

Dear Member



This is just a quick newsletter, mainly to provide you the latest information as I know it.

Over and above this, you should check the FCC web site (www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk) for the latest travel information, as FCC adjust their service in response to actual and forecast weather.

Update - weather

The main constraint on FCC now is the weather, rather than driver availability. As I write this newsletter (on a Sunday), the current FCC service is two trains per hour - Bedford to Brighton all stations.

The current FCC plan for Monday is also a two trains per hour service, with extras where possible.

Those of us who travelled during the rush hour on Friday will know that a two trains per hour service cannot meet demand during peak hours and people will be left on platforms. My personal experience was the 07:00 Bedford / 07:45 St Albans took some, but not all travellers from St Albans and virtually no travellers from stations Radlett and south thereof.

I can understand the decision to run the simple all stations service. The core logic behind this is to minimise the number of open air points in use - they can be very problematic in cold weather. Therefore, the line south of Bedford is effectively split into two - the fast lines for East Midlands Trains and the slow for FCC.

However, the decision to run just two trains per hour in the peak causes major problems and we wrote to FCC to say how disappointed we are with this decision and how important it is that additional rush hour services are operated. FCC replied acknowledging how hard travel is for us all at present and noting *“equally [we] can't be as heroic with the fleet with the wind chill and freezing conditions. We would have had many in depot for long periods of time which would have prolonged the agony for all”*.

I also have some sympathy for this view - I think the question is the balance of trade offs. My current view is that, even taking this into account, two trains per hour in the peak is not enough. BCA and ourselves will be discussing this issue with FCC on Friday.

Update – driver availability

Had the weather not been so bad, FCC would have been in a position to run about 80% of their normal service pattern tomorrow.

In response to previous requests, FCC have already plugged large gaps in the evening peak for stations south of St Albans and removed some of the large gaps for Luton Airport Parkway, Leagrave and Harlington. We have written asking for “permanent” stop orders to be put in place to tackle remaining large gaps.

Travellers from Radlett and south thereof will be all too aware of the 45 minute gap in the off peak service. Following consultation with the BCA, we both felt that plugging this gap should be a priority and have written to FCC to this effect. FCC have been, as yet, unable to tackle this gap. In part, this is because of the way drivers are rostered - apparently a single Wimbledon Loop service normally has a considerable number of driver changes.

We will continue to emphasise that plugging this gap (eg as 15, 15 & 30) should be a high priority.

Meeting with Mary Grant

Arthur Taylor, BCA Chairman and myself will now meet Mary Grant on Friday 15th of January (it as was postponed from the 7th)

Regards

Neil

Neil Middleton
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