



Dear Member

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Christmas / New Year 2013

As usual, FCC will stop running services early on 24 December and there will be no service 25 & 26 December.

All lines will be blocked south of East Croydon for engineering works 25 December – 1 January 2014 and buses will run to Gatwick Airport and other destinations as a substitute. For Gatwick Airport & Brighton travellers, the main alternative will be additional trains to East Grinstead, from where buses will depart. More information at <http://bit.ly/1aEpffe> (Network Rail) and <http://bit.ly/19WV4he> (Southern).

FCC will be running their standard Christmas / New Year arrangement on Friday 27, Monday 30 & Tuesday 31 – ie off-peak frequencies + additional peak hour services Bedford, stations to St Albans, St Pancras + stations to Blackfriars. A summary is available here: <http://bit.ly/17wl4Th> (FCC).

Current timetable

The timetable changed with effect from Sunday. The main changes are:

- Weekday off peak and all day Saturday, half of all 'fast' trains will stop at West Hampstead Thameslink.
- There will also be twice as many trains to and from Gatwick on Sundays as services to and from Bedford are extended beyond East Croydon to Three Bridges (note: this applies Sunday 22 December, then from Sunday 5 January 2014 onwards).

Santa Train

FCC will be operating a Santa Train this Saturday (14 Dec). Timings are Southbound – Harlington: 1038, Leagrave: 1043, Luton: 1048, Luton Airport Parkway: 1050, Harpenden: 1056, St Albans: 1102 & West Hampstead Thameslink: 1115. Northbound, timings are: London Bridge: 1400, London Blackfriars: 1408, City Thameslink: 1410, Farringdon: 1414 & St Pancras: 1418.

More details at: <http://www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk/about-us/media-centre/news/2013/all-aboard-1024-see-santa/>.

10% discount on Super Off-Peak tickets

FCC has extended its 10% discount offer on Super Off-Peak tickets until Sunday 5 January 2014 (these tickets are available on Saturdays, Sundays & Bank Holidays).

Fares - generally

There has been what seems like a blizzard of announcements and comments from the Government on UK Rail fares and first class. Here is a summary of them and their implications on us:

Topic	Likely impact	Proposal/Comment etc	APTU observations
Provision of First Class	Unknown	The Transport Secretary is reported as “looking into” the First / Standard ratio with a view to reducing the portion of first class: Eg Sunday Telegraph http://bit.ly/1ei34xN (Free, but registration and volume limits)	The market for First Class is known to be considerably stronger from the Brighton area – around 30 on a peak service. The new Class 700s (see below) will have around 50 First Class seats. We are asking all franchise bidders to reduce / eliminate these seats.
Limitation of ‘Flex’ within the annual increase to 2%	Very limited	As part of the annual fares increase of RPI + x% (individual fares are now limited to an increase of 2% above this. Previously some fares could increase by a further 5%. <i>Note:</i> The average remains unchanged, so other fares would have lower increases	In recent years FCC have increased all fares by a similar amount and had previously indicated that they expected to take the same approach this year.
Flexible ticketing	Beneficial in the longer term	The trial is likely to include discounted tickets for those travelling at quieter periods at either end of the rush hour....And flexible season tickets to benefit people who don’t work five days a week. And by harnessing smart ticketing technology, we can give passengers the service they need, when they need it.... At the same time we’ve ruled out proposals to charge premium fares at peak times.	We have asked FCC to bid to be part of the trial and emphasised to all franchise bidders how regular travellers other than those who travel at peak hours 5 days a week have lost out. We have specifically covered the evening peak restriction and the benefits that could arise from Smart ticketing. Some franchise bidders have said that they see Smart ticketing as an evolution, which suggests these benefits will be later rather than sooner.
Singles half price of returns	Very limited	The Government currently regulates off-peak return tickets and is considering regulating single off-peak singles instead for longer journeys. A trial is proposed for 2015	In my view ‘long distance’ is ex Intercity Journeys such as London to Sheffield, not Brighton to Bedford. I think the current regime where off-peak returns only cost 10p or 20p more than off-peak singles has

Topic	Likely impact	Proposal/Comment etc	APTU observations
			a very big impact on FCC's revenue protection strategy as many travellers on their return journey after the end of the evening peak have little to gain by just buying a single for their outward journey.
No fare increase	Good, bit limited	Rather than RPI + 1% (ie 4.1%), the increase will be RPI	A 1% saving is not to be ignored ...

