

The Fenman

Newsletter of the Fen Line Users Association
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Issue 3/2017

Calling for the earliest delivery of the
'half-hourly' Kings Lynn-Kings Cross commitment

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Monday 16 October 2017 and Secretary of State for Transport **Chris Grayling** is giving oral evidence to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee on Policy priorities for the Department for Transport:

Chair [Lilian Greenwood MP]: Have you set out what [CP6] enhancements ... £9 billion is meant to pay for? Is it for things carried over from CP5, or for something else?

Chris Grayling: ... The two things I have confirmed are that we will do the Ely junction and the trans-Pennine modernisation. [Q107] **Chair:** When can we expect to see more detail on what that money is intended to be used for?

Chris Grayling: In due course. On the trans-Pennine route, we will have to wait and see what the Network Rail proposal is. We are doing the work on Ely junction at the moment. The other area that will get investment is around Bristol. Those are probably the three decisions that we have taken. They are not the only decisions that we have, but they are the three things I have set out very clearly that we will do."

The congested Ely Area is preventing the committed 'half-hourly' King's Lynn-King's Cross service. So, on 11 October, a delegation - 'enough of words, time for deeds' - of MPs, LEPs, Councils and rail companies visited Chris Grayling, Secretary of State, who was abundantly clear about Ely: "It will happen!"



Meeting the Minister: a delegation including Chris Starkie, Doug Field, Jo Churchill MP, Henry Bellingham MP, Elizabeth Truss MP, George Freeman MP, Phil Hutchinson, Mark Reeve, Ray Harding, and FLUA Chairman Colin Sampson went to ask Secretary of State **Chris Grayling** (5th from left) for Ely assurances. Photo: Fiona Walker



Three stations in Norfolk, three in Cambridgeshire - no, four now, with Cambridge North. Littleport (Cams) may be unstaffed, but it's a hive of activity: as the train leaves, passengers queue to go down the steps. **79 new parking spaces coming there soon.**

We recently asked **Chris Starkie**, Managing Director of the New Anglia LEP, "Is the New Anglia LEP actively taking part in the GTR 2018 timetable consultation, bearing in mind that the consultation draft of this major timetable redraft envisages longer journey times to and from King's Cross for stations north of Cambridge (which include Norfolk's second and fourth most-used stations: King's Lynn and Downham Market)?" His immediate reply was: "**Yes! It's outrageous what's proposed and the LEP will be lobbying - the whole point of the half-hourly is not for journeys to take longer. King's Lynn's strength lies in its speed to and from London.**" That's welcome support. Not just words but action too - **Chris** was one of the delegation which went to see the Minister about the Ely Area Enhancements.

Annual General Meeting
Saturday 18 November 2017
1400, at St. John's Church Room, Waterbeach
5 minutes walk from Waterbeach station
Our guest speaker is: **Lisa Barrett**
Senior development Manager - Strategy, Anglia, Network Rail

As usual, we have invited rail management to answer members' questions.
The meeting will finish by 1620.
Light refreshments will be available.
Andy Tyler, Secretary, 25 October 2017

Colin Sampson, Chairman 01366 388003

Robert Stripe, Hon. President

Ken Hubbard, Treasurer

Contact us:

Andy Tyler, Secretary

www.flua.org.uk – useful web links, statistics, news and developments, and members' section

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www.flua.org.uk/membership from £5.25 a year

Hard class or soft?

After the proposed Fen Line 125mph 'IEP' trains were binned back in October 2010, by the then Transport Secretary **Philip Hammond**, the 100 mph class 377/5 units were earmarked for the route instead. These were then running on Thameslink. Despite their comparative slowness, we put them to an open-minded test, with mixed results. The cars at the outer ends were not faultless (the seats were harder than we were used to) but they impressed by having lots of tables and 2+2 seating in both classes. The inner cars were a big disappointment, mainly due to **their 'squeeze 'em in' narrow 2+3 seating**, something quite unsuitable for anything beyond a pretty short journey. They didn't make the final cut, the much newer 110 mph 387/1 units did instead. Of course, opinions vary ...

