

The Fenman

Newsletter of the Fen Line Users Association

www.flua.org.uk

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Issue 1/2009

The Fenman has been used, both officially and unofficially, as a train name ever since 1949.

FLUA is delighted that FCC unit no **365518** is now named **The Fenman** in memory of former Vice-Chairman, the late **David Forgan**. We are equally delighted that FCC unit **365527** - the one featured on our logo - is called **Robert Stripe, Passengers' Champion**.

“Let the great world spin forever down the ringing grooves of change.” These words of Tennyson seem so very apt in these times of great economic upheaval. Yet, just as “opportunity” is the reverse side of “threat,” the reinvigorated ideas of fellow Cambridge Apostle, **Keynes**, suggest that change can be diverted positively for positive public good. Much is planned for the railways and on Fen Line services we look forward to steady increases in seating capacity – **more and longer trains**.

2009 is the year of the Cambridge Capacity Study implementation, the year when more and (south of Cambridge) longer trains become a reality. In fact, things started early, with a couple of important improvements coming on stream a few weeks ago in December.

We know there are not yet enough trains for *all* our services to run non-stop south of Cambridge, much though we would like this. But two key King's Cross trains, the 0658 from Ely and the 1815 return, now run with significantly fewer stops, freeing up seats.

These are the two key services we would like to serve King's Lynn (currently NXEA connections). 5 extra trains from May will create many more seats. And FCC has applied to the government for yet *another* 5 trains from December this year.

We'll report on more Fen Line seating capacity as it materialises, right through to our future new trains: positive change for public good. The age is not one that is dying – it is “one that is coming to birth.”

STOP PRESS – Agility Trains is 'preferred bidder' for 125 mph IEP.

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Move on down the car!

FCC 4-car class 365
242 standard class + 24 first class
266 seats overall

8-car 532 seats 12-car 798 seats overall

Future trains *possible* seating capacity –

'New generation' Thameslink train from 2015

8-car 412-490 seats overall
plus large standing capacity

12-car 620-740 seats overall
plus large standing capacity

www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/rail/pi/thameslinkrollingstock/itt/technical.pdf

'Commuter' Intercity Express (IEP) from 2015

5-car 370 seats overall

10 cars 740 seats overall

plus large standing capacity

www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/rail/pi/iep/iepinvitationtotender/ittappendixc.pdf

THE FEN LINE



USERS ASSOCIATION

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Time to move on

EVERY DAY there are 123 passenger trains over Waterbeach station level crossing. Well over half of these run through non-stop.

There are also empty stock trains, freight trains and light engines passing through at up to 75 mph. It's odd that, although the railway has to be fenced, *that* doesn't necessarily apply to gates at level crossings.

When Waterbeach automatic half-barrier crossing was installed 20 years or so ago, half-barriers across the double lines were quite commensurate with the location and its characteristics.

Since then the number of trains is greatly up, the number of passengers using the station is greatly up and the amount of road traffic there is greatly up.

Our greatest fear is that somebody hurrying for a London train already stopped in the station will step into the path of a northbound non-stopper.

We're calling for Waterbeach station level crossing to be updated for today's conditions with barriers that reach across the full roadway.

King's Lynn station parking

On 3 February 2006 WAGN – remember them - opened a new 96-space 'overspill' car park at King's Lynn station, making 221 spaces in all.

We've been monitoring it every week since.

The overgrown land next to the 'overspill' is owned by BRB (Residuary) Ltd, in turn owned by the government. They want to sell it.

But our surveys show relentless pressure on parking – it's full up sometimes. And now, King's Lynn has been designated a 'Growth Point' by the government.

We want to see the BRB land safeguarded for future car park expansion phases.

We're asking Network Rail/local councils to buy the land *now* – for the future!

Evidence of things not seen

"It's an evidence based" organisation said *Passenger Focus*' **Guy Dangerfield**, speaking to us at the 2008 AGM. He didn't just say it, he proved it, with a lively presentation which included the PF study '*Thameslink Rolling Stock Qualitative Research*' about the new generation Thameslink trains due to run our way from 2015. www.passengerfocus.org.uk

Stripy trains won't come our way but there's a picture of the new Thameslink train in the *crush hour* leaflet.

www.thameslinkprogramme.co.uk

The Commuter Daily is a blog written by daily Fen Line Traveller to King's Cross, '*creditcrunchedcommuter*' <http://commuterdaily.blogspot.com>

Fenliner

2009 has certainly let us know we are in a new year. Snow here and there, frost everywhere, and some wind and fog in between. The trains are still running though, pretty well on our line compared to others.

Fares and car parking charges have gone up by rather more than most of us would have wished.

Of course, the simple law of supply and demand works everywhere. The demand for space on trains outstrips the supply of carriages so prices rise. The same applies to car parks, more cars than spaces.

The solution is simple isn't it? Not if you read *Captain Deltic's* instalments [in *Modern Railways*] every month, it isn't!

