Great Northern
Will Rogers - MD EMR
Gary Walsh - Network Rail Route Director East Midlands

Tom, Will and Gary started the meeting with their highs and lows of the past year:

Tom – Highs - May timetable and the Welcome sign and landscaping at Bedford. Lows – “pingdemic” and its effects on staffing resource

Will – Highs - May timetable (Intercity and Connect service). Lows - unreliability of Regional services.

Gary – Highs - additional work on Infrastructure. Lows - infrastructure work overruns.

There then followed very interesting and informative Q&A session, the main points of which were:

- Uptake of the new Flexi Season ticket was not as popular as hoped for although 6,000 had been issued by EMR.
- No news yet on the simplification of ticketing.
- There were no plans for a combined Car Park/Train Ticket at present but it has not been discounted.
- Plans for the refurbishment of the class 360s is continuing but due to Covid the timescales have slipped. It has been confirmed that a full refurbishment will take place which will include wifi, power sockets, new seats (2+2), new internal layout and new up to date Passenger Information System. It was also confirmed that no second toilet will be provided on each 4 car unit.
- On time performance was ok but there had been cancellations due to Covid. Overall the base timetable was working well and the infrastructure had been OK.
- “Skip-Stopping” has not increased but is still used when required. A strict process is used when deciding if to skip-stop a service.
- The new Brent Cross station is progressing well and no further blockades will be necessary in 2022. However there will be some blockades for improvement work to the overhead wires as part of the power upgrade south of Bedford. This is to allow 125mph running by EMR services.
- St Pancras High Level station is only used by Thameslink services for planned engineering work or major disruption.
- Network Rail is investigating ways to reduce the high noise level from the rails at the south end of St Pancras Low Level station. Re-railing of the core has been increased.
- The new Passenger Service Contracts are not hugely different to the present set up.

- The retrofit of wifi and seat back tables on the Class 700s is awaiting funding from the DfT and is not expected to be taken forward in 2022.
- Any inconsistencies on Delay Replay payments should be flagged up to Thameslink.
- There is a need to have Demand lead changes to future timetables.
- In readiness for the new Bi modes (33 x 5 car units) on EMR the current fleet of Meridians will all be modified into 5 car units.
- It is recognised that there is a move away from using Ticket Offices to TVM's/On line tickets but Ticket Offices will remain open for those who wish to use them.
- Access for All at Flitwick has been funded with a completion date of 2024.



4. Insight published into Rail Sector's Finances

The Office of Rail and Road has published its annual statistical release on rail finance for the financial year 2020/2021. It shows the significant impact of coronavirus on customer numbers and Government spending during the first year of the pandemic.

Key findings from the report include:

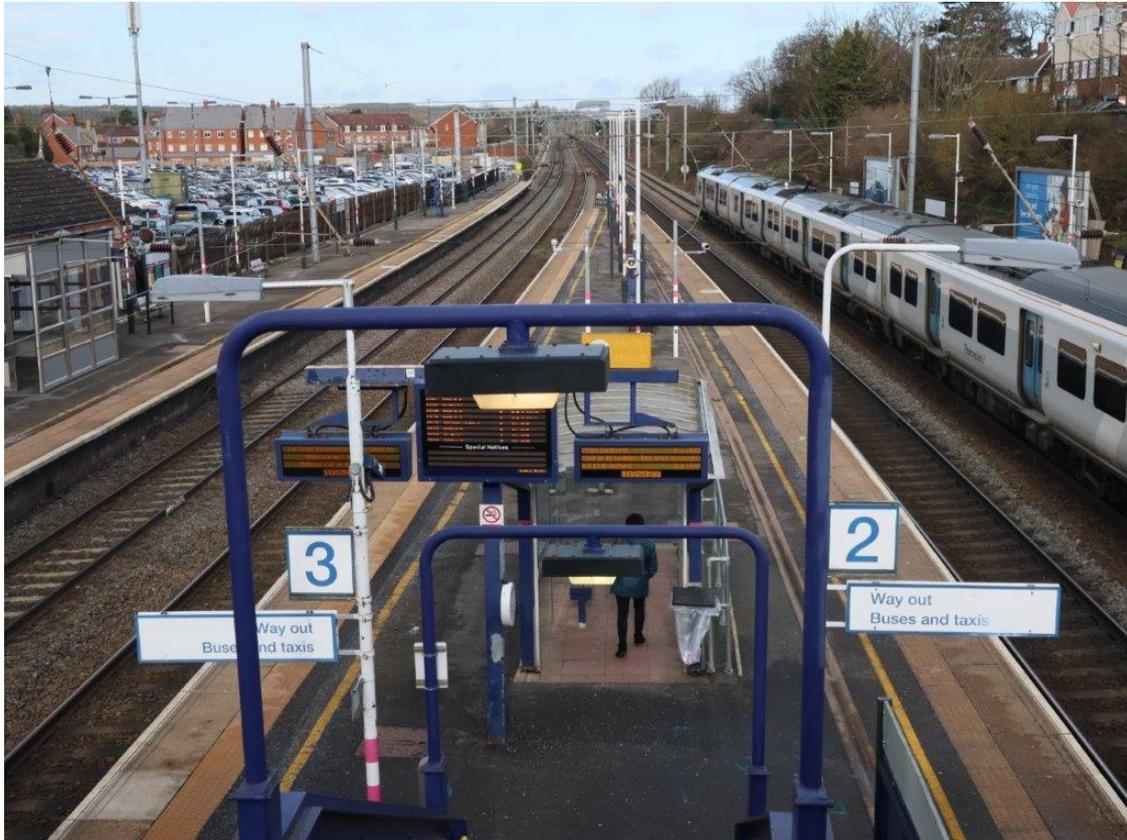
- Fares income in Great Britain dropped by £8.6 billion to £1.8 billion, due to the impact of the pandemic, with fare income accounting for 8.9% of railway income. Passenger numbers reduced by 77.7%, with fare income declining by 82%.
- Government funding of the rail industry in 2020-21 was £16.9 billion, an annual increase of £10.4 billion largely due to the use of emergency measures for train operators.
- The rail industry has started to recover from the impact of the pandemic, with 182 million rail journeys made in 2021-22 Q2, more than five times the 2020 equivalent. Passenger revenue, in line with increased passenger journeys, has also started to recover. In 2021-22 Q1 passenger revenue was £999 million, higher than the £184 million in 2020-21 Q1 but still lower than before the pandemic (£2.8 billion in the same quarter two years ago (2019-20 Q1)).

The report can be found at: <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/media/2036/rail-industry-finance-uk-statistical-release-2020-21.pdf>

5. Access to Flitwick Platforms/Flitwick Transport Interchange

We continue to press Thameslink for them to reopen the gate from the road bridge. At the present time due to the reduced numbers travelling they are reluctant to open the gate. However, rest assured we will continue to press them on this matter.

On a more positive note work has now commenced on the Transport Interchange with completion scheduled for late spring early summer.



6. EMR Stakeholder Conference

The Chairman recently attended the EMR Stakeholder Conference in Nottingham and took the opportunity to raise the BCA concerns on the Class 360 refurbishment and the reinstatement of InterCity services at Bedford with Will Roger MD EMR. Will reassured us that the class 360 refurbishment is still progressing but due to Covid has been delayed. He hoped the first refurbished class 360 will be completed in 2022. On InterCity services the DfT determine the timetable specification.

7. Membership Renewals

Just a reminder for those members who may not yet have renewed their membership that you still have time.

Please remember that the BCA regularly represents the views of its members in both local newspapers and broadcast media, as well as our meetings with the Govia Thameslink Railway and East Midlands Trains, Passenger Focus/London Travelwatch, Local Authorities, MPs, etc. During the pandemic we have continued to represent members' interests at regular virtual meetings and communications with GTR and EMR to discuss:

- Safety on trains
- Safety at stations
- Timetable changes
- Performance issue

and has responded to the recent consultation document on East West Rail.

Members receive regular newsletters during the year, keeping them updated with the latest developments from a traveller's perspective.

Why not suggest to a fellow traveller or a friend 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 the people travelling from Bedford and Flitwick on EMR and Govia Thameslink services.

An Application Form to renew your membership is on our website

STAY SAFE

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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