	Going	Cancelled	Current
Class	365	377/5	387/1
Introduced on Fen Line	1994	N/A	2017
No of cars per unit	4	4	4
Car length (m)	20	20	20
Unit length (m)	80	80	80
Maximum speed	100 mph	100 mph	110 mph
Exterior door position	1/3, 2/3	1/3, 2/3	1/3, 2/3
Exterior door width	Normal	Normal	Normal
Gangway between units?	No	Yes	Yes
Internal doors between cars?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Seats (total)	263	238	223
Seats (First/Std)	24/239	20/218	22/201
2+3 seats in Std?	No	In 2 cars	No
First Class	Unit ends	Unit ends	Near 1 end
No of toilets (total/disabled)	2/1	2/1	2/1
Air conditioned?	No	Yes	Yes
First: tables?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Std: tables/trays?	Both	Both	Both
Std: arm rests?	No	Some	Yes
WiFi?	No	No	Yes
Power sockets?	No	Yes	Yes
USB Ports?	No	No	No
Av seats per 20m	66	60	56
Seats per 12-car	789	714	669

Above figures indicative only. Individual units may vary.

NB when we say 'cancelled' we mean cancelled for Fen Line use. The class 377/5s (built in 2008/9) now work South Eastern services. There are other type 387 trains around - class 387/2 on GTR's 'Gatwick Express' service and class 387/3 on Great Western Railway. Where we simply say class 387, we mean class 387/1, i.e. the Fen Line ones.

Members only - the table above is meant to be enlarged on a screen. Write to **Andy Tyler** for a bigger copy and/or our chart giving details of many other Fen Line train types, past, current and proposed (11 in total, including the Intercity Express trains). Members can also view: http://flua.org.uk/FLUAmembers/files/train_technical_data.pdf

A few thoughts on our latest rolling stock

by **David Bell**

On the plus side the legroom is better as is the location of luggage racks. Also the ability to walk through the train from end to end. No opening windows is the biggest plus for me - no longer will 'fresh-air fiends' open windows in the middle of February and blow a draught round the back of my neck. I have watched with some amusement people trying to open the sealed windows! On the downside the overhead racks are shallow in comparison with the previous stock and I would be disappointed with the First Class were I a First Class traveller. I've also noticed the car with the pantograph above it makes much louder 'bonging' noises than the older stock. I know what the noise is, but I've heard several passengers expressing alarm at the louder sound. There is also no last minute 'hustle' alarm just before the train departs - it just starts to glide away surreptitiously, often with no announcement from the driver. Announcements about the next station are frequently wrong or out of kilter with where we actually are, although the warnings about which carriage you need to be in when the train divides are usually clear and it also reminds you which carriage you are actually in. **I can confirm that the driver has offered to wait at Downham and Ely on the odd occasion when both toilets have been out of commission!**

"One such train," says **Bob Pearman**, "was the 1354 from Lynn on 5 July (or 12 July). The train was 8 cars, but they left the rear 4 cars in Lynn making the rear passengers move forward, so it departed as a 4-car. The announcement was made as the train progressed southwards somewhere near Watlington. It must have **waited in Downham for quite some while**, because a queue formed for the meagre toilet facilities there!"

"I have made about 6 journeys on the new trains. On every journey I have used the toilet and **on every occasion there has been no water for hand-washing**. Has anyone else reported this?" asks **David Wells**. "Incidentally the 1054 from King's Lynn on 14 August was grossly overcrowded, mainly by large groups of young people with large rucksacks. The driver was polite and sympathetically asked passengers to make sure luggage was stowed in the overhead racks - impossible for all but the smallest bags now!"

Robert Stripe reports "I went from Lynn to Waterbeach with a friend who is an engineer (he makes model steam engines). **We were quite literally thrown around** and nearly came off the track in various places. 387s - almost dangerous things and certainly most uncomfortable. My friend thought the trains do not have air bags as do the 365s and 317s - he says he will have a look!" *[The riding seems better now].*

