

# *The Fenman*

## **Newsletter of the Fen Line Users Association**

**Issue 3/2018**

King's Lynn

Watlington

Downham  
Market

Littleport

Ely

Waterbeach

Cambridge  
North

**“Calling for the earliest delivery of the ‘half-hourly’ King’s Lynn – King’s Cross commitment”**

## *The View from the Chair*

The last six months have been the worst by far that I have experienced in all my three score years and ten. Even during the strike on the Southern Region in the early 1970s we got from Horsham to London and home each day, although I admit that the pubs near any of the stations from which we caught an evening train heading our way did pretty well! The sad thing about our recent problems is that they were, and still are, entirely predictable but those who inhabit the triple ivory towers chose not to listen to the real experts. However, things are a little better now so we must cling on to the hope that they will continue to improve. I thank all the railway staff belonging to both our train service providers for the super-human work that they are doing in often impossible situations. May your Christmas bonuses go some way towards reflecting your devotion to duty! Amongst the chaos there have been one or two real good-news stories, such as the Ely Southern By-pass and Watlington’s proper car park. I don’t want to say too much here as I have a Chairman’s Report to deliver at the AGM later this month and this space is at a premium! The future of FLUA is still uncertain so heed the notice below and come to the AGM in Littleport on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2018 at 2pm.

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## *Notice of 2018 AGM*

We hereby give notice that the AGM of the Fen Line Users Association will be held on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> November at Littleport Village Hall, Victoria Street, Littleport. CB6 1LX. There is a large free car park on Main Street (1 min walk away). For those travelling by train the hall is a 15 -20 min walk from the station. As usual representatives of the rail industry will be invited to attend and this will give members the opportunity to raise issues with key staff from across the network. This year the question and answer session will be held first to allow plenty of time for the regular business of the AGM and specifically for members to discuss FLUA’s current position and its future. Doors open at 1.30pm for a 2pm start and light refreshments will be available in the interval. Subscription renewals can be paid prior to the meeting and non members are also welcome but you will be encouraged to join on the day!

## *Service Update*

It has now been over 5 months since the new timetable was introduced and although things seem to have settled down a bit Fen Line services are still considerably less reliable than they were before 21st May. Although we haven’t suffered the regular, daily cancellation of services that stations south of Cambridge have had to endure, cancellations and delays elsewhere on the network inevitably continue to have a knock-on effect on our trains. One of the May changes was the addition of Ashwell & Morden as a stop for some peak services. Apparently it was added as a “less busy” calling point although one of our members has noticed a steady increase in passengers joining and leaving here and wonders if commuters are now travelling to Ashwell rather than Letchworth to join the train? Connections at Cambridge, especially for services to Liverpool Street, remain fragile and for passengers hoping to use the new hourly Cambridge to Brighton service for onward travel this service seems to be one of the first to be cancelled whenever there is disruption. A revised interim timetable was