2014 Fare increases

The 2014 fare increase will take place from 2 January 2014 and, as usual, season tickets will need to be bought on 1 January 2014 or before to take advantage of current prices.

2014 fares for singles, returns etc are yet to be uploaded to ticketing sites, so it still possible to buy tickets for early 2014 (currently, up to 4 March) to travel at current prices.

The new franchise

The state of play is as follows:

- FCC's current contract has been extended to 31 March 2014.
- FCC and the DfT are negotiating an extension to 13 September 2014.
- A new franchise is scheduled to be in place from 14 September 2014.

The 5 short listed bidders (First Group, Abellio, GoVia, MTR & Stagecoach) will submit their bids on 24 December and a decision taken in Spring 2014.

In a joint campaign with the Bedford Commuters Association, APTU has met all 5 bidders to discuss our aspirations for the Franchise. These were shaped by the DfT specification against which they were bidding. Our focus was on:

- "Operating Excellence", which includes a reliable fleet of trains and service;
- Up to date information;
- Disruption management and robust contingency plans;
- Smart Card technology;
- Network Rail infrastructure
- Future timetables; and
- Stakeholder engagement

After meeting them, we provided a letter to each bidder: this is available here:

www.aptu.org.uk/pdfs/tsgn_franchise_aptu-bca_view_october2013.pdf.

East Croydon, Gatwick & Brighton service frequency

Both the new franchise and the December 2014 timetable (which will be set by FCC and Southern) envisage that the current 4 trains per hour service to East Croydon, Gatwick & Brighton will reduce to 2 trains per hour, with the other two terminating at Elephant & Castle. This is because of the London Bridge blockade.

In another joint initiative with BCA, our investigations have shown that there is insufficient capacity and rolling stock to maintain 4 trains per hour to Brighton. However, our informal soundings within the rail industry suggest that 4 trains per hour to Three Bridges (south of Gatwick) is viable. We have recently issued a press release on this: www.aptu.org.uk/pdfs/50pctreduction.pdf.

If you can forward this to local politicians etc that would be much appreciated (if sending it your MP, you will need to include your postal address). Please cc aptu@aptu.org.uk.

North Watford fares (not) valid via St Albans

You may well have seen the stories in the press (eg <http://bbc.in/19l6i20>) about a court case where a traveller successfully argued that a Watford North Travelcard could also be used via St Albans, leading to a saving of c £900 per annum for a St Albans to London Thameslink traveller (as a season ticket can be used to start and stop a journey at any point on the route).

Although it was claimed over the summer a number of times that the loophole had been closed, so far as I can tell, the loophole was not removed until 9 October, when a new edition of the National Routeing Guide contains this entry in the Easements section:

700434	Customers travelling from Watford North, Garston, Bricket Wood, How Wood, Park Street and St Albans Abbey to or via London St Pancras in possession of tickets routed "Any Permitted" may not travel via St Albans. This easement applies in both directions.
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Whilst the Easements statement is a definitive matter, I did ask FCC to (a) confirm the situation regarding tickets purchased on 8 October or before [the current view is not longer valid for the remainder of their validity]; and (b) to confirm that the necessary approvals were obtained by ATOC. As yet I have not received a reply. If this matters to any member, please let me know, and I will follow up with more vigour.

The media also splashed with stories about it costing FCC a lot of money, but I think this is based on (a) a misunderstanding; and (b) the mistaken belief that the loophole would continue – this is partially true, as most of the revenue would flow to London Midland as the prime route is clearly via Watford Junction (and the price is lower). However, as FCC is in Revenue Support, 80% of the revenue reduction will be absorbed by tax payers (ie us).

It is clear that FCC will strongly resist any attempt to obtain a refund for a 'mis-sold' ticket (ie when asking for a St Albans to London Travelcard, you should have instead been sold a Watford North Travelcard) – see <http://bit.ly/1hBcMLn> (FCC website) and that the Government is highly likely to support them (see above – 80% of cost borne by tax payer).

