

Dear Member

If you have an email address to receive an electronic copy of this newsletter, please let us know by sending an email to aptumail@aptu.org.uk - you get the information faster and we save time.

FCC meeting on 24 June

FCC have now responded to the issues they took away with them on the 24th. They comment as follows:

ISSUE	FCC Response	APTU
It was claimed that the off-peak day return fare between St Albans and Elstree & Borehamwood is £6.50 whereas the off-peak day return fare from Elstree & Borehamwood is only £5.00.	The off-peak day return fare is £5.00 in both directions.	
It was said that the cost of a point-to-point fare from St Albans to Wimbledon was higher than the cost of an all-zones Travelcard.	This was an anomaly that had been corrected in May after being brought to our attention. Current fares are: Anytime Day Return £19.90, All-Day Travelcard £24.50. Off-peak Day Return £13.00, Off-peak Day Travelcard £14.50	
New London Underground Northern Ticket Hall at King's Cross St Pancras	This is scheduled to open in December 2009 and will greatly reduce the distance between FCC and LUL platforms. LUL will soon publish details of the shorter walking times as part of their planned communications programme. There will be step-free access to the Piccadilly and Victoria lines from Dec 09 and to the Northern Line from mid 2010.	①
John Cartledge suggested that station signs are difficult to see at night and also when passing through stations at speed. He advocated reference to Station Signage report produced by former London Transport Users' Committee (LTUC) in 2004	This will be less of an issue as more trains with visual and audible passenger information systems in each carriage are introduced, e.g.. as in all new Class 377 Electrostars. Larry Heyman will work with FCC Property team to establish what improvements could be made within available budget.	
Customer information screens at City Thameslink are often inaccurate, showing northbound trains as being delayed when they can be seen standing at platform 5 at Blackfriars station.	This should by now have been resolved.	②
Customer Information screens at Blackfriars are better but more intervention by the staff is needed if there is any disruption to services. Sometimes a lack of announcements.	There is a reorganisation underway which will strengthen our disruption management.	
Are there any plans to improve cycle parking facilities at Harpenden station?	FCC is working closely with Hertfordshire County Council to develop a scheme for more and improved cycle parking.	
Are there any plans to reduce the scope of the current evening peak restrictions?	Most eight car trains are very busy throughout the evening peak. Deliveries of the new Class 377 Electrostar trains from Bombardier are running very late. Only six of the 23 trains ordered from Bombardier have been delivered so far, although they were all due by mid March this year. We will review the evening peak restrictions late 2009 / early 2010 when all the new Class 377s are in service. The shorter, more convenient interchange with London Underground at St Pancras from December this year will encourage more commuters to use our services.	
Would FCC consider introducing an "off-peak Season ticket, allowing people a reduced fare if they arrive in London by 0630 and leave London before 1630?	We looked at that some time ago. Unfortunately there is no provision within the regulated fares regime for such a ticket to be taken into account when weighting fares baskets.	

Can the Kentish Town terminators (SE Trains) be extended to West Hampstead Thameslink?	These trains use platform 3 at Kentish Town, which leaves platform 2 clear for northbound trains to St Albans / Luton / Bedford. Terminating trains at West Hampstead would inevitably cause delays to northbound services as the terminating train would have to be thoroughly checked to ensure that no customers remained on board before running empty to Cricklewood sidings.	
Why was Cricklewood station not included in the list of stations where improvements have been carried out?	It should have been included. Tactile strips have just been fitted to the top and bottom of the stairways and the station lighting has been renewed this year.	
What is FCC's position in relation to the planned Radlett rail freight terminal?	We are against it because we feel it would be at odds with the capacity improvements funded through the £5.5 billion Thameslink Programme and could have a seriously negative effect on performance.	③
What's happening to the West Hampstead interchange?	The new pedestrian over-bridge with lifts to all platforms is under construction and will give direct access to Iverson Road. It is due to open by the end of this year. As shown in our presentation, there is also an interchange project led by Transport for London, FCC, Network Rail and the London Borough of Camden to create a new station entrance in Iverson Road, linking to the new over-bridge. The existing pedestrian over-bridge will remain in use.	
The lifts at St Albans are being closed in the evening to prevent vandalism. This can mean that mobility impaired customers or those with heavy luggage have to use the stairs because, once the person dispatching the train has left the platform, there is no way of contacting the staff from platforms 4 / 3 / 2 for assistance.	Unfortunately there have been a number of incidents where the lifts have been used as toilets, following which the staff have been locking up the lifts at 2200. Carl Rulton, the Station Services Manager, has now arranged that the lifts will remain in use until 2330. After that time, station staff will look out for customers who may require the use of the lift and will be able to unlock the lifts if they are required.	
Concern expressed about over-crowding at weekends due to trains being short formed of 4 cars rather than eight. The over crowding is generating some anti-social behaviour.	There are regular Events Planning Meetings, to ensure that we are informed of events which could create exceptional demand for our services. We are also monitoring passenger numbers in reaction to the recent introduction of the cheaper Super-Off-Peak weekend day return tickets.	④
Are there any plans to change the seating in the Class 319/2s which had on-board buffets and have lounge seating in that area?	Yes we plan to give them a full refresh with more seating. We don't yet have a schedule for this as the prioritisation is based on mileage and the need for a major mechanical overhaul known as a C6 exam.	

