

The Fenman

Newsletter of the Fen Line Users Association

www.flua.org.uk

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Issue 3/2010

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**.

“One Way Ahead” – a rail industry initiative to reduce costs in a time of financial restraint – repays study and reflection. Based on avoiding both up-front renewal *and* on-going maintenance costs by stripping out tracks, here are some of its contents: single some 16 miles of the Ely-Norwich line, some 9 miles of the Norwich-Ipswich route and almost all of the Norwich-Yarmouth/Lowestoft lines, plus a recommendation to consider creating **yet more Fen Line single track between Ely and Littleport!**

“There is insufficient money available, due to severe cash limits imposed by government, to carry out all renewals to existing track.” So, less money, less track, fewer trains? That’s an approach totally concentrating on one side of the equation, with no assessment of what infrastructure does for the *economy*.

That was all back in 1983, a time when the Fen Line north of Ely had *already* been approved for singling between Littleport and Downham and between Watlington and Lynn (that retreat was completed by early 1985).

Now 2010: Philip Hammond, Secretary of State for Transport, has queried the cost of *today’s* rail industry, expecting Sir Roy McNulty’s report of value-for-money to inform October’s government spending review. The UK system’s cost is high “by comparison with other European railways.”

Just cuts then? No, that’s not what they’re saying, rather a consistent value-for-money test of all affordable options. And two years after “One Way Ahead,” such an approach did lead on to Fen Line electrification investment (though ‘gold-plating’ nearly derailed all that...)

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Science and her handmaid

No decision on the future of the IEP in isolation of October’s spending review.

By then all “credible alternatives” will have been appraised alongside the IEP.

Here’s the Foster Review in a nutshell –

Electric IEP - as suggested for Fen Line – is technically ok (“bi-modal” is problematic).

King’s Cross-Cambridge/King’s Lynn commuter service alternatives to IEP include:

- (1) **class 377** - displaced from Thameslink - “modern high performing electric train”
- (2) current **class 365** - re-engineered and modernised for “greater acceleration”
- (3) “**New commuter electric train**” - if faster than 100 mph – more line capacity.

(1) and (2) “cheaper ...flexible as can be operated in 4, 8 or 12 vehicle formations” for more peak seats.

(3) “only slightly cheaper than IEP.”

www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/rail/pi/ipe/fosterreview

THE FEN LINE



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Another story

IT SEEMS clear that **McNulty** will suggest fares going up – hopefully not in big leaps, but unwelcome, bad news all the same.

And, of course, fare rises to throttle demand, to emasculate demand predictions, to kill investment cases, is an old trick. But let's look for good news.

There's a new emphasis on priority for projects that maximise economic benefits. There's a new emphasis on a long-term franchise model that captures private infrastructure funding and feeds results direct to the bottom line. In short, change.

The other story? Back in the 1980s, 'gold-plating' nearly derailed Fen Line electrics to Lynn. If hourly passenger services were to run, the rail freight business wanted partial reinstatement of double track (1 extra mile north of Littleport and Watlington-King's Lynn Harbour Junction) to ensure paths for its trains. But half a loaf *can* be better: the £1.5M extra track re-doubling costs would have derailed the entire investment.

Theresa Villiers, the new Minister of State for Transport, has stopped the re-franchising of Greater Anglia, East Coast, and others. She wants to examine "whether bidders for longer franchises would be able to offer *investment improvements* to trains and services."

Investment which impacts directly on the bottom line usually clarifies. Challenged to 'put up or shut up' the freight operators' 'gold-plating' melted away and electrification went ahead. Today, King's Lynn-King's Cross is a great success: how much better yet could it get with a new longer franchise?

Four M.P.s

King's Lynn - Henry Bellingham M.P.
*Parliamentary Under Secretary of State,
Foreign & Commonwealth Office.*

Watlington, Downham Market - Elizabeth Truss M.P.
*"Downham Market...has a number of
commuters...who travel to King's Lynn, Cambridge
and London. I shall be wanting to make their lives
easier by seeking improvements to that train line."
Maiden Speech to Commons 8 June 2010.*

Littleport: Stephen Barclay M.P.

Ely, Waterbeach: James Paice M.P.
Minister for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs.

Pushme-Pullyu

NOT ONLY baffled tourists, but even occasionally the odd regular in a hurry has jumped in error onto the wrong half of a 'splitting' train at Cambridge – front four cars for King's Lynn, back four for King's Cross. King's where? We're delighted at long last to see boards on platform 4 showing where trains split. How about the same on platform 1 as well, please?

Fenliner

Nice work if you can get it!

What sort of culture do we live in that allows the payment of what many perceive as obscene amounts of money to NR top brass for doing only what is expected of the job holder?

