



MAY 2025 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the May 2025 Newsletter.

1. Performance

We continue to monitor performance. Since the New Year there has been a significant improvement in the number of cancellations due to unavailability of staff. We have had another meeting with Thameslink management to discuss performance. Thameslink reported that the first of the new drivers have completed their training and are now rostered to drive service trains. More new drivers will complete their training as the year progresses. As a result the number of cancellations should drop further.

2. MML Electrification

Network Rail recently announced that the electrification between Kettering and Wigston (just south of Leicester) has been completed and been tested and is now ready for use. At present it is anticipated that the first of the new bi-mode Aurora trains will enter service in the autumn and will be able to run on electric power from St Pancras to Wigston.



Photo: Steve Floyd

3. Engineering Work

As you are aware over the past 18 months Network Rail has been upgrading the Overhead Line Equipment (OHLE) south of Bedford. This has entailed a number of weekend closures south of Bedford. The final three weekend closures will be on

10/11 May – bus replacement between Luton and West Hampstead

24/25 May – bus replacement between Bedford and Harpenden

31/1 June – bus replacement between Bedford and Mill Hill Broadway

On all the above dates there will be bus replacement between Luton Airport Parkway and Hitchin for onward travel to London.

We have been told that this will complete the engineering work.

Network Rail reported that the engineering work over the Christmas period was completed on time with no issues.

4. GBR Consultation

The government announced in February a consultation entitled “A Railway fit for Britain’s future” The BCA has responded to this consultation as follows:

“The BCA is a rail user group that represents rail passengers who travel to, from, or via Bedford and Flitwick (Central Beds).

Our comments on A Railway Fit for Britain's Future are:

A Railway Fit for Britain’s Future

The document rightly identifies the number of organisations and interfaces as the source of high costs and inefficiencies in the industry. We think the DfT and the legislation should go further in reducing the number of organisational interactions.

A new vision for the railway

The vision, and legislation, should include a duty on GBR to promote rail as an efficient and low environmental impact transport mode; and to take sufficient measures to increase rail’s market share in the passenger and freight transport markets.

I Leadership

The document provides a good analysis of what’s wrong with the railways, and one factor is the number of different organisations and the friction between them. In our view, the friction between the ORR and the other players has been a major factor. We want to see ORR’s functions allocated to the other official bodies, for example, the new watchdog, to remove the need for ORR altogether.

In particular GBR should license open access and HSI operators.

2 A new voice for passengers (Standards Authority)

Our view is that the new watchdog should focus on rail, excluding metros and trams. Past experience shows this works best for users. Transport Focus or another watchdog should deal with buses, coaches, metros, trams and road. Its scope should extend to freight shippers as well as passenger so that it can take over some of the duties of the ORR. Being independent of GBR, the new watchdog could also deal with third parties when a body independent of GBR is necessary such as appeals by open access operators.

3 Making the best use of the rail network

We would like to see all the functions of the ORR described here transferred to other bodies such as the Competition and Markets Authority and / or the new Standards Authority. Ultimately third parties have, of course, the option to resort to the courts.

4 Financial Framework

The stand out in this chapter is that GBR would have no funds or responsibility for long-term investment: developing and enhancing the network. GBR should have responsibility for capital projects and new trains with five year investment plans running concurrently with the Control Periods. This arrangement provides a level playing field with the road network, so that GBR's five year investment plan, agreed between GBR and DfT is exactly analogous with the Road Investment Strategy.

5 Fares, ticketing, and retailing

GBR should not only ensure that fares are “affordable”, but also “competitive with other modes of transport”. This is important because what is “affordable” varies from one purchaser to another; whereas “competitive” is objective and could be defined, for example, in a code of practice.

6 Devolution

There should be a duty on GBR to cooperate with all local authorities in the development of safe, short, and well-signed routes to stations.

7 Train driver licensing and certification regime

We agree with the legislative aspects and that they will be managed by DfT. But we see no reason why GBR should not license and train drivers. Here again is an opportunity to minimise the number of interfaces.

*Arthur Taylor
Chairman, BCA.”*

5. Universal Studios Announcement

Universal Studios recently announced its plans to build a theme park at Kempston Hardwick/Stewartby, on the former brickworks site. This will obviously have big implications for transport in the area. For the railways it will mean a bigger station at Wixams on the Midland Main Line. Also a new station will be required on the Marston Vale Line. We would also expect Bedford station to be improved or even rebuilt. These improvements will be required to handle the expected large increase in people using the train for visiting the Park.

We have now heard that the station construction work at Wixams Station has been paused awaiting detailed plans of the much larger station that will be needed. We closely monitor developments and ascertain what the new plans for the station are and when it will be built and opened for use. Once we have found this out we will keep you fully informed.

6. Flitwick Interchange/AFA

Recently the 200 bus service that terminates in Kings Road has been extended to the Interchange – a welcome move to improve bus/rail integration. We would now hope that the route 44 would also be extended and the northbound routes 34 and 42 also stop at the Interchange.

We are still awaiting a further update on the Access For All. Our understanding is that it is still being designed. Our concern is the length of time it is taking for this project. We have been assured that the funding for the project is secure.

7. May Timetable Changes

Our understanding is that there are only very minor changes to both Thameslink and EMR services from May.

8. EMR

For those using St Pancras you will have probably noticed that over the Christmas period additional gates were installed and the Ticket Vending Machines moved to a new position. At several meetings with EMR the BCA had voiced its concern at the large queues that formed at the gateline when multiple trains arrived at St Pancras and the need for additional gates. We are pleased that EMR took our views on board and provided additional gates.

The Chairman attended the Stakeholder Conference in January. Driver training for the new Aurora trains will commence later in 2025 ready for the introduction into service in the autumn. There was no further update on the class 360 refurbishment other than the final design work was being completed. The maintenance depot at Caudwell Walk where class 360s are maintained will receive new lifting jacks during 2025.



Photo: Jim Allwood (2007)

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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