APTU's additional comments

① From what I can see, the transfer distance will be substantially shorter for the Northern and Piccadilly lines, and some saving for the Victoria line - with the added advantage of taking the route away from occasional long distance travellers en-route to Eurostar (see http://www.btinternet.com/~nlks/aptu/pdfs/kingscrossaerial_revised_cropped.jpg). Once the Northern Ticket Hall is open, our route to it will be to turn left after the FCC barriers and go underneath the EuroStar platforms and down the escalators at the station entrance that is on Pancras Road at the North East end of the original train shed.

② I would appreciate feedback from members on specific times when incorrect information is shown. As a regular user, there are two types of problems:

1. The displays states that the service will be late, even though it can be seen at Blackfriars (or even en-route between the two stations).
2. The display claims the service to be on time until it is due and then it is then suddenly somewhat late (eg 10 minutes).

③ You may have since seen in the press that St Albans District Council refused planning permission (<http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/railfreight/default.aspx>) - however, press reports state that the developers Helioslough are have indicated that they will appeal to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. Apparently, this will happen in October this year (there is a quite a bit of “noise” in the local papers since it is claimed that the date was set before the refusal decision was made.

④ I would appreciate specific examples of overcrowding.

FCC meeting – TfL update

TfL have responded to unanswered questions at the meeting

- “With regards to the query about the possibility of a ramp being placed on the Circle line platforms to allow for wheelchair users to access the trains I understand that unfortunately it will not be possible to have a temporary ramp on the Circle, Metropolitan & Hammersmith and City line platforms at King’s Cross St. Pancras. This decision has been made for a number of reasons, which are focussed on the additional burden this would place on platform customer service staff at the station (which could impact on their role in dispatching trains) and the difficulties in arranging insurance that would be required to cover for any incidents that may occur. However despite the absence of a ramp, customer service staff will continue to assist people wishing to get onto and alight from trains on these platforms. This will include lifting wheelchairs when possible.
- I was also asked about the ticket gates at King’s Cross St. Pancras and how they frequently damage the paper season tickets issued to rail passengers. The station manager at King’s Cross St. Pancras informs me that the ticket gates have a tendency to damage these cards and that they regularly need to be serviced in order to ensure that the internal mechanism of the gates is correctly aligned.
- Your member who asked the question discussed the possibility of some gates being used exclusively for those with paper season tickets. Whilst this will not be possible due to the large number of people who use the gates (particularly during the peak periods), the customer service assistants who man the gates do frequently open the gates themselves for those with season tickets (in order to prevent them being damaged). Although I believe that our relevant project engineers will be aware of this issue, I will register the concerns about these paper tickets with them.”

Meeting presentations

The following material from the meeting is available on the website:

1. The FCC presentation - http://www.btinternet.com/~nlks/aptu/pdfs/aptumeeting24june2009_fccpresentation.pdf.
2. The aerial image of Kings Cross St Pancras from TfL - http://www.btinternet.com/~nlks/aptu/pdfs/kingscrossaerial_revised_cropped.jpg.
Please note that this image is © Arup, Allies and Morrison.

20% or 25% discount for weekend travel and Annual Season tickets

FCC are offering 25% discount on train only tickets to London and 20% discount on Travelcards at weekends until 6 September.

However, if you hold an annual season ticket (“Gold Card”), then both yourself and up to 3 accompanying adults can travel with a 34% discount. Up to 4 children travel for £1 (50% less). More details at https://www.fcc.trainsfares.co.uk/season/info/st_gold_card_benefits.asp. If you have a train only ticket and want Travel Cards, then you need to buy an off peak travel card (c £5:00) for yourself.

