

# The Fenman

Newsletter of the Fen Line Users Association

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## Issue 2/2015

*We seek the **best for users** from the fast-changing railway scene by **working with** all parties in the railway industry and with other relevant bodies in the development of the **Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern (TSGN) franchise on the Fen Line.***

**“Stand and deliver!”** Words which must have been fearsome to hear when travelling in the long gone, Christmas card scene world of the horse-drawn stage-coach. Necessitating the employment of guards (something taken on board by the first railways) it's easy to overlook a subtle point here: to be able to stand, you had to have a seat first – something not always possible to find on today's Fen Line! But let's put that aside and concentrate on the other part of the highwayman's phrase - **the delivery.**

The next little while should be big on delivery. Promised are air-conditioned trains, half-hourly King's Lynn-King's Cross services, Cambridge Science Park station, and upgrading Ely North Junction. So, when on 25 June Transport Minister **Patrick McLoughlin MP** told Parliament of problems with Network Rail delivery, alarm bells began to ring.

**On the face of it, no Ely upgrade, no half-hourly service, at least not with the existing pattern of operations.**

However, the half-hourly service is a franchise commitment, due to start in 2017. Time now for some creative thinking.

**Government is about to re-tender the 'Anglia' franchise: swapping our few Liverpool Street services for King's Cross trains would deliver half-hourly in the peaks. Longer trains north of Cambridge are needed now; different passing points could give better reliability. As for the Ely upgrade – vital for flexibility – deliver it ASAP!**

Maybe there's something here? – page 2

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### From [www.lynnnews.co.uk](http://www.lynnnews.co.uk)

**Thursday 9 July 2015** - After meeting the rail Minister, **Henry Bellingham MP** says, "We were extremely relieved and pleased that the Minister was able to give assurances that the half-hourly services are still on schedule by end of 2017."

**Elizabeth Truss MP** adds, "The DFT confirmed that studies are still ongoing but the minister understands that the delivery of the half-hourly service on the King's Lynn to London line by end of 2017 is a priority project for me and I will continue to work with my fellow MPs on this."

**Friday 26 June 2015** – 'Rail service chiefs have insisted they remain committed to a multi-million pound upgrade of the network serving Norfolk, despite a review of the programme.... [there were] fears over the future of the project to improve the Ely North Junction.... But a Network Rail spokesman said today: "The intention is to do it in control period 5 (the current programme scheduled for completion in 2019)."'

### THE FEN LINE



USERS ASSOCIATION

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**Mondays-Fridays Fen Line timetable metrics May 2015**

<b>To King's Cross</b>	King's Lynn KLN	Watlington WTG	Downham Mkt DOW	Littleport LTP	Ely ELY	Waterbeach WBC
First arrival at King's Cross	0637	0637	0637	0637	0637	0637
No of arrivals at King's Cross <b>0700-0959</b>	6(1)	6(2)	6(1)	6(2)	7(2)	6(2)
No of arrivals at Cambridge <b>0700-0959</b>	8	6	8	6	14	7
No of departures towards London	25(2)	23(2)	26(2)	23(2)	44(21)	26(3)
No of departures towards London <b>1600-1859</b>	3	4	5	4	9	4
Last southbound departure	2232	2239	2246	2255	2303	2313
Average journey times to King's Cross. <b>a.m. peak</b> (mins)	109	104	95	88	80	69
Specimen journey time to King's Cross <b>off-peak</b> (mins)	99	92	86	77	69	60
<b>From King's Cross</b>	King's Lynn KLN	Watlington WTG	Downham Mkt DOW	Littleport LTP	Ely ELY	Waterbeach WBC
No of departures from King's Cross <b>1600-1859</b>	5(1)	5(2)	5(1)	5(2)	6(1)	6(3)
Last departure from King's Cross	2314	2314	2314	2314	2314	2314
No of departures from Cambridge <b>1600-1859</b>	4	4	5	4	14	7
No of northbound arrivals	26(3)	25(3)	27(4)	25(3)	42(15)	31(6)
First northbound arrival	0707	0659	0653	0641	0529	0623
No of northbound arrivals <b>0700-0959</b>	5	4	4	5	13	4
Average journey time from Kings Cross <b>p.m. peak</b> (mins)	104	98	89	82	70	67
Specimen journey time from King's Cross <b>off-peak</b> (mins)	97	89	83	74	67	57