Sure, some challenging targets were met, but some were not, so at best it should have been a case of "well done, you earned your salary this year." At worst it should have been "hard luck, your salary next year is frozen or even reduced". It is not as though the basic salaries are peanuts to begin with, is it...?.

One day there will be effective accountability.

We still do not have a 24 hour-7 day a week railway, do we?

There are far too many route closures for normal maintenance requirements. Of course there are safety considerations, but surely work on one line should not always prevent the passage of trains – albeit at reduced speed – on the adjoining track.

In the quest for easier and cheaper track maintenance, most of the crossovers have been replaced by plain track, so the ability to switch trains from one track to the other has been lost.

The resulting "sections" of what now becomes single line are far too long to allow temporary two-way working with even a reduced train frequency.

Maintenance costs are supposedly much less, which is fine, but what are the hidden costs of "bustitution" and inconvenience to passengers, not to mention loss of revenue from those who just don't travel?

Evidence to support the impression that Network Rail runs the railway to suit itself and "to hell" with the needs of passengers and TOCs?

And as for the hassle created by long sections of singled track (Downham-Littleport 10 miles) ...

Finally, in support of *The Railway Magazine*, can we please have the route mileages re-instated in both versions of the "All Line Timetables" as from the December 2010 issues?

Happy travelling.

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

fenliner@flua.org.uk

The Fenman Interview **Barry Cheeseman**

Home station: Watlington

➤ *Where do you travel and why?*

BC: I live in South Creake but my job is near Waterloo - I go there 3 days a week. I always travel to King's Cross in the evening and return in the mid morning, so I avoid busy times - I've had enough of those after 30 years! I am the Research Manager for a company that specialises in cultural tourism, so I go abroad at least once a month. Having St Pancras International right next to King's Cross is a big bonus.

➤ *What's its best point?*

BC: Reliability and speed!

➤ *What's needed the most? Why?*

BC: There are several things needed immediately:
(a) **Longer trains at all times.** Once the train is divided at Cambridge the section which comes on to Lynn is still crowded. And when we have just 4 carriages all the way it is unbearable whatever the time of day between London and Cambridge!
(b) Why can't we have **the late train every evening** - this would make it possible for people to go to concerts and plays etc. If we can have a train on a Friday why can't we have it every day?
(c) Why do the evening trains to London have to stop at every station mid-week - they don't on Sundays!
(d) The time between a platform being announced at King's Cross and the departure of the train seems to get shorter and shorter. Getting from the main concourse to platforms 9-11 takes a time, especially for older people and those with luggage. It makes a very uncomfortable start to the journey

➤ *Anything else you'd like to say?*

BC: I run the North Norfolk Music Festival, a series of international chamber concerts held in South Creake - this year is the 6th Festival and will run between 2-12 September. I *always* encourage our artists to travel by train because it is reliable and fast, not withstanding the points I've made above! They are always impressed that they can get here so quickly as they start out thinking we are in a different time zone! It's quite amazing how many well-known musicians travel up by train having appeared at the Proms the night before or who are going back to sing at Covent Garden that night. **Most people new to Norfolk ask about trains to Norwich and never even think of King's Lynn. I take great pleasure in putting them right!** By the way, I've told all my friends that FLUA isn't an exclusive or eccentric club for train spotters - it is an intelligently run consumer pressure group and more people should join up! Oh, and finally, is **H.M. the Queen** an Honorary Member? I think she should be!

www.northnorfolkmusicfestival.com

Measure for measure

*The current timetable assessed
(See issue 4/2009 for previous assessment)*

**Mondays-Fridays service from and to
KING'S LYNN May 2010**

(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 deps 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 - 104 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**

Squeaking pips

LOUDSPEAKERS at Ely, Wednesday 14 April: expected at 1813, the delayed 1756 (1644 King's Cross-King's Lynn) is **"very overcrowded"** - and passengers are "advised to wait" for the 1830 (1658 Liverpool Street-King's Lynn).

Fast forward to Friday 23 April: the usual King's Cross late indication of platform number - the 1545 King's Cross-King's Lynn listed as platform 4 at 1540 - "a mad scramble to get there before it left," writes **J.M. Polkinghorne**. The usual big group of people had hedged their bets by waiting half way along platform 8, the best compromise position. Only 4 cars, so "like a madhouse." One man was on the floor, another kneeling and two standing and that was First Class!

"At Cambridge the platform was 4-5 deep - I have never seen anything like it... I got off at Ely."

"I *didn't* get on that train at Cambridge," concurs **Brian Beckett**. "I was trying to get back to Lynn, but we couldn't physically get on. Waiting an hour for the next train just isn't funny, especially at the end of a week."

The *Foster Review* highlights the splitting and joining of trains en route, in our case at Cambridge, and, ok, it's a system that works well enough. *Except* that 4-cars north of Cambridge is getting to be insufficient. As **Edward VIII** said, **"something should be done."**

Join us from only £4.50 a year! FLUA Membership,
**67 Goodwins Road, KING'S LYNN, Norfolk, PE30 5PE 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.

