

Dear Member

FCC meeting

Our FCC meeting is booked for **7:30pm Wednesday 24 June**. We expect to have both Jim Morgan, Interim Managing Director at FCC and Larry Heyman there and are hopeful that Tom Joyner, FCC's recently appointed Operations Director can join us.

We will be meeting at Trinity United Reformed Church, 1 Beaconsfield Road, St Albans, Herts, AL1 3RD (at the junction with Victoria Street) (Streetmap: <http://www.streetmap.co.uk/map.srf?X=515419&Y=207124&A=Y&Z=110>). This a change from our usual location at the Friend's Meeting House, which is not available that evening.

Meeting practicalities

The meeting will follow the usual format - FCC will give a presentation, and this will be followed by a Question & Answer session.

If you have specific questions then, to allow FCC to carry out the necessary research, please email them to me by Sunday 14 June. We do not currently expect to have Network Rail representatives with us, so any questions about their areas of responsibility should be sent by the 14th.

We will ask FCC to honour travel to/from St Albans that evening as they have done in previous years. Please print off page 1 of this newsletter and take it with you (I will email again if this is not possible or there are to be different arrangements).

Treasurer's Note – Subscriptions

Thank you if you have paid in advance, recently sent a cheque or paid by standing order, otherwise your subscription is now due for 2009/10.

The rate remains as before, £3.00 for individual membership, £5.00 for joint membership residing at the same address.

Please send a cheque made payable to APTU to myself at the address below.

Alternatively please consider paying by standing order, if you wish to do this please contact me, again details below, and I will let you know bank account details.

Thank you

Malcolm Howe
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Elaine Holt

You will have no doubt read in the media that Elaine Holt, MD at FCC left at the end of March. Whilst this is sad because FCC are heading in the right direction and we had a very productive relationship with Elaine, Jim Morgan who is interim MD confirmed at the

recent Stakeholders event that he too wants to maintain the relationship with Rail User Groups.

FCC stakeholders forum

I attended a FCC Stakeholders forum recently and there are a number of items to pass on:

377 units

When we last reported, the expectation was that FCC would start receiving approximately 1 unit per week. Real life has proved this to have been over optimistic and units are being received at the rate of approximately 1 every 2 weeks.

I understand is that the problem is that there are a considerable number of units that need remedial welding performed on them before they can be released to FCC (these units were mostly built sometime ago, but were missing interiors).

FCC told us that the arrangements to borrow 377 units from other TOCs has been extended - there is a reduction to one 317 unit.

My train back on Monday was a pair of 377s including 377 504, so I rather assume FCC has now received at least four units.

Snow days & performance

In these supposedly Spring like days the snow days we suffered in early February seem like something from the distant past. FCC commented that their decision to run a service on those two days had caused performance to drop off significantly - if they had chosen not to run a service at all, then their reported performance would be better!

Insourcing vs outsourcing

One trend that is clear is an FCC preference to “in-source” previously outsourced services (ie bring them back in house). This is definitely an ongoing theme. The reasoning behind it is that it gives them greater control and flexibility - their ability to move resources around / re-prioritise is no longer governed by a contract.

The latest contract to have this treatment is one between Bombardier and FCC for parts of maintenance of the 365 units on the GN route, which has been terminated; the work is now undertaken by FCC.

In general, FCC certainly seem to be moving the right way on fleet availability - 3 of their 4 unit types (319 on Thameslink and 365, 317 & 313 on GN) are “best in class”. For instance, the Thameslink 319 units have an annual average failure rate of 1 every 14,842 miles, whereas Southern’s fail once every 5,966 miles (*note: these statistics are pre the March reallocations; 377s are not included*).

Ticket Office opening hours

Further to earlier newsletters, FCC reported that they will be re-applying to the Department for Transport to vary ticket office hours. Following recent publicity relating

to FCC and other TOCs, the DfT has apparently issued guidance that a reduction in hours will not be approved in any hour where more than 12 tickets are sold.

