

Dear Member



In this newsletter we cover both feedback from the recent FCC Stakeholder's forum and a variety of other news:

ANNUAL 'MEET FCC MANAGEMENT' MEETING ON THURSDAY 27 MAY

WEEKEND SERVICE

COMPENSATION UPDATE

THE STAKEHOLDER'S FORUM – GENERALLY

FCC'S IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

MAY TIMETABLE CHANGES

THAMESLINK £10 MILLION INVESTMENT

EXTREME WEATHER - GENERAL

EXTREME WEATHER & OTHER CATASTROPHIC PROBLEMS - MILL HILL TO CRICKLEWOOD SERVICE

THAMESLINK PROGRAMME

LUTON TO DUNSTABLE GUIDED BUSWAY

Annual 'Meet FCC Management' meeting on Thursday 27 May

A reminder that we have scheduled the annual meeting with FCC Management for Thursday 27 May in St Albans (in the evening, at the Friends Meeting House). We expect to have Neal Lawson, FCC's Managing Director with us.

More details will follow in due course. In the mean time, an [ICalendar event file](#) is available on the website for you to record this event in Outlook, Google Calendar etc.

Weekend service

I thought it worthwhile particularly drawing your attention to the following changes to the typical weekend service pattern:

- 10 & 11 April - through services (except Sunday morning before 7:30am: Buses between Kentish Town & Hendon; also late Sunday night). Following a suggestion from APTU this is now receiving more publicity on the website.
- 1 May (23:15 onwards) & 2 May - Buses between St Albans & Leagrave - in connection with Luton Station platform lengthening.

It is worth remembering that FCC publishes a PDF file giving details of planned engineering works in future months. This is currently available at www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk/changes - it is always worthwhile double checking soon before travel.

Compensation update

Annual season tickets

The only area with a noticeable update over and above the announcement I sent out on the 23rd is with respect to season tickets.

The first point to be observed is that Annual Season tickets issued by other operators do qualify (provided, of course that they are for the Thameslink route!); this is most likely to happen with employer purchased season tickets (mine, for instance comes via Network Business Travel Services, who are part of South Eastern).

Either compensation offer is available - the challenge is to use the discounted ticket option at any other operator. Informal discussions before the meeting indicated that, unfortunately there has been no movement on allowing this to happen and this is not expected to change. The issue is not that FCC are unwilling - I get the distinct feeling that they want to help - but that the National Fares systems simply do not get cater for processing this ad-hoc discount and therefore “the process” has defeated everyone.

I vaguely recollect that there is some tax ruling that requires the employer to purchase the season ticket direct and not to hand the employee a cheque made payable to the relevant rail operator. FCC do not operate an employer’s season ticket service; however, whilst I have not directly asked them this, I get the distinct feeling that FCC would be willing to cooperate for the discount renewal. For instance, if your employer was prepared to send a cheque to FCC I think they would cooperate by sending back a season ticket or arranging for it to be available at a chosen station. If this might apply to you, let me know and I will approach FCC - do not get cheques sent until I have a name / department and address for you.

Generally

We have obtained ex-gratia payments for 3 members whose circumstances did not meet the published criteria, so if this applies to you, please forward details. Generally, FCC are being flexible on compensation, so, again, if you feel you have not received a fair hearing, do let us know.

Based on my recent (online) application, the turnaround time at present is just under two weeks - I would expect postal applications to take a bit longer, both to reflect delivery time * 2 and time to key in the claim details.

Finally

Other than sorting out specific problems, it is my view that the compensation saga is now over. Annual and monthly season ticket holders get at least 4 days compensation for each badly disrupted month, an effective discount of 20- 25% for those months, and I think this is a reasonable outcome.

The Stakeholder’s forum – generally

The key message from Neal Lawson was that he wants to start looking forward, not back. Following the recent problems, a key priority for him is to get his staff proud to work for FCC again.

As regards train operation he noted that in the most recent period:

- The PPM measure is currently 92% (budget 90.4%)
- Cancellations are running at 60% of last year
- Short formations at 25% of last year.

There was plenty of acknowledgement that customer communication needs much improvement. I would break the planned improvements down as follows:

- Front line staff
 - Getting them quality information; Neal observed that staff sometimes knew less than travellers with smart phones and internet access: A key initiative is to provide all front line staff with Blackberries.

- Improving motivation. I think this will be a challenge, but empowering them with reliable information is an essential first step.
- Investment. The plan is to replace the back end system. The current system is currently very inflexible and a significant barrier to speedy updates during periods of disruption. Changes often require an extremely high number of manual changes to be applied. This was the underlying reason for periods at the start of the year during the height of weather related disruption for online information and reality being two different things.

This is certainly consistent with my recent experience of travel.

The slides presented at the forum (and additional background) can be obtained from the APTU website at www.aptu.org.uk/pdfs/fccpresentation240310.pdf (note: 3.5mb).

