

The Fenman

Newsletter of the Fen Line Users Association

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Issue 4/2009

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**.

Never mind the quality, feel the width! When it comes to rail services, some might think that's putting things the wrong way round. Surely, it is the *quality* of the service that matters most: lack of overcrowding, quicker journeys, reassuring staff presence, good communications. But how much good would excellent quality be if, say, the service was pared to just one train a day – yes, 'width' counts too. We want both. That's what we mean when we ask for, and ask for again, **"more and longer trains."**

Our short phrase embraces, in a kind of shorthand, both sides of the coin. "More" quite obviously refers to quantity; 'longer' has to stand for more than just eliminating overcrowding, being called upon to cover the whole range of quality factors, like those mentioned above.

Of course, we could spell out here the long, full list of everything we are asking for. In the right places, we always do! But, as you will see elsewhere, the old maxim "Keep it simple, stupid" is our bedrock in assessing everyday issues on the expanding Fen Line.

This is a time of great flux for the country's railways as they shape up to a bigger and more important future. There's support for big London schemes and for high speed rail. For Fen Line relevance, think Thameslink, think IEP.

Right now, though, it's unclear which outcomes will make the final cut. What quality will there be and in what quantity? We want to *measure* change objectively. And right now? Why, "more and longer trains!"

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Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting
will be held on
Saturday 21 November 2009
at the Green Quay, King's Lynn at 2 p.m.

Our guest speaker will be
Chris Curtis

*Route General Manager,
Anglia Route, Network Rail*

As usual, we have invited rail management to
attend and answer members' questions.

Andy Tyler, Secretary 29 October 2009

Leaf fall times – early morning trains

www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk/content/doc/cms/FC090923_LeafallTT_GN_Web.pdf

This leaflet covers FCC services only. The 0519 and 0618 trains from King's Lynn run as normal.

THE FEN LINE



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Going metric

SO how does the Fen Line service measure up? We've taken the new timetable that starts on 13 December and run the meter over it.

Of course, all this can look as dull as ditchwater, paradoxically perhaps, for what is a dry topic! It's only when you see the effects of the passage of time that you realise how much the service has developed and is continuing to develop.

But you can't satisfactorily do that unless you compare like with like, measure for measure. We've taken the info for the terminus, King's Lynn, as our starting point and will use this "fact pack" to keep you in the loop as events unfold.

Mondays-Fridays service from and to KING'S LYNN December 2009

(numbers in round brackets relate to planned connections off/onto King's Lynn-Liverpool Street services and are included in totals)

King's Lynn-Kings Cross

First arrival at Kings Cross – **(0715)**

No of arrivals at Kings Cross 0700-0959 – **6 (2)**

Last departure from King's Lynn – **2228**

No of departures from King's Lynn – **22 (2)**

Average journey time a.m. peak - 109 mins

'Standard' off-peak journey time - 97 mins

No of arrivals at Cambridge 0700-0959 – **6**

No of arrivals at King's Lynn 0700-0959 – **5**

Kings Cross-King's Lynn

First arrival at King's Lynn – **0710**

No of depts from Kings Cross 1600-1859 – **5 (1)**

Last dep from Kings Cross – **2215** [2315 on Fri]

No of arrs at King's Lynn – **24 (3)** [26 (3) on Fri]

Average journey time p.m. peak - 105 mins

'Standard' off-peak journey time - 96 mins

No of departures from Cambridge 1600-1859 – **4**

No of departures from King's Lynn 1600-1859 – **3**

Short and sweet

FCC tell us that their most popular fares will *not* be going up in January! Indeed some will be going down.

Pull our string!

There have been several studies recently suggesting that the country's still to be built high-speed network should include Cambridge. 20 minutes from there to London?

www.cambridge-news.co.uk/

cn_news_home/displayarticle.asp?id=449990

Winning coalition

X Intercity Express Programme

2015: King's Lynn-Kings Cross 140mph Super Expresses

X Thameslink Programme

2015: King's Lynn-St. Pancras Int'l-London Bridge-Gatwick Airport

Fenliner

Well, things have certainly been happening, or not, as the case may be, since I last penned a few lines. Some is good and some of it isn't!

Fancy NR applying for consent to change the appearance of the Downham Market Grade 2 Listed station building AFTER submitting the plans for the footbridge. Whether you agree or not with the need for the bridge is not the issue, you would have thought the best possible design would have been produced first time round and saved considerable money and a lot of very red faces, wouldn't you?

I feel sorry for the residents of Watlington who have had to endure the flood of cars parking all over the place near the station – just as I feel sorry for all the commuters who rather abruptly found "no room at the inn". Just as we all thought the new state-of-the-art car park was about to be agreed, the deal almost fell apart it seems. It is to be hoped that a satisfactory resolution of the problem is achieved quickly and that "normal service" is resumed and then construction work can proceed.