Summary of FCC initiatives

We have received the following from FCC:

Following his appointment as Managing Director of FCC, David Statham has announced a wide range of improvements that will deliver a more reliable train service, cleaner trains and consistently high quality passenger service information. Key to this is an initiative to help Network Rail improve the reliability of power supplies and signalling which caused numerous problems for FCC passengers through the winter. This will help to avoid a recurrence of events such as the collapse of overhead wires at Hitchin, St Neots, Potters Bar and Radlett, all of which occurred in a three month period.

To improve punctuality and reliability

- Giving Network Rail a one-off programme of additional opportunities in the evening and at weekends to maintain and upgrade the track, power and signalling systems for a more reliable service (last financial year, 63% of delays stemmed from faulty infrastructure attributable to Network Rail, including external factors such as trespass and vandalism, fatalities and bridge strikes). This extra engineering work will be timed to cause the least inconvenience to passengers, for example early on Sunday mornings.
- Working with Network Rail to position mobile engineers at key locations on the south Thameslink route to respond to signal and track faults up to three times faster.

To improve the travelling environment

- Introducing deep cleaning of train carpets, changing damaged seats in service at terminus stations, more on-board litter picking and trialling new steam cleaning equipment to give passengers cleaner trains

To improve service information

- Releasing a further update to FCC's text and email service information alerts that provides alerts for multi-leg journeys and additional information about the London Underground all of which could also be sent on Twitter
- Building on the 24/7 Twitter information service that is now followed by one-fifth of FCC's passenger and, from FCC's support centre, responding to passengers' queries and monitoring website and station information systems
- Creating a new phone service for drivers to quickly find out the causes of delays so they can inform passengers. This summer, a new system is also being rolled out in all FCC train cabs which, by autumn of 2014, will give drivers a communication link to engineers and the control centres (currently all information has to be channelled through the Network Rail signaller)
- Launching a new "Interchange" for passengers to tell FCC how they think we can improve the train service
- Creating more opportunities for passengers to talk to FCC directors at meet-the-manager "super sessions" in concourses of large London interchange stations and evening online forums

FCC has updated us on cleaning as follows:

Following our promise to focus on delivering a cleaner train environment for passengers, we are about to announce a new deep clean programme which will see all 840 Thameslink and Great Northern trains given an extensive roof to floor clean, with an emphasis on removing deeply ingrained dirt and grime.

The extensive programme, which will deliver noticeable changes for passengers travelling on all FCC routes, began a few weeks ago. Specialist train presentation teams are based at Cricklewood and Bedford carriage sidings and at Hornsey depots, to deliver the work.

The work being carried out will ensure that all stock is brought up to a uniform level of cleanliness which is easier to maintain.

Cleaning at Brighton

Turnaround cleaning at Brighton station has been enhanced, with an improved cleaning process brought into use and new agreements with Southern to wash trains. This will help to ensure that no train leaves Brighton without being cleaned. New CCTV systems have been installed at the South Thameslink storage sidings shared by FCC and Southern to deter vandals.

Steam Cleaning

Following the successful trial of hospital-grade steam cleaning equipment we are making steam cleaning part of our regular cleaning routine.

The equipment has already proven its worth at Hornsey depot and Bedford and Letchworth carriage sidings, where it has been in use this summer. The precision nozzles allow cleaning crews to tackle difficult grime and dirt. The devices can also be used to remove gum from seat covers, to remove some types of internal graffiti and to clean seat covers. As well as being used as part of the regular cleaning cycle, the steam cleaners will also be used on an ad-hoc basis to ensure that trains are left in good state of cleanliness.

On-Train Cleaning

On train cleaning teams are now working at a number of locations across the FCC network. Key locations include the Sutton loop and the Thameslink core between Blackfriars and St Pancras stations. Having additional cleaning teams working in these locations ensures that discarded newspapers, coffee cups and other loose waste is cleared, leaving the train clean for the onward journey.

Any feedback, good or bad, would be useful.

FCC: Passenger Information Screens during disruption

FCC have updated us as follows:

Following feedback from passengers, stakeholders and independent watchdog Passenger Focus, FCC have introduced a new disruption mode for passenger information systems. During severe disruption, Service Delivery Centres can now easily remove all trains which are cancelled from departure boards and platform screens. This allows passengers to quickly see which trains are running and make an informed choice as to how to continue their journey. Additional information regarding the disruption will also be displayed on the screens.