Nicholas Bleaney says “as a First Class ticket holder I seek essentially that which was provided prior to foisting what, it would appear, are spare trains upon us. That is to say, some space to work, reasonable comfort, and a guaranteed seat. On the morning of 29 June I was on the 0705 from Downham Market. I duly presented myself at the correct door to find that all bar eight of the antimacassars had been removed from the seats with the predictable influx of those who had no reason to suppose they were where they should not be. As we know, the only delineation between first class and standard are the antimacassars. I was not one of the ‘lucky’ eight. On the 1714 to Ely that evening there were only five marked seats. The cabin was mobbed. It’s not so bad now, and what was an issue in June has receded a bit, **but what’s still very much an issue is the stunning discomfort of the seats. Even canting them would help.**”

“No indications at either Cambridge or Downham which end of the train First Class is at” writes **Debbie**. “I am unable to walk through a crowded train to find First Class; I need to be at the correct end of the platform. In Cambridge the display boards tell people using the Stansted-Birmingham service which end First Class is at. The staff at Downham don’t know which end First Class will be. If they are assisting someone with mobility issues onto the train they know where the appropriate carriage is and from their position I can figure out where First Class will be, however there isn’t always someone needing assistance getting on the train. [This issue has now been sorted]. Also, First Class areas need better signing. Especially needed is a notice on the exterior doors that lead to First Class and the windows. People are not noticing it’s First Class until they sit down and from there while some get up and move, others comment but stay. The problem is at its worst between Cambridge and Ely both in and outside the rush hour in both directions. I have seen misuse north of Ely as well. **The calmness that was in the First Class area is gone.**”

“Yes, they have 2+2 seats, and yes they have aircon (sometimes) and wifi (sometimes) and 13A sockets but the seats are the most uncomfortable of any on any UK trains - they are, for my bottom and back at least, unbearable” writes **Stewart Kidd**. “I can’t believe no-one else has written about these. They lack lateral support and the base and rear are so thinly padded that 60 minutes on one of these is torture. Coupled with the lateral movement of the coaches at speed (due, I guess to the lighter structure?) I find the journey from Ely to KGX now something I dread. **It’s impossible to write or use a keyboard due to the jolting.** The new First Class is a joke and the seating arrangements have obviously been made so they can be easily reconfigured. Given that I cannot stand for more than 5-10 minutes and am unable to run for a train, if GN remove First Class I won’t be able to travel into and out of London on the Fen Line.”

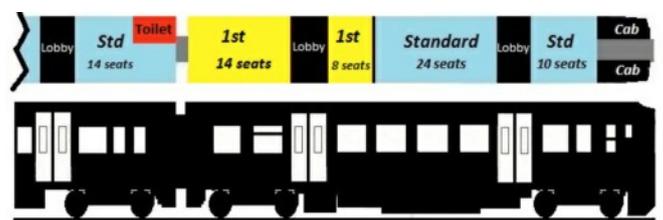


Two of the new trains which we are now seeing at Cambridge on test runs: the class 700s. The infrastructure will accommodate them at Ely, but not at Waterbeach, and they will not be used on Lynn trains. Suitable for shorter journeys, but not for long Fen Line ones.

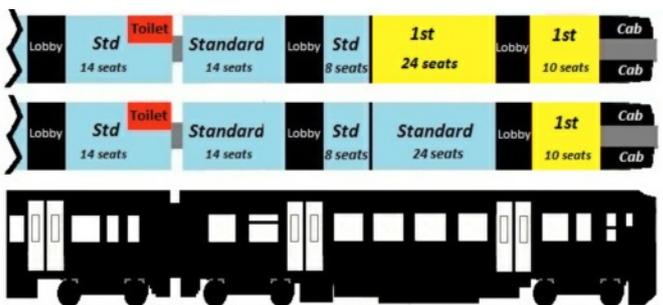


25 yrs of Fen Line electric trains: classes 317 (centre), 365 (front) and 387 (back) at King’s Lynn. Gangways between units permit crowds to spread out - a passenger-friendly attribute of 8-car trains.

It was June 2011 when Transport Minister **Theresa Villiers** told **Elizabeth Truss**: “Our current plans envisage that passengers on the Fen Line could benefit from new Intercity Express Trains from 2018. [They] would offer improved passenger accommodation and a shorter journey time to London ...” Well, she did say “could.” As it is, we have Norfolk’s (but not Cambridgeshire’s) fastest trains but longer transit times are planned, and the trains themselves have an eccentric seating plan, causing all manner of dissatisfaction. Otherwise-stranded Standard Class passengers have to open the door between First and Standard and go right through First to reach the toilet (red). **‘Eccentric’ is too mild a word!**



Above: First Class (yellow) is an island, sandwiched by Standard accommodation (blue). Below: we would like First Class all at one end, or perhaps at both ends of the train (only one end is shown).