Saturday service pattern

We were concerned about the reduced service level for some inner stations during blockade weekends and asked FCC for their comments - these were:

“There is absolutely NO intention to reduce services at Radlett to 2tph on Saturdays - the only reason Radlett currently gets 2tph is because of weekend engineering work for most of the year and our ability to only resource 6tph instead of 8. As usual, there are compromises to be made between serving the inner stations and preserving competitive journey times for our longer distance customers - this is achieved by providing the two busiest inner stations (Elstree and West Hampstead) with 4tph, and the remainder (Radlett, Mill Hill, Hendon, Cricklewood and Kentish Town) with 2tph. There is also insufficient demand at Radlett to justify 4tph when the core route section is shut.

On those occasions when the core route is open, the normal 4tph Bedford - Brighton fasts and 4tph Luton/St Albans - Sutton all stations services will usually be provided.”

377s / Electrostars

FCC were reporting 3 weeks ago that they are still operating with only 6 of the 23 Electrostars they have ordered - the arrangements to borrow stock have been extended.

FCC – Ticket Office Hours

We have just received this from London Travel Watch:

First Capital Connect changes to booking office hours

- You may recall that you contacted us earlier this year in relation to the proposed changes to booking office hours by First Capital Connect. At the time we informed you that we had submitted a formal objection to the proposals on the basis that they would significantly reduce the ability of passengers to access rail products at the stations affected. In addition, we also stated that we were hopeful that the company would reconsider their proposals in the light of our and passengers' concerns about the impact of their proposals.
- I am pleased to inform you that, following extensive negotiations with First Capital Connect (in collaboration with Passenger Focus), we have been able to achieve a significantly better proposal for change than had originally been proposed.
- In particular, the following changes to the original proposal have been agreed:
- All of First Capital Connect's stations will retain their booking office facilities and will remain staffed, although the exact booking office opening hours may change;
- Over 30% of the booking office opening hours (2261/2 hours per week) that had been proposed to be cut will be retained, and some stations (such as Alexandra Palace and Loughborough Junction) will remain open at evening and weekends when they would have been otherwise unstaffed;
- No station booking offices will be closed where the average number of booking office transactions exceed the Secretary of State's agreed minimum standard of 12 ticket sales per hour;
- In response to our objection to reducing ticket office opening hours at London Blackfriars, Elephant & Castle and Loughborough Junction, First Capital Connect have agreed to retain the existing opening hours except on those weekends where no services are running from these stations due to engineering works;

- For a trial period of two months, First Capital Connect will provide staff at eight stations that will be able to support passengers using the ticket machines and provide general assistance. At the end of the trial, a further review will be undertaken to assess any passenger problems with obtaining tickets with a view to permanently restoring booking office facilities at these stations where problems arise;
- City Thameslink, London Blackfriars, Finsbury Park, Bedford, Luton Airport Parkway, Hertford North, St Albans, Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City stations are staffed 24 hours per day. At most of these stations, tickets will be available from staff at ticket barriers for those unable to purchase tickets at ticket machines when booking offices are closed. In addition, the ticket office will remain open at Hertford North on Sundays for Arsenal and some other Premiership home matches;
- First Capital Connect have agreed to ensure that facilities such as waiting rooms which would have been affected by a removal of booking office hours will be kept open;
- First Capital Connect have promised to upgrade their ticket machines to enable them to issue weekly and monthly season tickets which are currently only available at ticket offices, and will install top up facilities for Oyster cards at London stations. Changes are being made to maintenance regimes to ensure that ticket machines are available and have adequate change and ticket stock wherever possible;
- First Capital Connect have promised additional security measures at stations and works to tackle lineside graffiti at a number of locations and to consider introducing a 'Community Ambassador' scheme to encourage use of the railway by people who currently are not rail users. Customer Information Screens are being installed at all stations on the Wimbledon Loop providing advice on delays and cancellations to services;
- There will be an extension to booking office opening hours at some stations including Elstree & Borehamwood and Harpenden stations.
- We recognise that this revised proposal will still lead to reductions in booking office hours at some stations, but we believe that by engaging in negotiations with the operator we have been able to agree significant concessions and improvements for passengers using First Capital Connect's services. Further details on the proposals are available on our website at <http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/document/3836/get>

Elaine Holt

Elaine Holt, ex MD of FCC has been appointed Chief Executive Designate of the publicly owned East Coast Main Line Company, which will operate the East Coast Main line Franchise once National Express East Coast hands it back (expected to be some time later this year).

London School of Economics – MSc Candidate Survey

We have been approached by a student at the London School of Economics, who is running a research study on the opinions/views of UK consumers towards electric bikes. More details, including the survey link, in a PDF of his email:

http://www.btinternet.com/~nlks/aptu/pdfs/aptu_committee_research_enquiry.pdf.

Regards

Neil

Neil Middleton
2 August 2009