On public announcement systems, pre-recorded announcements will be played less frequently, allowing more time for relevant updates.

Previously				Now			
Departures				Departures			
Time	Destination	Platform	Expected	Time	Destination	Platform	Expected
11:18	London St Pancras	3	Cancelled	11:18	London St Pancras	3	11:23
11:24	Brighton	2	Cancelled	12:24	Brighton	2	On time
11:38	Corby	4	Cancelled	11:05	Brighton	2	12:38
11:40	Brighton	2	Cancelled				
11:49	London St Pancras	3	Cancelled				
11:54	Brighton	2	Cancelled				
11:55	Sutton	1	Cancelled				
	via Wimbledon						
12:07	Nottingham	4	Cancelled				
12:10	Brighton	2	Cancelled				
12:18	London St Pancras	3	Cancelled				
12:24	Brighton	2	Cancelled				
Time now 12:01				Time now 11:19			

Siemens / Class 700s – the new Thameslink rolling stock

APTU, BCA and other stakeholders from Great Northern and the Brighton Mainline have been engaged with FCC on the final design of these trains for some time now. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to reveal details as yet as we were required by the Department for Transport to enter into a Non-Disclosure Agreement. We are pressing for us and other stakeholders to be released from this, which may occur after the formal launch of the new trains, which is expected to be relatively soon. We will then be able to comment to you.

Other news

Oyster @ West Hampstead Thameslink

Further to recent newsletters, Oyster Cards are now on sale at the Booking Office. To top up, use the ticket machines at the station.

Electric car charging points at St Albans, Luton Airport Parkway & Luton

There are now two electric car charging points at St Albans (Ridgmont Road), Luton Airport Parkway & Luton (multi-story) car parks. The charging points are managed by Source East (www.sourceeast.net) as part of the East of England charging network; pre-registration is required.

More details in the FCC press release: aptu.org.uk/pdfs/fcc_electricchargingpoints_august2013.pdf and in this Herts Ad story <http://bit.ly/1cpbgsO>.

Elstree & Borehamwood footbridge

There is an 'open house' at the Station on Thursday 12 December from 6pm to 9pm in the Platform 1 Waiting room (pic.twitter.com/Jrhf5AVNzD).

Network Rail to invest

FCC have updated us as follows:

I would like to take this opportunity to inform you that we have been able to secure £21 million of additional investment for Network Rail (NR) to upgrade their assets on the Great Northern and Thameslink routes. This investment will be used by NR to carry out repair work to tracks and points, to clear vegetation which interferes with overhead equipment and to enhance a large amount of electrical equipment. They are also undertaking work to upgrade points and signal equipment in areas where failures are common.

We are working with Network Rail to ensure the root cause of problems is addressed, as I know it has been a hugely frustrating time for our passengers who suffered many delays this period. Whilst NR deliver their work, we concentrate on helping our passengers to ensure they always know what travel options are available to them, and how they can best perform their journey. Our enhanced customer information systems, which we told you about in last month's edition, are being used when unplanned disruptions occur.

It is of note that for FCC the areas with most regular problems are the Brighton main line and the Great Northern route (where performance has been so bad recently that Network Rail have had to formally apologise).

Identifying class 377 services

For some time, the PDF timetable books have indicated which Monday to Friday services are diagrammed for Class 377 units. This is of particular benefit to mobility impaired passengers as the Class 377s have suitable designed toilets. Historically, this information has not been published for weekend services. When questioned on this at a meeting with FCC on other issues, they subsequently commented:

"I've spoken to colleagues who put the timetable booklet and the reason the 377s are not identified in the timetable at weekends is because they are prone to be changed as a result of engineering work. This is much more likely on Sundays than on Saturdays; however our concern is we would be giving passengers false information about services planned to have disabled toilet facilities and areas for wheelchairs."

With effect from the current timetable, Saturday services also have this information, but not Sunday services. I would be interested in feedback as to how important it is to you to be able to identify a 377 operated service and why. For someone like me, identifying a 377 operated service is very much a "nice to have" – for instance, that the service will be air conditioned on a hot day, however if there are good reasons for them to be identified on a Sunday, we will follow up.