**Notes:** 1 - Fen Line Timetable Metrics should be used for broad comparison purposes only. 2 - Minor changes may not always be significant for individual passengers. 3 - Brackets show change of trains required, usually (but not always) from/to King's Lynn-Liverpool Street route trains. 4 - Except where the context requires it, not all services included are to/from London, e.g. the early morning Cambridge-King's Lynn service. 5 - Not all services are included. Note that the Ely data shows all journey opportunities to/from King's Cross where a single change (at Cambridge) is required. 6 - Caution should be exercised in using time-band counts; a change of plus or minus one minute between timetables can modify the counts without significant change having taken place. 7 - Timetable metrics from August 1992 (Fen Line electrification) to date are available on request.

**Maybe there's something here?**

Running a railway is clearly no simple task. It's easy to stand on the sidelines and wail – we think that's natural sometimes, but we do realise railways are complex, and that changing one thing can create unexpected, often adverse, results elsewhere.

**Nonetheless, we also think that our collective experience over years of travelling allows us to offer up our own suggestions for consideration.**

Having consulted you, our members, we suggest the remaining few Liverpool Street services are swapped for a half-hourly King's Lynn-King's Cross peak service (though we ask that they still run south of Ely). We applauded longer trains south of Cambridge, now relief is needed north of Cambridge too. The way the 0714/0725 trains from King's Lynn combine at Cambridge is a shining example of creativity – these serve both 4-car and 8-car platformed stations, yet take only one precious ECML path into King's Cross.

Today, London-bound trains often wait at Downham Market, waiting for the single-line to clear. Originally, trains crossed at Watlington and if the northbound service was late, the London-bound train passed it on the double-track between there and Downham – and, extremely important, kept on its scheduled path over the congested ECML. Worth re-instating?

Cambridge Science Park station will give Fen Line users superb access to education and jobs – we welcome it, noting that it too will affect passing points.

**Maybe there is something here? In any event, the ever-shifting factors highlight the need for enduring flexibility. That's why, whatever the short-term fixes, the regional congestion hub, Ely North Junction, needs its upgrade – soonest!**

**Comments are free, but facts are sacred**

Yes, railways embrace both science and the humanities – no taking sides here! We've compiled basic facts for Fen Line timetables since electric trains started running in 1992, our data presenting a truly objective base for measuring change. We record our distillation of the current timetable above.

**Hands on**

FLUA CHAIRMAN Colin Sampson joined other volunteers, including GN Passenger Service Director Keith Jipps and Station Manager Graeme Pratt, on 30 June to pick up litter and plant flower baskets and tubs at Downham Market station. Downham just missed a top score in last year's 'Anglia in Bloom' contest – this year, they're determined to go for gold!

[www.thameslinkrailway.com/about-us/news/bloomin-hard-work-as-downham-station-staff-and-community-vie-for-gold/](http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/about-us/news/bloomin-hard-work-as-downham-station-staff-and-community-vie-for-gold/)

**Digital railway**

TO SEE what cab signalling (ECTS, part of ERTMS) entails and how it will be deployed on the ECML between King's Cross and Royston, take a look at a recent Institution of Railway Signalling Engineers talk, to be found on the link below. There's a preview of how King's Cross' tracks might be re-arranged too.