Lady in the Luggage Rack

by Mawrenna Gleid

Are you used to the new trains yet? Can you even recall the old ones clearly?

As autumn slides into winter, the trains keep on rolling. Summer holidays are a distant memory, and schoolchildren and students alike have found their feet and settled into their new timetables. Workers may have changed jobs or changed hours, and individuals come and gone, but every morning and evening little groups still come together to share the daily slog.

Most of us don't really pay much attention to the actual trains we travel on. They are merely a means to an end; a conveyance from A to B. Commuters sweat the small stuff: will we get a seat, will we arrive late, will we spend our entire journey with someone's elbow in our left ear? These are the things that shape most regulars' experience of travel. As with so many things in life, the railway would run so much more smoothly without customers.

But how are the new trains themselves? They're still clean (moderately) and shiny (mostly). The toilets may be pitifully small, and regularly out of action, but many of the luggage racks are considerably more comfortable to sit in. The doors beep and shut automatically, panicking countless casual travellers, but the carriages are now so quiet you can hear every note of your neighbour's too-loud music. Periodically an automatic announcement plays, mostly with geographical accuracy, but with a worrying tendency to stick on Waterbeach.

Pros and cons as with most things. As the seasons keep on rolling, bringing their changes with them, so do the trains.

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

****Also in the news** *Keep up-to-date - check www.flua.org.uk***

*120 more parking spaces at Ely, 16 more at King's Lynn.

*Cambridgeshire Level Crossings Inquiry starts 28 November.

*Free wifi on class 387s. *25 years of Fen Line electrification.

*Cambridge South station? Cambridgeshire Mayor says yes.

*Cambridge railway book - see www.flua.org.uk for discount.



Lovely, but where are the trains? King's Cross-Ely trains call hourly at Cambridge North, but most King's Lynn trains cannot do so until the 8-car project is finished. Developers are already talking about a new commercial quarter to be built next door. As part of "linking homes and jobs", we say "stop where the jobs are." Photo: Ben Walsh



If only we didn't have to wait around Cambridge station attaching or detaching units. That's one thing that 8-car trains should do away with, though there will still be some trains that will need to be strengthened to 12-cars even then. Bikes? Well, this is East Anglia!

Service degradation by Andy Gibbs

I feel the previous connection from the 0531 ex Downham into the 0614 ex Cambridge *could* be maintained/restored with some planning by the relevant agencies. Fewer people are now attempting this now unadvertised journey opportunity; understandably, as the timings and platforms allocated to the services mentioned at Cambridge are far from ideal: Platform 1 arrive 0610, platform 8 depart 0614 (arrive King's Cross 0716). So much for the half-hourly peak service, which I need to get to work. **Run for the passengers? It's the passengers who are doing the running.** My fear is that passenger numbers affected by this change will be seen as diminishing and therefore the effort involved in resurrecting the connection will be seen as not worthwhile. Far from delivering half-hourly peak arrivals at King's Cross, effectively this vital one's now been taken away.

Ten years ago

"Rail passengers in King's Lynn will be among those who benefit from quicker and easier journeys the Thameslink Programme will deliver. Benefits will include direct journeys to Gatwick Airport." We were quoting NR's press release 'Good News for King's Lynn.' Things didn't turn out that way.



Downham Market signalbox, a Listed Building, no longer controls the crossing gates, Cambridge has taken over. This means shorter waits to cross the line. The 'box' looks quite shabby now. Photo: Mark Collins

Rear carriage: You probably have realised by now that we think it's high time for the successful Fen Line to be given the service and infrastructure it clearly needs. But we must be realists - things do take time, you cannot squeeze a quart into a pint pot. We want to thank the people who *are* trying to make things better for passengers; several of them will give up their own time to attend our AGM and take whatever's thrown at them. **Please come and support it too.**