We have some additional trains and some longer trains on the line now. Every little helps and no doubt regular travellers are benefitting from the extra seats. Just think what improvements will follow when the Hitchin Flyover is in use and Thameslink (or should that be IEP, or even both?) trains are running from and to King's Lynn.... not long now, is it?

It's funny what good housekeeping can achieve, isn't it? Since many of the lineside forests have been felled and the embankments kept clear the autumn leaf-fall problem has been much less.

There are still some minor temporary adjustments to the timetable but nothing like what used to have to be done. Well done to all those who have carried out the clearance work and memo to the bosses – keep up the good work, you know it makes sense!

Finally, it is "all change" at the best watering hole on the line. Farewell, Andrew and Bridget, thank you for six years of a very good idea which transformed Downham Market station – especially Plan B following the Post Office cull - and welcome to Ian and Lesley who seem to be settling in well, despite the shock of those early morning starts! Good luck!

Happy travelling.

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

fenliner@flua.org.uk

The Fenman Interview Margaret Blackburn

Home station: Watlington

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

MB: These days it's occasional use, mainly travelling off-peak with my Senior Rail Card, say 2-3 times every month.

➤ *Where do you travel and why?*

MB: For about 10 years I was a daily commuter from Ely to Kings Cross for work, then it was a rather irregular 2-3 journeys a week from Watlington to Kings Cross for semi-retired part-time work, and currently I use the train for pleasure [!] for recreational visits to London and Cambridge, and to the occasional committee meeting at exciting Leigh-on-Sea or Gravesend.

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

MB: For me, as an occasional passenger, it's the difficulty of buying a ticket when you don't know well in advance that you will be travelling - the automatic ticket machine at Watlington is hopeless. The screen is totally blank at virtually every time of day and in nearly all light conditions. I've been able to read the screen just once - I think it was a dull day in winter. On that occasion it actually worked very well, but every other time at Watlington I've had to take a permit to travel (when that machine was working) and buy my ticket later. Then if there isn't a ticket collector on the train it's a real hassle to buy a ticket at Kings Cross in the crowded booking office, especially if, as is often with me, I'm in transit across London with limited time to make my connections. I'm afraid I don't have great confidence in my ability to use the ticket machines at Kings Cross. If I know in advance that I'm going to be travelling, I plan to buy my ticket at Lynn when I'm in town, but this isn't always convenient. Now there's only one booking window open at the station, I also try to time it so that I'm not there just before a train is due to leave.

➤ *What's its best point?*

MB: The frequency of the service - though more trains are always welcome, and a later train from London for theatre trips would be marvellous!

➤ *What's needed the most? Why?*

MB: I would have said longer trains at peak times, and non-stop running from Cambridge to Kings Cross. It looks as if this is being addressed in the timetable, but shame about the 1814 from Kings Cross not stopping at Waterbeach, Littleport and Watlington. I can see this causing confusion, and aggravation for those of us who will have to spend around 15 minutes (if we're lucky) waiting for the next connection at Cambridge or Ely.

➤ *Anything else you'd like to say?*

MB: Another aggravating thing - those bicycles blocking the doors at busy times: I'd second the plea for a more rigorous restriction on carriage of bicycles, and a medal for the folk who have the folding variety! Oh, and could we ask again for the return of the refreshment trolleys? It's fine for the travellers with refreshment places on the station - I really envy the Downham Market people! - but those of us on the unmanned platforms do suffer on cold and wet days - and in the heat. I know it's nigh impossible to get trolleys through the trains at peak times, but there are well-patronised trains at other times whose passengers would appreciate trolleys.

And, while I'm here, how about this?

*Arrived at Kings Lynn ticket office at 1210 on a baking hot day to find it shut, "Open again at 1220."

*Went for a cup of tea in the buffet.

*Came back at 1220 to find a queue of c.6-7 people.

*Joined it.

*Lots of queries at ticket office from people at the head of the queue, taking much time.

*Allowed 2 people to go ahead of me as they were travelling on the next train to London (1256).

*Got to ticket office at about 12.40, to find that I needed to fill in form.

*Took form to fill in, sat at bench by the platform.

*Heard voices and movement of people.

*Returned to ticket window at around 1245 to find it shut again, and several people at the ticket machine.

*Station staff hovering around, one with a portable ticket machine.

*Asked what was going on.

*Was told:

*Ticket man had finished his shift - the Station Manager had asked staff to come out to help with the long queue, but by the time they got there the queue had gone (it was at the automatic machine ...)

*Explanation: there used to be three shifts, Early, Middle and Late, the middle shift overlapping the others.

*'They' have done away with the Middle shift.

*The Early and Late shifts do not overlap.

*There is a gap of "15 minutes or so" between the shifts (i.e. in this case covering the time when the next train leaves).

My queries:

Why don't the shifts overlap?

Why finish the Early shift just before a train is due to leave?