The April Passenger Focus newsletter has content on this subject - it is available at http://www.btinternet.com/~nlks/aptu/newsletter_links/passengerfocus_voice_eastofengland_april2009.pdf.

There is also an article on First Group's centralised Passenger Assistance service.

Farringdon - Bedford bound Customer Information Screens

Just to let you know that we are the case with these and are chasing FCC regularly.

Timetable changes / 18:16 from Farringdon (18:20 from St Pancras)

Generally, the May timetable change which started on Sunday, brings few changes. One notable change is a shuffle around at 18:15 at Farringdon.

The 17:05 from Sevenoaks, which previously ran as the 18:19 from Farringdon to West Hampstead, then all stations to Bedford, now departs at 18:15 and has the same stops as the old 18:16 (St Albans, Harpenden, Luton Airport Parkway, Luton, Harlington and Bedford). It is an 8 coach train.

The 18:19 now starts from Farringdon and is a 4 car train - I guess this is the 317 unit.

More details at http://www.thameslinkprogramme.co.uk/news/news_items/view/23.

Evening Peak

FCC have recently reaffirmed their promise to look at this issue in the Autumn, so we will be looking to give some input in due course. To guide us, I hope to commission a quick on-line survey to get your views.

Timetable design

FCC asked both Bedford Commuters Association and ourselves to a meeting a couple of months ago to look at possible improvements to the printed timetable layout.

Our session included:

1. Reviewing to see if the timetable could be switched back to portrait mode from landscape. Unfortunately, we jointly concluded that the extra stations now served by FCC made this impractical.
2. We asked that Portrait headings be put in the timetable booklet to make it easier to find the right page and this has been done (my view is that we naturally open the timetable like a book, find the right page and then rotate the book through 90 degrees).
3. Added to the main London > Bedford section information about key stations south of the river. Apart from general usefulness, we asked for this to tie it in with Journey Planner which lists trains by start point. Apart from the odd train that starts from locations such as Three Bridges, this is now possible.

Our thanks go to FCC for involving us. If you have any additional comments, do let me know.

Timetables – National Rail

If you have not already discovered it, the National Rail website has a “Print Your Own Timetable” facility, which will generate a customised PDF file between any pair of stations on the National Rail network. The URL to use is here: <http://ojp.nationalrail.co.uk/en/pj/pyot>

First Group results

First Group recently announced their preliminary results for the year to 31 March 2009. Key items to mention include:

1. FCC growth of 8.6% (vs 13.5% last year)
2. FCC franchise includes revenue support (for FCC, this effectively shifts 80% of the risk of low economic growth to the tax payer).
3. The Franchise has 3 termination dates: March 2010, extended to March 2012 based on performance and an optional extension to March 2015.
4. Individual franchise revenue / P&L is not reported. The most relevant financial figure is the money received by the Government. This is £95.1m (£70.2 last year). To put this in context, the Scottish government pays £307.2m for Scotrail and Whitehall pays £116.3 for Transpennine Express.

Thameslink programme rolling stock

And then there were 3 ... Hitachi, one of the four pre-qualified bidders for the Thameslink programme rolling stock have withdrawn. There are three remaining potential suppliers - Alstom, Siemens & Bombardier (providers of the 377s).

The Department for Transport have asked bidders to provide the bid in two parts - batch 1 being the depots and approximately 40 units and batch 2 the remainder. Remember that Thameslink trains will be 8 or 12 cars, not the typical 4. There are significant hints in all the material I am seeing about funding issues being a significant concern.

More suggestions on getting to Canary Wharf

Following my earlier request for suggestions, I have received an extra - Bus Route 25 (Holborn exit at City Thameslink) seems to go to Tower Hill at present. I say “seems” because the comment a couple of months was “yes, temporarily”. About half the maps on the TfL website says it does, the other half say it doesn’t! (the 15 definitely goes from the Ludgate Circus exit to Tower Hill). I can only say: “*Life is an adventure!*”

Neil Middleton
20 May 2009