Only Whitehall mandarins and politicians could have designed such a system to try to run a railway (to slightly misquote a railwayman from the past!).

It is not all doom and gloom though. There is much happening that is good or will be good when it does happen. We have additional and longer trains, more seats and shelters at some stations, and some progress on extending car parks and even the beginnings of a new one, with a little bit of luck.

Not too sure where everyone will park while it is being built...but perhaps we won't go down that road in this column!

The improvements connected with the Thameslink Programme are getting ever nearer and even though we will not benefit straight away from the big work, there is much that will be a positive spin-off for us.

That brings me nicely to a little tale from Downham Market. Once upon a time there was a Post Office in the station which caused much excitement for many people. Then a nasty lady from PO HQ came and closed it down which caused much consternation for many people. The redundant sub-postmaster sat by his fireside and wondered what to do to fill his time during the day.

In the smoke from the fire he saw some letters being formed which spelled out "landlord" and, being a clever sort of chap, he realised that did not mean renting out property.

So, phoenix-like, from the ashes of the Post Office rose the *Railway Arms*, complete with its own railway! If you've had a bad day at the office, or haven't even gone to the office, drop in and sample probably the best beer in town before you go home.

It works wonders and will cause much pleasure for people who will all live happily ever after!

Happy 2009 and happy travelling!

Fenliner is on the Fen Line most days, and uses Downham Market station.

Fenliner would welcome members sending news and views.

fenliner@flua.org.uk

The Fenman Interview

Debbie

Home station: Downham Market

➤ *How often do you use the Fen Line?*

D: A few times each week.

➤ *Where do you travel and why?*

D: Cambridge for work and leisure, King's Lynn, Ely and Cambridge for shopping. I have a disability which bars me from driving so I am dependent on public transport.

➤ *What's the service's worst aspect?*

D: The hourly service during the day; we need more trains between Ely and King's Lynn. I often get stuck with long waits at Ely when changing trains. Fortunately Ely has good waiting room facilities and when I miss a train at Downham I enjoy browsing the second-hand book shelves.

➤ *What's its best point?*

D: The friendliness of the onboard ticket inspectors and Downham station staff, who at times have gone out of their way to help me. I am pleased to see that the Sunday service is now hourly.

➤ *What's needed the most? Why?*

D: A later train from London on weekday evenings. When I go to London for an evening event I don't have that much time before I need to start thinking about leaving for the 2215. Could one of the later Cambridge trains be extended to Lynn?

➤ *Anything else you'd like to say?*

D: My disabilities are invisible – you cannot tell I am disabled just by looking at me. One of the problems I have on trains is that it is physically painful when people brush off me. I travel first class to reduce the chance of that happening. Doing that also means that there are fewer trains I have to let pass or leave mid-journey because they are too crowded. A (thankfully small) minority of passengers hold the belief that anyone who travels first class is 'too good for the rest of us' and feel the need to tell me. People travel first class for many reasons. In my case without this service I would not be able to travel to Cambridge at busy times. The Fen Line is not like the Tube where you can afford to wait for a less busy train to come along.

➤ *Finally, is FLUA worthwhile?*

D: Yes. It's good to know that volunteers talk to FCC on our behalf and produce these informative newsletters.

Littleport Lines

by Jenny Lowles

TRAIN TRAVEL to and from Littleport has been trouble-free for most of 2008 – unless I missed a major incident. The new "super" ticket machine has broken down several times and currently it will only take credit cards and not cash. It also issues "dud" tickets, i.e. those which will not go through the barriers at Cambridge. Either the tickets are faulty or possibly it's the barriers themselves – one or two do have "off" days when they won't accept tickets.

Customers travelling to King's Lynn still have to wait in a tiny shelter – I remember waiting there one very cold Saturday en route to the FLUA AGM and the wind coming under the barrier was freezing.

This was discussed at the AGM and I discovered there had been problems in increasing the size of the shelter. Hopefully this will be resolved soon.

The car park is usually full to the point that some travellers now park in the road – either to save money or because they cannot find a space.

Another plea – could we have another train to King's Lynn from Cambridge between 1635 and 1740? Even the 1722 to Ely is getting busier – using that to go forward is the only way of making sure you can actually get on the train, rather than fighting your way on at Cambridge.

Overall, travelling from Littleport has been a good experience – long may it continue.

In the last issue we said that the third ticket window at Ely was ready to use. This was based on information received from the rail industry. Our statement was incorrect, though, and we apologise to members.

PlusBUS a winner!

The Cambridge PlusBUS scheme is the third most popular in the country. It's the fastest growing too. PlusBUS adds on unlimited bus travel around the places that your railway ticket is valid to or from. You can use PlusBUS add-ons to start and/or finish your journey – there are 1-day versions and seasons for Cambridge, King's Lynn and more than 300 other places nationwide. Buy PlusBUS at the station booking office (either at your own station or at your destination) or by phone, but NOT on buses – we've asked for this bargain to be available from rail ticket machines too! See - www.plusbus.info

Cambridge PlusBUS (inc Fulbourn, Stapleford, etc)
1-day £2.70 (child and Railcard discounts available);
7-days £9.50; Month £38; 3-months £114; Year £400.