[www.irse.org/nearyou/publicdocuments/ETCS%20on%20East%20Coast%20Main%20Line%20%202013\\_11\\_14.pdf](http://www.irse.org/nearyou/publicdocuments/ETCS%20on%20East%20Coast%20Main%20Line%20%202013_11_14.pdf)

**STOP PRESS! Lucy Frazer MP** (SE Cambs) met roads Minister **Andrew Jones MP** on 13 July to discuss the Ely Southern Bypass: "Mr Jones made it clear that the DfT did not know of any reason why the upgrade would be delayed" and work "should go ahead as scheduled." **Steve Barclay MP** (NE Cambs) has pointed out the importance of Ely North Junction works for the projected Wisbech-Cambridge rail service as well as for the Fen Line. [www.ely-news.co.uk/Roads-Minister-assures-MP-Lucy-Frazer-Ely/story-26897906-detail/story.html](http://www.ely-news.co.uk/Roads-Minister-assures-MP-Lucy-Frazer-Ely/story-26897906-detail/story.html)  
<http://stevebarclay.net/mps-meet-rail-minster-to-discuss-ely-north-junction-upgrade/>

## The Fenman Interview

### Tim Howes

Home station: Waterbeach

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

**TH:** At least four days per week.

➤ *Where do you travel and why?*

**TH:** 0908 Waterbeach to Cambridge, for work.

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

**TH:** Too few trains - they're too short, leading to routine overcrowding.

➤ *What's its best point?*

**TH:** The fare is fair, and reliability isn't bad. I would also praise Abellio for getting their Cambridge-Norwich services to stop additionally at Waterbeach in the case of problems elsewhere.

➤ *What's needed the most? Why?*

**TH:** Longer platforms at Waterbeach to ease overcrowding; and modern ticket sales methods (e.g. via QR codes on a phone screen - just like a plane boarding pass!) I think that several peak trains, which go north of Cambridge with 8 coaches, could make a useful additional stop at Waterbeach. It may also help the horrendous overcrowding of (e.g.) the 1740 from Cambridge.

➤ *Anything else you'd like to say?*

**TH:** The recent deployment of ticket selling staff in the morning peak at Waterbeach is *extremely* good: there were numerous occasions where the machines were inoperative, and queuing up again at Cambridge (when you've already allowed yourself queuing time at Waterbeach) was not good. There is an increasing number of full size bikes using the 0908 train which does not help with the overcrowding. Any more and I think it'd be getting dangerous in case of emergency - the vestibules can be a complete nest of interlocked bikes. The practice of selling individual little bits of card to represent train tickets is out of date: the operator really needs to address this now that we are half way through this decade in which we've been boarding planes for years without paper. It would help the crowding of Waterbeach and Cambridge stations: the current machines are horrendous to use even if you know the intricacies of the British rail network: for a popular tourist destination the machines create huge tailbacks. Allowing travellers to pre-buy tickets on their phone (which I did in Finland about a decade ago!) would help. It would alleviate the silly problems of Waterbeach ticket machines running out of cardboard over the weekend, or having to rummage for stuck tickets!

Another problem is there is no support for part-time workers, or those working from home on certain days; it's not worth it for me to get a season ticket. Every day many of us queue to get the same ticket day in, day out. We're not even allowed to buy the off-peak ticket the evening before! A carnet of tickets (yes, off-peak too!) would help queuing at the machines. It could be attractively priced to be a little cheaper than separate tickets (surely it would save credit card fees with fewer transactions), and would free up ticket machine time for other users. Is FLUA worthwhile? Yes! FLUA has been going for much longer than any of the franchisees have operated this line; so it is in a good position to provide long-term feedback to the present incumbent.

## Joining the dots

A REVISED Rail Prospectus for East Anglia, *Connecting our Counties*, has been published by the New Anglia LEP. A strategic detail, maybe, but we are pleased to see a call for full barriers at Waterbeach station level crossing in it. Running the sirens for the entire period whilst trains are approaching *and* until they're in the station is a great improvement, but there's still concern about safety – nobody, nobody wants another Elsenham tragedy!

