

The Fenman

Newsletter of the Fen Line Users Association

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Issue 3/2009

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**.

“Clear the air! clean the sky! wash the wind!” Perhaps the temperatures we've seen recently are a warning, or at least another nudge, to remind people, governments and governed alike, that environmental concerns should be riding high on mankind's agenda. Sure, no transport mode is totally clean, but rail - especially when electrically powered and high speed - can hold its head high. And, coincidence or cunning plan, the Fen Line is in the **forefront of the forthcoming generation of new trains.**

What's more they're here right now! It's not the heat, we're not dreaming, just indulging in 'simplification and exaggeration.' The truth is that something very much like the IEP trains intended for the Fen Line is running from St. Pancras, as of now.

140 mph, Hitachi-built commuter trains have started public service on St. Pancras-Kent runs and the full quota will be running later in the year. Hitachi and their partners are the 'preferred bidder' for the IEPs due to take over King's Cross-King's Lynn services.

Key to IEP running on the Fen Line is a complete recast of the ECML timetable, aimed at squeezing the absolute best value out of the proposed new IEP fleet. Throw in infrastructure works and a whole new ball game emerges.

Why all the excitement, given the IEP is at least six years away? Well, all the decisions that Ministers will make *this year* – not least the size of the IEP fleet – will determine our future for decades. Check it out - try a high-speed pilgrimage to Canterbury!

See - www.southeasternrailway.co.uk

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Off to work to Cambridge

If your employer is a full member of the 'Travel for Work' organisation, you could be getting a **10% discount** off Monthly, Quarterly, and Annual seasons.

This applies from King's Lynn, Watlington (if you buy a Lynn ticket), Downham Market and Ely.

www.tfw.org.uk

www.tfw.org.uk/documents/TfWTrainDiscountPromotion.pdf

to London King's Cross

A reminder that the 0618 from King's Lynn has a simple **cross-platform interchange** at Ely into the 0654 Ely-King's Cross (arr. 0806).

We know that Ely passengers have to use the subway now – sorry for the extra walk – but this arrangement is a great help for users from King's Lynn, Littleport and stations between.

THE FEN LINE



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Double be his praise

by Paul Durose

IN THE LAST issue it was said that the proposed IEP trains will stop at all stations north of Cambridge. I can't help thinking this is missing a trick.

Even without the Hitchin flyover, the Cambridge island platform, and other proposed improvements, surely we could go for a regular half-hourly service, with alternate all-stop and semi-fast services north of Cambridge?

How about the current London-Cambridge-Kings Lynn being retained, and extend the second London-Cambridge to Kings Lynn *all day*, but only calling at Ely, Downham Market and Lynn (those stations with longer platforms) - as I see the 1905 from Cambridge now does (introduced in May). These other semi-fast services could use up to 8-car trains without costly station modifications.

As a regular off-peak Littleport traveller, I can't believe passenger numbers can justify a half-hourly off-peak service from there or Watlington, whereas surely the larger towns of Lynn and Downham warrant this doubled level of service.

Perhaps the Liverpool Street NXEA services could be used to maintain a half-hourly 'all stops' service in the peak - or are power supply and the single track sections north of Littleport constraints on capacity?

As FLUA member Paul himself says, there are many issues involved when planning future timetables and there is much more to say on the subject. Things don't just stop at buying new trains! Network Rail has been issuing some very insightful papers recently about infrastructure and planning issues - search for 'Network RUS' on www.networkrail.co.uk and you'll find much to ponder.

In the absence of 'selective door opening' or platform extensions, short platform stations are a thorny issue. We have suggested that if there were to be extra trains, they should run 'limited stop' north of Cambridge.

We understand the DfT intends that, come 2015, 'fast' King's Cross - Cambridge - King's Lynn services will be IEPs, not Thameslink.

There now seems to be no ambiguity as to which of these two major programmes will operate those services, save, of course, for the usual 'subject to contract and to negotiations with the DfT's preferred bidder' disclaimer.

We support IEP.

We also support Thameslink.

Double vision?

USE the right platform! The new Saturday mornings 0930 fast from Lynn is *not* the all-stations 0956! Both stand in the station together - check you're on the one *you* want!

Congratulations to Committee member **Brian Long** (already deputy Leader of King's Lynn & WN Council) on his recent election to Norfolk County Council.

Booms or bust?

FOR OVER THREE years we have been pressing for full level crossing barriers at Waterbeach station. We think that things change and that, given the increase in the numbers of passengers - and of trains - since they were installed, the 'AHB' half barriers there are no longer suitable.

We do not want to see another Elsenham type accident, whereby distracted passengers hurrying for a train step into the path of a non-stopper heading the other way.

FLUA member **Jerry Alderson** has asked us to reconsider our views. He points out that full barriers have to be linked to railway signals (which cannot turn green until barriers are down) and that this could easily mean the barriers would be down for 2-3 minutes before the relevant train had passed over the crossing. *He is right.* What's more, as the number of trains using the route increases, so does the number of times the barriers would have to be closed. And that could mean passengers having to allow longer to get to and from the station.