King's Lynn PlusBUS (inc Woottons, Terrington, etc)
1-day £1.50 (child and Railcard discounts available),
7-days £10; Month £36; 3-months £100; Year £360.

Also PlusBUS for Aberdare, Aberdeen, Aberystwyth, Accrington...Worksop, Worthing, Wrexham, Yeovil, York.

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All stations

by Robert Stripe

I UPDATED the FLUA noticeboards at the end of December. The special timetable for that time of year was not up at **Waterbeach**, the down platform ticket machine there was completely out of order and the other machine was only taking cards (no facility for taking notes or coins). All the relevant FCC timetable posters for the festive period were up at **Ely**, a NXEA station - hidden in the information flip chart boards but at least they were up.

The special timetable was not up at **Littleport**, where the ticket machine was then completely out of order. The excellent poster near the foot of the DDA-compliant ramp, explaining how to cross the line with a wheelchair with assistance (also saying that Downham Market or Ely stations will be used by taxi drivers etc) said exactly what it should say, except the title which states – *Waterbeach!*

All the relevant posters for the festive period were up at **Downham Market**. But not so at **Watlington**. When I got to **King's Lynn** the posters were not up there either. I asked about them and by the time I left 30 minutes later they were up on display. The booking office people were handing out timetable booklets too, which was good.

So, stations where staff were in attendance (eventually King's Lynn too) had the notices showing the special timetables, but the unstaffed ones did not. Yet it is the unstaffed stations which have the greatest need, as there is no facility to pick up a leaflet or timetable at those places.

It is even more important that proper notices are placed, especially as the general one explained in capital letters that for New Year's Day there would be NO SERVICES... then in small letters said, correctly, that a Sunday service would run!

I hope things will be better in 2009.

All go?

SNOW.: white-out: Fen Line information black-out. Why the blind spot over stations north of Cambridge? But thanks to staff on the Fen Line and its London Extension for heroic efforts getting people home then being up early to clear snow.

All change!

YOU may not have noticed! King's Cross is well in the throes of modernisation and the footbridge has already gone. Now the Underground entrance on the concourse is gone – please use the entrance *outside* the station.

www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/projectsandschemes/2333.aspx#entrance
www.networkrail.co.uk/asp/4059.aspx

Membership enquiries to: FLUA Membership, Flat 4,
36 Nelson Street, KING'S LYNN, Norfolk, PE30 5DY or
www.flua.org.uk/membership

Since we have introduced Corporate Membership, our scope now includes commercial and industrial companies, property developers, estate agents and many other bodies and organisations interested in the Fen Line.

Lady in the Luggage Rack

by Mawrenna Gleid

AS EVEN the memory of the festive season fades away, the empty trains of Christmas Week now seem impossibly distant and long ago. It's not just that the schoolkids weren't travelling, it's more like *no one* was, not unless they had to.

For almost two weeks of bliss, everyone walked onto the train, chose their pair of seats and sat down, without having to ram their bag between their feet or onto an already overcrowded luggage rack.

Tonight, the jostling for position began on Cambridge station even before the 1740 to King's Lynn had pulled in. The lady is literally writing this sitting in the luggage rack and it's not even a particularly busy evening. Certainly, two bikes and three large cases blocking the doorway are nothing unusual.

It makes me wonder sometimes: who is the space in our trains actually for? When the luggage racks are full of passengers, and the doorway is full of suitcases, who has the most right to the space?

How about mothers with prams? Surely we can all agree they deserve special treatment – but, in return, shouldn't they too show a little consideration? Putting your pram in the middle of the aisle only ensures that no one can get past, and the passengers crammed like sardines on the other side won't be grateful that your sticky child has the space to run screaming up and down.

Or how about bikes? We all need to travel a little more greenly, and to all the men and women with fold-away cycles: you are an example to us all.

But *full-size* bikes on already heaving commuter trains? As a newsflash to one gentleman from Downham, you don't 'need' to put your bike anywhere. After making everyone climb past it on their way out, what right do you have to deny half a dozen people the chance to breathe out?

One bike will fit in a doorway, two at a push. Three is madness, or a typical Friday night. We all use the trains together, so let's show a little consideration for our fellow travellers. Next time someone elbows you in the jaw, just smile – **after all, they've probably just had a set of handlebars in the kidneys.**

King's Lynn resident Mawrenna is a regular on the Cambridge Run.

Ten Years Ago

FLUA's request for something to be done about the afternoon crowding at Cambridge was to be met by a new 1727 departure to Waterbeach and Ely. We said then that this was "a good first step towards meeting our aim that all six Fen Line stations should have an improved home from work service from Cambridge."

FLUA diary 2009

Saturday 21 November
AGM, King's Lynn.