

Dear Member



This is just a quick newsletter to update you with the latest on the driver shortage, compensation, car park charges and the Christmas service.

The driver shortage

As we are painfully aware, we still do not have a normal service. The situation, as I understand it, is as follows:

1. The 14 December temporary timetable shows a reduction of 30%, which is an improvement on the previous timetable which was a reduction of 38%.
 - a. The new temporary timetable currently contains a large gap just after 6pm on all stations services. I have asked FCC to fix this and they have agreed to do so with immediate effect - this will not immediately appear in the pdf timetable, but should be visible on the web site, on Journey Check etc (see below).
2. On the Thameslink route, drivers at two of the three depots have returned to normal working. FCC and ASLEF are working together to encourage remaining drivers to again make themselves available for rest day working. A key event in this will be the drivers receiving their ballot papers following the latest FCC/ASLEF negotiations. These are expected to arrive today and tomorrow and will include a recommendation from ASLEF to vote in favour of accepting the offer. FCC (and ASLEF) hope this will encourage drivers to again resume rest day working. I'm afraid I'm not going to give you any specific date by when the service will return to normal levels, since FCC simply has to wait for the drivers to make themselves available.
 - a. This is obviously an unsatisfactory situation and I know FCC want to stop a repeat of this type of problem. As we are all too aware, industrial relations and historic working practices in the railway industry take a long time to solve, and it should be recognised that this is a problem for the industry as a whole, not just FCC. This is mainly an issue to be picked up after normal service is resumed.
3. On the GN route, the service is back to normal, so if you drive to the station, you might like to consider this option. Your parking season ticket is valid at FCC car parks (ie not Stevenage).

Train updates

Some services are being given additional stops to cover gaps in the service. The best option seems to be Journey Check (<http://www.journeycheck.com/firstcapitalconnect/>). The filtered route often contains the additional stops.

Compensation options other than 'DelayRepay'

We have no definite news from FCC on compensation options, and I believe there was no decision at the FCC Executive Committee meeting last Thursday. We remain in dialogue with FCC. Somewhat depressingly, what is happening is that options are disappearing (but fortunately, some tolerable ones remain).

Options that have been eliminated are as follows:

- **Like for like Ticket Extensions.** The main issue here is the impact on other operators. If FCC grant season ticket extensions then this will impact on the revenue of other

operators on which we can travel. On Thameslink North, this is most relevant to TravelCard holders and to Bedford, Luton and Luton Airport Parkway, where the option to travel by East Midlands Trains exist - it is also applicable to stations south of the river for Southern and South Eastern. Although not so relevant to some journeys, it effectively rules it out for all stations. *For these reasons, I think this option is now a non starter and it will not be pursued further*

- **Cash refunds.** The issue in this case is “Revenue Support” - often known as “Cap and Collar”. This is a feature of franchise contracts where the operator receives monies from the Government if revenue is short of expectation (as defined in the contract) - and conversely, pays an additional fee if revenues exceed those expected. The exact rules and precise amounts at which it kicks in are shrouded in mystery (“commercially confidential” is usually claimed), but it is clear that FCC are now receiving the maximum amounts payable, so for every £1 reduction in revenue, 80p is paid by the Department for Transport (or, to be more accurate, the tax payer). If we are to be reimbursed, 80p in every £1 will therefore, in effect, come from the government. FCC’s view is that, in the current climate, this is politically difficult to impossible (because of the general pressure for government cost savings). *Whilst this makes this option very difficult, I have not totally given up hope.*

As mentioned, APTU and BCA remain in dialogue with FCC; in the meantime **I recommend you keep expired tickets.**

Car Park charges

When the BCA and myself last met FCC, we were told that FCC had decided not to impose a generic increase in car park charges, which we welcomed but that they intended to increase prices by 2½% to match the return of VAT to 17½% and to add a 1.8% credit card processing charge to season tickets bought in advance by credit card.

Following our protests, we understand FCC have agreed to absorb the 2½% increase, and the 1.8% surcharge can be avoided by paying by debit card. Whilst any increase is not wanted, this seems a good result.

Christmas services

The full service details are available on the [FCC web site](#), but in summary (from the timetable booklet):

- Services finish earlier on Christmas Eve
- No service will operate on Christmas Day or 26 December
- ***No services will operate between St Pancras International and London Bridge/Herne Hill on 27, 28, 29, 30 December or 2 January.*** National Rail only tickets will be valid on the Underground and Buses (certain routes)
- An amended service (with trains operating through Central London) will operate on 31 December, 1 & 3 January.

Also:

- There are no evening peak restrictions 24 December to 3 January inclusive
- This weekend there are through London trains

Regards

Neil

Neil Middleton
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