FCC's improvement programme

FCC have published a three phase improvement programme:

1. Short term (2010/11): Deliver performance promise
2. Medium term (2011/12): Continuous improvement
3. Long term (2012/15): Transformation programmes

Most detail was available for 2010/11:

- Drivers
 - Additional drivers on the Thameslink route to reduce reliance on rest day working
 - 6 qualified train drivers will start this spring
 - A further 16 are either in conversion training (this takes 6 months) or being recruited to start as soon as possible
 - 28 trainee drivers will start training later this year (this takes 12 months+)
- Improved Customer Information
 - Customer information screens will be upgraded (I think this does not particularly apply to Thameslink North)
 - Upgrades to infrastructure and software that drive CIS systems
 - Overhaul of the FCC website
 - Customer facing staff to receive PDAs to allow access to real time information (see above)
- Increased fleet reliability
 - Class 377: Full fleet available 18 January (over 300 days late); poor reliability addressed through travelling fitters and reliability improvement programme for June 2010 (may extend slightly)
 - Deferred class 319 C6 / traction reliability improvements re-commenced Aug 2009 for completion on schedule (May 2010)
 - 319 door fault investment in new diagnostics equipment to aid early identification of train faults
 - Repaired snow damaged 319 traction motors: Initially 36 damaged motors, affecting 19 units; repairs completed by 10 February
- Investment in People

May timetable changes

There are only a few timetable changes in May:

- 07.37 SX Sutton - St Albans. Additional peak service calling at all stations via Mitcham Junction (to be 1x319EMU)
- 07.22 SX Sutton - Luton to depart 07.06 and run 16 minutes earlier throughout
- 07.28 SX Orpington - St Albans to be extended to Luton, calling additionally at Radlett, Harpenden and Luton Airport
- 07.11 SX Sevenoaks - St Albans to terminate West Hampstead
- 05.48 SX Luton - Sutton to run via Wimbledon instead of Mitcham Junction
- 06.04 SX West Hampstead - Sutton. Additional service calling all stations via Mitcham Junction
- 19.08 SX Sutton - Bedford to terminate at St Albans.

There are also a number of changes to stopping patterns south of the river and no doubt some services will vary by a minute or two.

Thameslink £10 million Investment

FCC told us that the investment will be spread between:

- Improvements to the Customer Information Systems (see above)
- Enhanced maintenance regime for class 319 trains to resolve reliability issues with door mechanisms (see above)
- Introduction of ticket barriers at: Finsbury Park, West Hampstead, Harpenden and Leagrave - to improve security and reduce fare evasion.
- Increase in discount and refund scheme

Extreme weather - general

Since the recent extreme weather, we have followed up the reasons for the poor performance and also the planned actions to reduce the impact of any future extreme weather event. Key points include:

- 377s - generally, I understand these performed well, not least because AC traction motors are less vulnerable to ingested snow. There were a number of small problems, and these can be easily corrected.
- 319 doors - these were particularly problematic. A particular cause of problems was snow blowing between the door and the carriage sides at the door edges. This then froze solid - and stayed frozen. Although this has always been an issue, on previous occasions there have been warmer periods to allow the snow to melt. The sustained cold period was therefore a particular issue. Hopefully the door reliability modifications will address elements of the problem, but a key issue is inherent in the basic design.
- 319 traction motors - as previously reported an improvement programme to address this had started, but then put on hold due to late delivery of the 377s. The programme has now recommenced.

Extreme weather & other catastrophic problems - Mill Hill to Cricklewood service

The APTU Committee recently debated the issue of service to stations south of St Albans during occasions when the train service is very, very limited. The sort of circumstance we were thinking of is during the snow when there were only two trains per hour. In practice, particularly in the morning peak, the service is not even a “real” 2 trains per hour, because the trains are crush loaded on arrival. Station stops are also extended, as a few try to squeeze on.

Following some discussion, the Committee felt that trains should stop at Radlett and Elstree (lack of alternatives) and West Hampstead and Kentish Town (interchange) - but not Mill Hill to Cricklewood inclusive.

We'd appreciate your thoughts. We'd like to make it clear that we are not talking about bad disruption where there are 4 or 6 all stations services - we think these should stop at all stations, but about occasions such as when only 2 trains per hour are possible in the peak. A key point is that if a traveller knows there will be no service they won't waste time getting to the station and then not getting on a train. I would expect that most years there would be zero days to which this applies.

Thameslink programme

Useful nuggets of information from the Stakeholder forum included:

1. There are currently 400 people working on the Blackfriars rebuild - and this is shortly to rise to 1,000!
2. The current estimate for the closure of Blackfriars station is for 8 weeks from November this year. During this period trains will run through, but not stop at Blackfriars Monday to Friday. During this period the through platforms will shift from the east to west sides.
3. The latest on contract signature for the new trains is December this year, with full delivery by 2016. The remaining bidders are Siemens and Bombardier and a decision on the preferred supplier is due this Summer
 - a. Although not mentioned at the Forum, it is of note that our current 319 units are destined for use in the Northwest and Thames valley for the electrification programmes there, and so there is pressure for a quick release from there.

Separately, Network Rail have reported that the following work was completed over Easter:

“As well as widening a rail bridge at Luton Station and work to reduce delays in the Swanley Junction area, important signalling equipment was moved from Farringdon station in preparation for a major redevelopment that will allow passengers to interchange between Thameslink, Crossrail and London Underground”.

Thameslink Consortium meeting 21 January

I attended the Thameslink Consortium meeting on 21 January. The consortium is mainly local authorities and rail user groups on the full proposed Thameslink route (ie Great Northern, additional destinations south of the river etc).

The presentations are available here:

www.aptu.org.uk/pdfs/thameslinkconsortium21january2010.pdf (warning: 10Mb).

Luton to Dunstable guided busway

Luton Borough Council has received funding for this, which will replace the disused railway between Luton and Dunstable (the full busway covers Luton Airport, Luton town centre, Dunstable and Houghton Regis). Funding of £80.2m has been granted. Whilst the press release implies that funding is “guaranteed”, it must be at risk of cut after the election, and it is unclear what happens if the detailed design work costs the works at more than £80.2m, since funding for this must be doubtful. More information is available at www.luton.gov.uk/busway/ (press release: <http://bit.ly/bWf51a>).

Regards

Neil

Neil Middleton

8 April 2010