Oyster – Incomplete Journeys

Research by London TravelWatch highlights a lack of understanding of how to use Oyster Pay as You Go, resulting in an Incomplete Journey charge (being the highest possible single journey cost. The full research can be read here <http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/clickthrough/link?id=355>.

Pages 19/20 highlight:

Knowledge Gaps

Knowledge gaps relating to Oyster Pay As You Go usage most frequently highlighted during the course of the research can be summarised as follows:

- A maximum fare will apply in the event of a journey exceeding a certain time limit. Some expressed concern about the amount of time it could take to travel across London, especially if unexpected delays were experienced
- Passengers did not understand why a fare is charged if a user touches in and out at same station within a period of time too short to have made a journey (for example, if there are problems or delays to the service at that station).
- Uncertainty about what to do if the barriers at a gated station are open.
- Lack of awareness of the Oyster boundary.
- The correct procedure to follow when interchanging.
- Whether it is necessary to touch every reader passed in the course of a journey (or whether doing so would incur a penalty).

The TfL guide to avoiding incomplete journeys (and claiming a refund) is here:

<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tickets/26171.aspx>. On Thameslink, the Oyster Boundaries are Elstree & Borehamwood, East Croydon (note: the actual boundary is further south if you are changing there) and St Mary Cray (Sevenoaks trains). The entire Wimbledon loop is entirely within Oyster zones. Maximum journey times are here: <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tickets/14872.aspx>.

Radlett Strategic Railfreight interchange

This rumbles on; the most recent key events being:

- Herts County Council as land owner has deferred their decision: <http://bit.ly/18V7ITW> (Herts Ad) and <http://bbc.in/1iXSKAI> (BBC) (but decided to proceed on the planning obligation).
- The local football club owner has shown an interest in buying the site: <http://bit.ly/1aWfdUS> (Herts Ad).
- It has been alleged that Theresa Villiers broke the Ministerial Code by having lunch with a lobbyist at the time she was a Rail Minister (<http://bbc.in/1dr17hj>).

Temporary service changes August 2014 & February 2015

Service changes at London Bridge 23 – 31 August 2014

During this period, which covers the Bank Holiday weekend, the following 4 working days and the subsequent weekend, some FCC services will retimed. There will be no Southern services, so services south of the river, particularly at rush hour, are likely to be very busy.

There is little other information available as yet; it would seem sensible to assume that services will be diverted via Herne Hill during the weekends.

The web page to monitor is <http://thameslinkprogramme.co.uk/about#keydates>.

West Coast blockades – Various

I thought it worthwhile to mention these as some travellers are likely to switch to FCC services making them busier; this might influence the timing of your holidays.

The West Coast Mainline is due to be closed for engineering work during the week for two periods in 2014/15: Saturday 9 / Monday 25 August 2014 and Saturday 14 / Sunday 22 February 2015. Full details, including details of other weekends and the weekends covered by these longer blockades at <http://bit.ly/16kkgQM> (Network Rail).

St Pancras / Kentish Town incident 26 May 2011

As you may recollect from press stories, FCC were fined £75,000 for failing to protect passengers in the Dock Junction incident (Dock Junction is the point the Thameslink route diverges from the Midland main line to St Pancras).

FCC sent us this statement after the Court case:

Dear stakeholder,

I wanted to personally inform you of the outcome of today's Court hearing between First Capital Connect and the Office of the Rail Regulation, about an incident that took place in May 2011.

This incident involved one of our eight carriage Class 377 trains. The train's rear pantograph (the piece of equipment which conducts power from the overhead electricity cables to the train) was damaged by foliage overhanging on the overhead line, which led to the train being stranded between St Pancras and Kentish Town stations.

Our passengers, their safety and security is our top priority. We didn't live up to our own high standards in the way we handled this incident and therefore entered a guilty plea to a prosecution under the Health & Safety Act. We were fined £75,000 and will also cover the ORR's legal costs of £27,718.

In his verdict the judge made several comments which reflect the work we have done to date. He specifically commented that lessons had been learnt and new procedures implemented, he accepted that we maintain a vigorous safety culture and agreed that we have an enviable safety record. He also recognised that there was early and candid acceptance of responsibility which is very important.

This was an isolated incident, and since then more than two years ago, we have implemented a range of actions based on the findings of both our own independent investigation, and the recommendations from industry body the Rail Accident Investigation Branch. These measures significantly improve our approach to managing this type of incident.