As things stand, full barriers on electrified lines have to be remotely monitored by signallers using CCTV (not to be confused with CCTV used to monitor road offences or that used to monitor platforms). And, as you can imagine, CCTV is very expensive.

Network Rail Route General Manager, Anglia **Tim Leighton** has written to us to say that options for changing the type of level crossing are looked at when crossings are due for renewal [not due for many years at Waterbeach] and that NR "has no current plans to replace the AHB equipment at Waterbeach with CCTV operation."

Interestingly, in September last year the *International Railway Journal* reported on successful trials of 'AFBC' automatic full barrier crossings on diesel lines, one such test being at Breydon, in the east of Norfolk. The big thing about these AFBCs is that they use radar-style obstacle detectors, rather than CCTV, to check that the crossing is clear. Thus they are much cheaper to install.

Fitting AFBCs on *electrified* lines (such as the Fen Line) is somewhat different, as the equipment must be immunised from the effects of the high voltage overhead wires. According to the *IRJ*, however, a version of the AFBC which would be suitable for electrified lines is being tested at the moment. However, testing is *not* approval.

And any future AFBC crossing would, of course, still need to be linked to the railway signals so **Jerry's** point about 2-3 minute delays still stands. Of course, if the proposed new station at Chesterton were to be opened, delays at Waterbeach level crossing would not be a problem for those who chose to drive there instead!

Back to Waterbeach, where clearly NR has no plans for change in the foreseeable future. But, as we said at the beginning, things can and do change. So, what do FLUA members think? Should we continue to press for full barriers or drop it? Please write and let us know.

Hot stuff

by Diane Stearn

So, yet again, the temperatures soar along with our collective blood pressure!

I am a daily commuter between Waterbeach and King's Lynn and yesterday, along with countless others, saw major disruptions to the service run by FCC. Luckily for me, though not most on the train, I was able to summon a lift back home from Ely. It was a different matter for those trying to connect to other places in the country or beyond. A lady waiting for her husband told me he had waited ages in sweltering heat while FCC attempted to get buses laid on from Cambridge to Ely. Later on we passed several on the A10 at a rate of maybe one every 5 minutes, empty! The usual shambles I am afraid.

Today, Tuesday, I was suddenly aware of peace down the road. Unfortunately it was because the trains had stopped... again!

I rang the very polite but wholly unhelpful Plymouth lot to be told they basically hadn't a clue as to why this has happened twice in two days and, several helpings of electroclassical music later... no idea how long to expect it to take to fix. I asked if they might consider giving my school a hand-out to cover a supply teacher to take my kids tomorrow/ Thursday / Friday/ The rest of the year???? Oh and to cover all the other people who cannot just pop into work an hour or two late on the off-chance of maybe getting home as well.

I can understand that problems happen from time to time, as I explained to the Plymouth lady. However, the emphasis should be upon "occasional" and not every time we have a little heat wave or half a centimetre of snow (of the wrong type, naturally). The lady from Germany picking up her husband was quick to point out that it is almost unheard of where she came from, for trains to be even a little late, much less stopping completely when the sun shines or the snow falls. If they can run trains ... why on earth do we have this fiasco so regularly?

I gave up attempting to find any sensible answers to the questions about whether the service might run tomorrow. **It seems that communications between engineering and the public face of FCC are sadly as lacking as the trains were today!**

First train on Tuesday 30 June from King's Cross to make it north of Ely, right through to Lynn, was the 1644. Ely-Lynn shuttles and Cambridge-Lynn buses had shared the loads.

The Fenman Interview

Simon Thurley

Home station: King's Lynn

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

ST: I shuttle backwards and forward between King's Lynn and King's Cross like a maniac! Right now I commute to King's Cross at least three days a week. I'm Chief Executive of English Heritage, so I also occasionally go to Cambridge as well, as we have an office there.

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

ST: I get very excited about the new 1814 from King's Cross. In theory, by cutting out the smaller stations, it should be much faster than normal, but it isn't! That's utterly baffling. There's a great frustration in being lured onto what should be a faster service, but isn't.

➤ *What's its best point?*

ST: Actually, it's a pretty reliable line. Recently there have been a few problems, but essentially the 0652 from Lynn is as regular as clockwork. I know I can rely on it when I need to be leaving Paddington at 0910 for a meeting in Bristol. It's pretty good on the whole.

➤ *What's needed the most? Why?*

ST: The main King's Lynn-King's Cross service should stop at Downham Market, Ely – that's a big interchange – and Cambridge only. Another train could stop at the smaller stations. To do a day's work in London you need to be at your desk at 0900, or 0930 at the latest, and the rapid trains should cater for this. Coming back, a couple of really rapid trains between 1815 and 1915 are needed for what is literally our life-line.

➤ *Can you mix heritage and new?*

ST: Look at St. Pancras! The redeveloped King's Cross is going to be as fantastic. As for Downham, in principle, you could design the proposed footbridge there to look new or old. My personal preference is for something with a Victorian feel but meeting modern requirements. Most importantly, it should be a thing of quality.