[www.newanglia.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Our-Counties-Connected-a-rail-prospectus-for-East-Anglia.pdf](http://www.newanglia.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Our-Counties-Connected-a-rail-prospectus-for-East-Anglia.pdf)

### East Anglia Rail Franchise

THREE companies have been shortlisted by the Government to bid for the forthcoming East Anglia franchise. This is for trains out of Liverpool Street, currently run by Abellio Greater Anglia, *not* for Great Northern King's Lynn-King's Cross services. The three on the shortlist are Abellio East Anglia (Abellio/Stagecoach joint venture), First East Anglia (part of First Group) and National Express East Anglia. All of the owning groups have or have had experience in running trains in the region. The Invitation to Tender (ITT) is to be issued in September.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/406010/dft-east-anglia-prospectus.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/406010/dft-east-anglia-prospectus.pdf)  
[www.gov.uk/government/news/shortlist-for-east-anglia-franchise-announced](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/shortlist-for-east-anglia-franchise-announced)

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/441862/july-2015-rail-franchise-schedule.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/441862/july-2015-rail-franchise-schedule.pdf)

### The folks next door

YOU'VE probably noticed the new neighbours at King's Cross! Virgin Trains East Coast (VTEC) have arrived with the start of their long-distance ECML franchise, officially launched by Rail Minister **Claire Perry** on 2 March 2015. Their tenure runs until the end of March 2023.

<https://www.virgintraineastcoast.com/>  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-east-coast-franchise-starts>

### Open access – East Coast Main Line

THERE ARE ALREADY non-franchised "Open Access" long-distance trains on the ECML - Grand Central (Alliance) and First Hull Trains. Now, Alliance, First, and VTEC want to run more. But there are not enough train slots ("paths") for them all. And the more trains that are squeezed in, the more disruption is caused when things go wrong. The rail industry accepts that 10 paths per hour in each direction are required for GTR services, including two King's Cross-King's Lynn trains per hour (*indicatively* leaving King's Cross at 14 and 44 minutes past each hour). The ORR has to decide which *long-distance* trains run.

[orr.gov.uk/what-and-how-we-regulate/track-access/current-work/east-coast-main-line](http://orr.gov.uk/what-and-how-we-regulate/track-access/current-work/east-coast-main-line)

### Going for growth

Cambridgeshire County Council has drawn together longer-term planning and transport issues, aiming to maintain growth and competitiveness in our world-class location. "Rail growth in the county has been marked over the past decade, and opportunities to significantly improve north-south and east-west rail links are identified."

We support longer-term proposals for a station at Addenbrookes as well as the Cambridge-Oxford "East West Rail" link. We have asked for studies on the latter to assess *options which would permit a faster, congestion free route from Cambridge to the ECML*, allowing potential 125/140 mph running from Cambridge to King's Cross.

[www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/3745/the\\_long\\_term\\_transport\\_strategy](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/3745/the_long_term_transport_strategy)  
[www.eastwestrail.org.uk/route-selection/](http://www.eastwestrail.org.uk/route-selection/)

### High winds, high drama

On Tuesday 31 March, the 1144 King's Cross-King's Lynn came to a stand about 300 metres north of Black Horse Drove (on the Cambs/Norfolk border).

High winds had forced the pantograph on train no. 365503 to bend, which in turn brought the wires down.

*A passenger told us "there was a strange noise, the train jolted, started decelerating, and then stopped. A ticket collector walked through, telling us that only emergency power was available – light, but no heat (it was a cold day). The wind was so strong, it was gusting, you could feel the train rocking – it was really quite scary.*

*"After 20 or 30 minutes, two coaches arrived. The coaches had to wait for passengers to disembark. The door to the cab at the London end was opened and people very slowly filed along and queued to get in the cab. There was a ticket collector there, helping people with bags, and who explained how to turn round and climb out of the cab safely.*

*"One of the ticket collectors had come round on the train, taking passengers' details, saying the train company would be in touch about compensation."*

**GTR arranged 20 coaches for the remainder of the day and every account we received praised the company for handling a difficult situation well.**

[www.thameslinkrailway.com/tickets-and-fares/31March](http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/tickets-and-fares/31March)

### Ely-Soham

IN PART only single track (it was built that way) the Trans European Network Felixstowe-Ely-Midlands priority freight corridor is to be doubled between Soham and Ely. As it's one of measures greatly needed to increase train capacity through the congested Ely area, we fully support the full doubling of the Ely-Soham section. We acknowledge that the Soham line will have to be closed for some 6 months at some point (a replacement bus service will operate between Ely and Bury) to allow land settlement before works can resume. NR expects to submit an application to the Secretary of State for Transport for the necessary Transport & Works Act Order (in effect, planning consent) this Autumn. If this is granted, work would start in Autumn 2017 and the scheme would be fully completed in early 2019.

