

Dear Member



I am writing mainly to report on the meeting that BCA & myself held with FCC Management on Friday.

We met Neal Lawson (Managing Director) and Michelle Smart (Customer Service Director). Neal was previously the New Trains & Engineering Director and had been appointed Managing Director on the day we met him. I've described who is who at the end of the newsletter.

This week's service

The good news is that the Thameslink service returns to the normal timetable Monday to Friday from tomorrow.

The current constraint is unit availability. The full FCC fleet is 109 units and 99 of them are needed to run the timetable with planned formations. FCC expect to have 92 units available to them tomorrow. They do not plan to cancel services - instead some services will be short formed.

Following the announcement of the result of the ballot on the FCC offer, FCC seem confident that they will have sufficient drivers available.

It is worth noting that the service will be "fragile" for a while, due to knock on effects from the recent cold weather. FCC are currently short 36 traction motors for the class 319s (each one has 4). They have moved motors between 319s to maximise unit availability, but still have quite a number of 319s with only two working motors. Such 319s can only run when coupled with a 319 with 4 working motors.

You probably recollect that a 319 reliability programme was started sometime ago. As regards the motors this has reached 80%, having been delayed because of the 377 unit shortage. Of the 36 traction motors that failed, 70% have come from the 20% of the fleet that have not been modified. The main snow related problem is that pre-modification the air intake is on the bottom of the unit, where it sucks in a lot of snow - the modification moves this to the top. More traction motors are due on 3 February.

Compensation

We discussed compensation during the meeting, and FCC confirmed that this will be increased beyond the 5 days already offered for monthly (& longer) season ticket holders.

They summarised the current situation in this note sent to us after the meeting:

"We can confirm that we are finalising compensation. We have listened to your views and we will be offering compensation for weekly season ticket holders [*APTU Note – in addition to monthly + longer ticket holders*]. We will be offering a flexible approach to compensation which is a combination of either a number of return journeys or a discount depending on the type of ticket purchased. We will give you the full details of the scheme towards the end of next week. However, we want to ensure that all our back office systems are ready to deal with this efficiently and it will be a few weeks before we will be ready to receive claims."

FCC also confirmed that they will consider special circumstances not covered by the published arrangements.

In response to our questions, FCC confirmed that there will be an extended period of validity on the compensation - for instance, it will still be usable for someone who renews an annual season ticket in the next couple of weeks.

Delay Repay Claims

Like me, you probably have a number of Delay Repay claims for the last couple of weeks. FCC told us that there is currently a backlog of 15,000 claims. They said that they have taken on 24 temporary staff and started a night shift to tackle this backlog.

The best option is to apply on-line at www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk/delayrepay.

Communications

FCC admitted that customer communications is one area where they have badly let us down. In part this is because of systems limitations - the systems they have do not automate (or even make it easy) to process the many adjustments that needed to be applied on some recent days.

We were told that a major investment in Customer Information Systems is currently going through the First Group internal signoff process. This programme is likely to take around 40 weeks to complete. It is clear, however, that some of the limitations are with industry wide systems - whilst FCC would like to see these fixed, this is not within their ability to do so.

We strongly encouraged FCC to re-launch the SMS broadcast system and they were receptive to this. They also noted that use of such systems was variable depending on who was on duty and steps were being taken to get everyone to act consistently.

Skeleton service

We strongly emphasised to FCC how unsatisfactory the two trains per hour service is for travellers, since it cannot cope with demand. FCC acknowledged this, and were particularly embarrassed about last Monday's service since a communications screw up meant that available stock was not used on Monday morning.

377 reliability

As regards the 377s, FCC report that these largely came through the recent bad weather unscathed - the motors were not affected and the type of door they use is much less susceptible to freezing shut. However, in general, they are still much less reliable than the 319s. Modern Railways reported that in Period 7 (16 September to 13 October) miles per 5 minute delay were:

	Period 7	Moving average
FCC 377/5	5,520	6,462
FCC 319	17,062	15,044
Southern 377/4	32,088	29,902

By comparison:

FCC 365 ♦	35,301	30,061
C2C 357 ♦	80,750	57,179

The Southern 377/4s have been in operation longer than FCCs and have had a number of reliability improvements applied to them that were not applied to the FCC units when they were built. FCC have now commenced a campaign to drive reliability up to similar levels to Southern.

The recent problems at Bombardier with build quality can also be seen in the performance of the 378s used by London Underground, which are even less reliable.

◆ FCC use 365s on services to Peterborough, Cambridge & Kings Lynn. The 357s used by C2C are the UK's most reliable train - the annual moving average is more than 50% better than the next type of train.

FCC Senior Management team

As mentioned above Neal Lawson has been appointed Managing Director from Friday 15 January.

The FCC Senior Management team is now:

1. Neal Lawson - Managing Director
2. Tom Joyner - Operations Director
3. *TBA* - Engineering Director
4. Tom Stables - Commercial Director (he currently works for First Group in North America and will start on 1 April)
5. Michelle Smart - Customer Service Director - including Communications and Property. Staff at stations report to her, as done Larry Heyman (who now reports to Danny Williams, Head of Stations).
6. Chris Cornthwaite - Finance Director
7. David Statham - Thameslink Programme and Property Projects

Hugh Clancy (previously Commercial Director) is now First Group Rail Division Commercial Director [he will be working on Franchise bids - both East Anglia and C2C are up for grabs] and Belen Martinez (previously Property & Projects Director) is First Group Rail Division Business Development Director.

Regards

Neil

Neil Middleton
17 January 2010