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Magic?

by Robert Stripe

On 20 May FLUA Chairman **Colin Sampson** and Vice-Chairman **Robert Stripe** joined Transport Secretary **Philip Hammond MP** and rail chiefs at Kings Cross for the opening of the new electrics only platform 'Zero.'

WELCOMING us, NR's **Robin Gisby** outlined the sparkling future for King's Cross, followed by positive words from East Coast's **Elaine Holt** and from FCC's **Neal Lawson**.

Philip Hammond MP spoke last, quipping about standing between Platforms Zero and 9 3/4, and wondering where he might go! Rail is, he said, the greenest and most efficient way for commuting and long distance travel.

There will be no third runway at Heathrow, but the next High Speed Line will go there on its way to the Midlands and North. Thameslink rebuilding work will continue, Crossrail will go ahead, and Kings Cross will rival St Pancras for splendour!

We all walked towards the open end of the new platform where the Minister cut the ribbon before the first train pulled out. At the other end of the platform a magnificent cake celebrating the occasion was cut and pieces distributed to all.

Two days later, the resplendent and reliveried GWR Castle Class locomotive '*Hogwarts Castle*' was seen waiting in platform 4 with its rake of maroon carriages ready for filming...

Will Mr Hammond work his own rail magic?

Science

RADAR monitored full barriers are likely for the Ely-Norwich line. A solution for the pedestrian-risky Waterbeach crossing?

Network effect

SOFTWARE giant Microsoft is to move its UK Research Arm across Cambridge to the new 'CB1' development on Station Road. Rail and knowledge economy – a perfect fit!

<http://www.businessweekly.co.uk> 5 May 2010

Fighting on

MEANWHILE, at the other end of Silicon Fen, Cambridgeshire County Council is continuing its efforts to obtain funding for the proposed Chesterton station. Through trains, please!

www.cambridge-news.co.uk/Home/Bid-to-find-money-for-new-station.htm

"One Way Ahead" 1983-4

Proposed singling: Lakenheath-Brandon, Thetford-Harling Road, Attleborough-Wymondham; Tivetshall-Diss, Diss-Mellis; Brundall-Reedham, Reedham-Somerleyton, Somerleyton-Oulton Broad.

Proposed Closure: Reedham-Yarmouth.

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk - catalogue ref: AN 188/78

Electrification: Cambridge-Ely-Kings Lynn 1985-90

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk – catalogue ref: AN 184/384

McNulty rail industry costs probe

www.dft.gov.uk/press/speechesstatements/statements/hammond100614

New, longer franchises

www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open/2010-28/

Lady in the Luggage Rack

by Mawrenna Gleid

THE Fen Line schools are breaking up for the summer and it's a relief for everyone. I sit in the same carriage as the King's School (Ely) crowd. For the last month the soundtrack to my journey has been one of equations, French verbs and a frankly doomed attempt to memorise the Periodic Table. Exams are now over, and exotic holidays beckon – so exit the school party, stage left.

At this point, the working part of the commuting public breathes a huge sigh of relief, largely because it's the only time in the year when there's space to do so. For the next six weeks the service will be quite civilised, and that's a very worrying thing.

In my carriage there are around fifteen schoolchildren. Multiply this by all the carriages on all our commuter trains and, even after removing all these bodies, people will still have to stand.

We all know the trains are getting busier, but it's not like the Tube, where people are continually getting on and off. It's about 45 minutes from Cambridge to King's Lynn, with only six stops for people to escape.

In the evening the 1722 to Ely relieves some of the pressure on my train, the 1739 to King's Lynn. Last Thursday the Ely train was cancelled and as my train pulled away, we left a hot, angry crowd in the 30°C heat. Only hardened regulars (who know where to stand) had got on.

The trains are already overcrowded. What next? As demand continues to grow, will we get more carriages or more trains? Or, in these hard times, will we be priced off the railway instead?

Something to think about as you enjoy breathing out.

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

Ten Years Ago

"You say you'll double the frequency. Well, we'll double the track as well!" We reported that franchise bidders had promises a'plenty. The catch though, we revealed, was that these promises were for the Waterloo-Exeter line - not for the Fen Line. [By the way, the three-mile loop at Axminster on the Exeter route finally opened in December last year!]

We are the masters now!

LITTLEPORT residents have said they think a key objective for ECDC's forthcoming 'Masterplan' should be "improving connections to the railway station."

www.eastcambs.gov.uk/planning/littleport-masterplan

Smile, you're on camera!

MORE MAGIC? 'Great British Railway Journeys,' the television series with **Michael Portillo**, may feature the Fen Line in the next series. Have you seen them filming?

FLUA diary 2010

Saturday 27 November

AGM, King's Lynn.