➤ *Anything else you'd like to say?*

ST: The Fen Line is very good for Lynn. I'm passionate about King's Lynn and we're very lucky to have such a well looked-after station there. The little café is great; it opens early and serves newspapers and really good food. It's fundamental to the station. Yes, it's possible for people to work in London, hold a national level job, and commute from Lynn or Downham!

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Have a laugh on us!

WE'RE DELIGHTED that Lord Adonis has appointed respected experts Chris Green and Peter Hall to set consistent standards for stations nationwide. We think they might take *shelter* as a basic given. That's why we invite them to the northbound platform at Littleport. Here's a travel tip for them – if it's raining or it's windy, *don't all come at once!* P.S. speak to E CDC about funds.

Weekend sale

UNTIL 6 September, FCC is discounting weekend tickets to London by 20-25%+. Reduced prices are on - www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk/Main.php?sEvent=News&sFile Name=News.php&iid=170

Let there be

August will see a total renewal of platform and external lighting at Ely station; an "enormous difference" is due.

Search deeply

THE FIRST M-F train from Littleport that is 'off peak' to Cambridge is the 0921 departure. The ticket machine doesn't promote off-peak tickets until 0930! Look at the 'other' option to find that elusive 'off-peak' ticket.

What you told them

At the last FCC/NXEA 'Meet the Manager' session at Ely, peak overcrowding north of Cambridge, platform capacity at Ely and Cambridge, and seating for pregnant women were some of the top issues raised. There was much praise for Ely station and the staff there. Keep it up!

Drink up?

A member has suggested train services should be made alcohol free, as they were on Saturday 6 June for the Cambridge Strawberry Fair. *Write and tell us what you think.*

Near and far

58% OF FLUA members have a Norfolk postal address, 36% are listed under Cambridgeshire; the remaining 6% are far flung (but including not so faraway Lincolnshire and Suffolk).

Next to Nature

ANYONE KNOW who the artist sitting with his easel on the down platform at Downham Market on 6 May was? Viewed from the window of the 1056 ex King's Lynn, it looked like a Fen Line masterpiece was being created!

Alternative medicine

FEN LINE trains to/from Liverpool Street are very useful in providing peak connections into and out of King's Cross services, giving us a 2 trains per hour frequency. NXEA and the DfT are now consulting on new trains/running some Cambridge-Liverpool Street services as 12-cars.

www.nationalexpresseastanglia.com/about_us/proposals_to_deliver_increased_capacity

High jinks in High Fen

OFFICIAL! There are no plans to have this sort of operation on *our* Fen Line. If the news from Aix about *their* Fen Line hasn't reached you yet, sneak a peak at www.railbike.be to see why *we're* the better off (wink)!

AGM - Nominations for Committee, motions for debate, etc must be with **Andy Tyler**, Secretary, by 1st October.

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

Lady in the Luggage Rack

by Mawrenna Gleid

ONCE UPON A Saturday in June, there lived a Lady who went to visit the Queen. Arriving at King's Lynn station in need of an extra ticket, she was dismayed to see the queue stretching out of the door and only one ticket window open.

"If only I had a Fairy Godmother with a portable ticket machine," she sighed.

Ten minutes before departure, the Lady finally reached the front of the queue. Three minutes before the clock struck, the good fairy arrived, but the Lady had already boarded. Others were not so lucky.

The Lady arrived back at King's Cross to get the 20.45 but an evil fairy had cast a spell on the train so even the driver couldn't make it work. The Lady ran round to platform 5, where the people were told there was a replacement train. She lost a glass slipper but, as the train sat there for half an hour, there was time for a passing prince to return it.

"I hope I heard that message right," the Lady mused, "as there's been no announcements yet on *this* train."

At last, the overcrowded train crawled out of the station. The Lady waited for ten anxious minutes, but at last the driver announced it was the King's Lynn train, and apologised for the delay.

"Hooray for happy endings!" cried the Lady.

In Monday's 30° heat, she had to come all the way home from Cambridge on a bus, and she realised that the week's adventures were only just beginning.

The moral of the story? A boo and a hiss for the lack of communication but a big clap for all the staff who always, eventually, get us home.

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

Calling the politicians – help!

WATLINGTON new car park – we hear DfT's money share *must* be spent in 2009/10. Much time and money spent, but some land still to buy. Work is meant to start by 10 August!

So where was Moley, then?

WRITING in the *Lynn News* on 12 June, J.B. Shrive of Holt told how a brown rat was a fellow traveller on the 2115 King's Cross-King's Lynn train one Monday. Hmmm.

Ten Years Ago

Car parking – or the lack of enough of it – was under the spotlight. Watlington's was a quagmire, Waterbeach's was full. At Littleport there wasn't one at all! We called for "joined up thinking." That meant, we said, more parking at all our six Fen Line stations.

Potters Bar accident Friday 10 May 2002

THE government has decided not to hold a Public Inquiry into the accident; the Inquest continues.

www.dft.gov.uk/press/speechesstatements/statements/wmsgrayriggpottersbar

**FLUA diary 2009
Saturday 21 November
AGM, King's Lynn.**