<https://consultations.networkrail.co.uk/ely-to-soham/ely-to-soham-rail-improvements>

### Obstacle free

ELY station level crossing is to be abolished when the Ely Southern Bypass road is completed, important to permit that large expansion in the number of trains (particularly freights to and from Felixstowe) projected to pass through Ely. South East Cambs MP **Lucy Frazer** is pressing the Department for Transport for an early start. **Neil Darwin**, Chief Executive of the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP, says, "Ely bypass remains one of our top priorities." Cambridgeshire County Council has already published draft Compulsory Purchase Orders to acquire the land.

<http://www.ely-news.co.uk/Ely-Southern-Bypass-remain-8216-priority-8217/story-26863248-detail/story.html>

[http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/3729/ely\\_bypass\\_public\\_notice](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/3729/ely_bypass_public_notice)

### Lady in the Luggage Rack by Mawrenna Gleid

ON THURSDAYS, the train is at its most crowded. Every Thursday morning without fail, someone says, "busy today, isn't it?" And then there's a pause, and someone else says, "ah, but it's *Thursday*."

Friday mornings are the quietest: no surprise there. But they make up for it on the way home, as endless hordes of tired, sun-bronzed people with giant suitcases cram themselves into spaces designed for the more minimalist commuter.

Mondays are quiet in a different way. The train's no less busy than normal, but every regular gets on saying, "Monday *again*," and lets the carriage remain in brooding stillness.

Then there are the larger rhythms of commuting life.

September brings new students, bright-eyed and nervous with shiny shoes. By Christmas the shoes are scuffed, and there's less talk of French verbs and more of parties. The adult contingent frets about the logistics of seeing *his* parents and *her* parents, and not forgetting Auntie Joan.

May brings exams, and the whole carriage gets to brush up on their trigonometry. Now Summer is here, and as coats are left behind so too are the students, and the carriage breathes out and relaxes and wishes for some proper air-con.

**But soon enough September comes again, and the crush starts again.**

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

### Ten Years Ago

**"From next April, WAGN's Great Northern services are to be amalgamated ... to form 'Thameslink Great Northern.'" It's a big step towards the [cross-London] 'Thameslink 2000' proposals ... now expected around 2011." Through King's Lynn-central London-Ashford services were envisaged.**

### Analysis of fact

RAIL COMMUTING into Cambridge is influenced hugely by service frequency: that's the conclusion of a detailed paper, analysing the 2011 Census, and produced by campaigning group *Railfuture*. Perhaps an unsurprising outcome, but the paper produces the hard evidence. Unable to cope with more cars, the Cambridge of the future needs more and longer trains, southwards, and - given the increasing Fen Line crowding - north of the University city too.

[www.railfuture.org.uk/east/docs/Railfuture-East-Anglia-Commuting-to-Cambridge-Census-backs-case-for-rail.pdf](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/east/docs/Railfuture-East-Anglia-Commuting-to-Cambridge-Census-backs-case-for-rail.pdf)

### Eagle high in cloudland soaring

IF you want the Fat Controller's view of what's going on, you can now get live information for train running between Kings Cross and Ely (though not beyond yet). Go to the *Open Train Times* website, and select Maps 'London North Eastern: Kings Cross to Hitchin', 'London North Eastern: Hitchin to Ely' maps and watch the progress of trains, section by section.

<http://www.opentraintimes.com/maps/signalling/ECM1>

<http://www.opentraintimes.com/maps/signalling/sbr>

### FLUA diary 2015

**Revised date - Saturday 21 November  
AGM, King's Lynn.**