Why was the ticket office closed in the 45 minutes before the shift was due to end?

Why, if staff can be rushed out to help with a long queue, couldn't someone have covered the presumably fairly short period when the member of staff had to leave the office (I have no idea how long he had been gone)?

In all fairness, I went back the next day, armed with my completed form, and received my new season ticket in about 3 minutes - no queue, no train due to leave, everything working smoothly.

Ah, the joys of efficient management!

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Keep it simple, stupid!

ONE platform is long, the other shorter. So you have to walk *right past* the 0956 to catch the 8-car 0930 'express' at King's Lynn on a Saturday morning. The first of these to leave (from the short platform) is the one you come to *second*, that's if you haven't automatically stepped into the first one you came to.

If nobody keeps the doors locked on the 0956, if nobody tells you that it's the *second* train out, you then sit there an extra 26 minutes, even though you intended to leave at 0930.

The breweries seem ok these days – any chance of sending some of their expertise over?

Miracle technology?

MAYBE NOT, but paying for FCC station car parking by phone has been improved following a link up with the 'RingGo' system. Cheaper phone calls for a start!
<https://fcc.myringgo.co.uk>

Timetable tidy up

THE December 2009 timetable has a few minor alterations. The fast 1814 Mon-Fri Kings Cross-King's Lynn will now arrive at King's Lynn at 1953, three minutes earlier. On Saturdays the 2152 Kings Cross-King's Lynn will not run, being *replaced* by a 2215 from Kings Cross. Also on Saturdays, the 2312 Kings Cross-King's Lynn will no longer call at Finsbury Park and will leave Kings Cross at 2315.

In the opposite direction, the 1939, and 2039 Mon-Fri King's Lynn-Kings Cross will depart *earlier*, at 1936 and 2036 respectively; the 2232 King's Lynn-Kings Cross will depart earlier, at 2228. On Saturdays, the 2312 King's Lynn-Kings Cross will leave earlier, at 2310. The 1326, 1426 and 1526 King's Lynn-Kings Cross on Sundays will leave at 1328, 1428 and 1528.

As ever, please check before travelling!

Streetwise

NATIONAL RAIL ENQUIRIES now show on their website bus and street maps, e.g. for Ely, see -
www.nationalrail.co.uk/stations/ely/details.htm

Downham Market station footbridge

The planning applications for the proposed footbridge have been withdrawn. NR has told King's Lynn Council that it will "look at altering the design of the footbridge to accommodate some of the feedback received to date and will re-submit these details in a fresh application."

Congratulations!

FLUA Committee member **Cllr Brian Long** is now Chairman of the Councils' Norfolk Rail Policy Group.

Join us from only £4.50 a year! 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

HAVE you ever heard the spooky story of the Ghost of Dividing Trains? Well settle down there, pull the blankets over your head and I'll begin.

Once there lived a lady who had gone to Cambridge for the day, and wanted to get home to King's Lynn. She ran on to the platform in time to hear the end of an announcement telling her that the train to King's Lynn would depart from platform 4.

Summoning up the last of her strength, she sprinted down the dark platform and pressed the train's door button.

Nothing happened.

She pressed it again, and from platform **4A** there came the sound of a train grinding into motion.

They say she stands there still, desperately trying to enter the ghost of a departed train...

More seriously, trains that divide can be a real issue. How about hopping on the 1739 to King's Lynn only to be told that just the front four carriages will be continuing? All very well for the regulars, who ignore it and continue to scabble for papers. But what about the hundred or so people who pack themselves into the very front carriage, just in case?

Or how about that old tourist favourite, 'London King's Lynn?' It's a bit late to rename our stations but what about a 'London This Way ->' sign?

It's not too bad going to Waterbeach by mistake, but accidentally going to King's Cross? Now that is a spine chilling thought!

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

Ten Years Ago

Rail travellers could get discounted entry tickets for the Millennium Dome. Back on Earth, there was heated discussion as to whether the speeded-up Cambridge-Royston section really did amount to saving 100 minutes a month. And one train company suggested 140mph trains for long distance commuting

Two wheels better

NOT ONLY luggage, but bikes are undoubtedly an issue – they take up space, and can be a snag or hazard, yet they keep cars off the road. Remember, many employment areas in Cambridge need a bike to get to, after all! FCC changed their bike policy abruptly; what's ok and what's not is on here:

www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk/Main.php?iCmsPageld=84

Up and running

IF YOU get the chance, check out the brand new FCC class 377 Thameslink route trains, say between St. Pancras and London Bridge. We think they're just right for longer journeys, and, of course, they're 'oven ready' for cross-London journeys. So new, they've yet to make it onto FCC's website!

www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk/Main.php?iCmsPageld=90

**The Christmas Fenman 13 December 2009
60007 'Sir Nigel Gresley' Lynn-Kings Cross**

www.railwaytouring.co.uk 01553 661500