Since this incident we have successfully recovered a number of failed and stranded trains. The procedures have worked well and have been applied to incidents such as the de-wiring of the overhead lines at Radlett in February 2013, where five trains were detrained within 90 minutes.

We have a good safety record and have been recognised as industry leaders in several areas including passenger safety management and occupational health.

I hope that this message conveys how seriously we take this issue and assures you of my personal commitment to ensuring that our customers are looked after safely at all times. This matter, and the lessons we have learnt as a result are of the utmost importance to me.

Kind regards,

David Statham

A shorter version of this is also available on the FCC web site: <http://bit.ly/1bXjZyR>.

The Office of Rail Regulation's statement is here: <http://bit.ly/1jPiCg6>.

I was interviewed on Heart Radio and the two key points I made were that I was pleased that FCC had admitted they fell short by pleading guilty and that I was pleased FCC have learnt the lesson – there now appears to be a much greater focus on evacuating trains promptly after an incident.

Interim train order

Because of the delays to the Siemens order, there has been an interim order for an additional 116 Electrostar [ie 377 type] carriages. This has been organised by Southern Trains. The two key phrases in the press release are:

1. When the contract is placed, the new trains will be used initially on the Thameslink Route, facilitating the release of existing trains to newly electrified routes. In the longer term, these new trains will in turn also be cascaded.
2. It is anticipated that the 116 vehicles will be delivered during 2015, with a view to their use in the Thameslink Franchise from the timetable change date in May 2015. Once the new Thameslink Rolling Stock is delivered, these new vehicles are intended also to be used on services on newly electrified routes.

It is important to understand that there will not be 116 additional carriages for our use, as these trains will undoubtedly be used to allow the existing 319 units to be released and sent for refurbishment before they find a new home on either (or both of) the Thames Valley and North West England. Two issues that APTU is trying to get to the bottom of are:

1. The timing of the release of 319s vs the arrival of the interim new stock order, as we would not want to see a temporary capacity reduction.
2. How the arrival of the first of these units ties in with the start of the London Bridge blockade, as this may require additional stock.

South Korean TV interview

Here's the report from APTU Member Matthew Taylor, who agreed to be interviewed (and had just returned from a holiday in South Korea):

It all went smoothly and was quite an interesting process. The journalist is a special reporter for KBS who seems to produce single subject (probably Panorama style) programmes. My understanding is that KBS broadcasts some material in English albeit the interview was translated. The translator had lived in London for about 15 years and had travelled regularly on Thameslink / FCC from Wimbledon (the main Korean community in London is in New Malden) to Mill Hill.

They filmed my journey to the station, entering the station and some shots on the platform looking at a copy of the Metro which had a headline about the fare increase announcement. They then did a few questions on the train, filmed me leaving St Pancras and then did a further interview outside St Pancras.

My sense was that their slant is that privatisation has not worked in England, Wales and Scotland and that Koreans should be concerned about what their government is planning. I understand this is limited to private operation of certain long distance routes but not the Seoul metro. As Korail long distance routes are already quick, efficient and pretty cheap and have had a certain amount of high speed investment already it may be that a private operator just running the trains without problems of historic under investment in infrastructure and rolling stock could work.

They had interviewed RMT members at the fare increase protest on Tuesday and had interviewed one of the authors of the Manchester University report that was strongly critical of privatisation. I don't think they were going to speak to anyone from the government or DfT or to a TOC / ATOC. The programme is therefore likely to try and paint a picture of a failed system.

Their questions for me were mainly focussed on what I felt about fare increases, over crowding and reliability. It was easy to give some sound bites about the waste experience in franchising such as re-painting trains and new staff uniforms every time there is a new operator. It was also easy to give examples of investment, reliability and infrastructure issues such as the failed train at St Pancras that led to the RAIB report and FCC running reliant on rest day working. What was harder was being able to comment on the pre / post BR days as I have no direct experience of commuting before privatisation. I know that the frequency of services has improved but it is hard to say if BR would have had to have delivered those improvements anyway.

Overall my contribution was probably fairly superficial and I was perhaps not as 'angry' about fare increases as they would have liked. The programme will be aired on 17 September. If I get a copy or if it is available online I will let you know.

Regards

Neil

Neil Middleton

10 December 2013