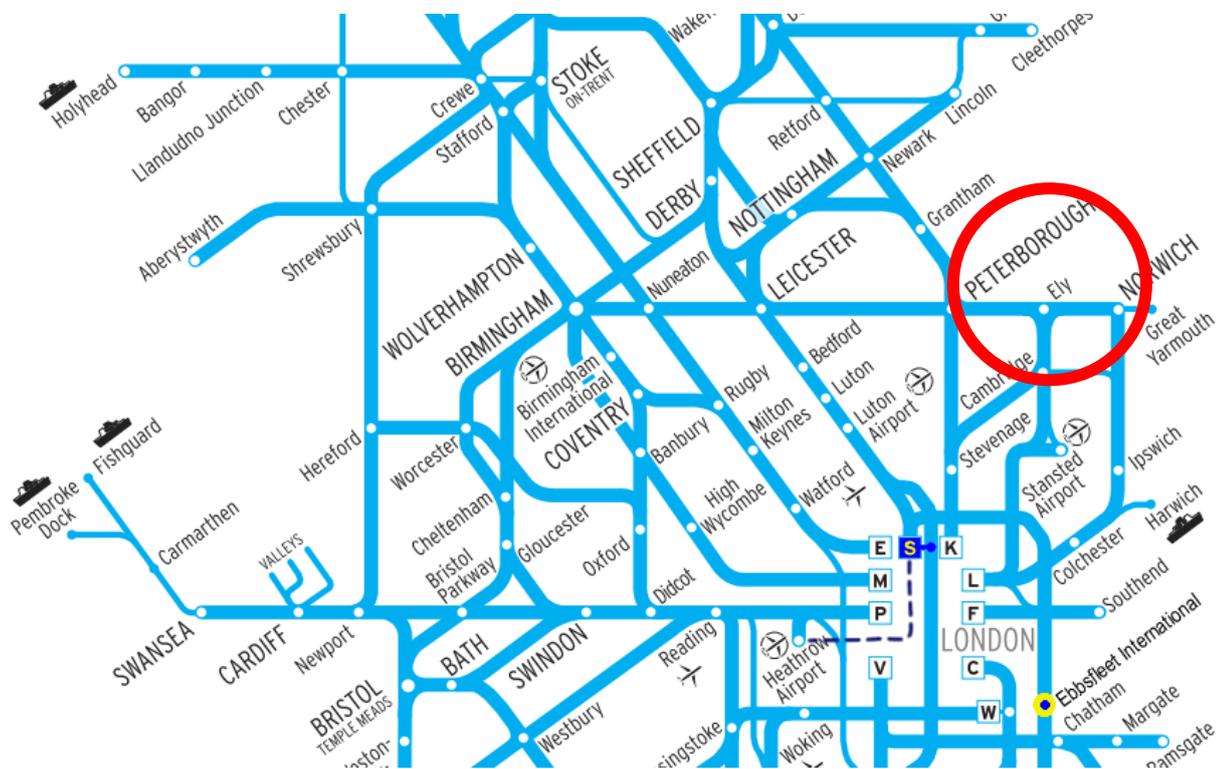
issued on 15<sup>th</sup> July but the printed version for our route was incorrect with pages for Saturday services suddenly appearing during the times for weekday afternoons! A delay in getting these withdrawn and re-printed caused much confusion and aggravation for travellers and staff alike. Since then more services have been added with an additional morning service from Cambridge to King's Cross and an extra return service in the evening running from 24<sup>th</sup> September. Normally at this time we are awaiting the introduction of the winter timetable in December but Great Northern are instead opting to roll out the remaining services originally scheduled for May and we don't anticipate too many changes on the Fen Line. There will, however, be an amended timetable between 23<sup>rd</sup> December and 1<sup>st</sup> January to cover the festive season and New Year and as usual there will be no trains running on Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Latest figures for the whole of the Great Northern network show 79.3% of trains arriving within 5mins of their scheduled time but these are average figures and statistics don't always give a true picture of the situation. Internet sites such as Realtime Trains and Open Train Times mean that accurate arrival and departure times are now readily available and the Eastern Daily Press has used data from the latter to report on the reliability of services in East Anglia over the last 6 months which, of course, mainly covers the period since the May timetable. There was no detail of how they calculated their figures but for King's Lynn they found that only 63% of trains were on time with 14% being 5 or more minutes late. For Downham Market only 41% of trains were on time with 19% being 5 or more minutes late. Whatever the statistics say the reality for the travelling public is that our trains still arrive too late too often and they are still seriously overcrowded.

Patrick Verwer has now taken up the post of CEO of GTR – the parent company of Great Northern. He recently spoke at a meeting in Cambridge and FLUA were there to hear what he had to say. Although not originally from a railway background (he was formerly a chief superintendent in the Rotterdam police) his previous roles at Merseyrail and London Midland Trains have shown his skill in turning round under-performing TOC's. Early in his speech he mentioned "I like people and service industries that help people" and that "customers' lives depend on the railways", themes which he returned to throughout. He also said he enjoys a challenge and we have no doubt that his new role will provide plenty of these! We wish him the best of luck.

## *Keep Ely to King's Lynn on the map*

A recent letter in a local newspaper told the tale of a self-employed customer wanting to travel from Downham Market to King's Lynn. The train was first shown as running 15mins late, then delayed "due to train staff being delayed" and finally cancelled altogether. As a result they were an hour late arriving for a job and lost an hour's earnings. They wrote: "There was nothing wrong with the train itself, it turned out, as once it reached Ely it had been sent back to Cambridge instead. So apparently passengers living north of Ely are not worth the same as those living to the south". All too often the section of the Fen Line between King's Lynn and Ely is given second class status and in fact on some official route maps it is omitted altogether. Even some of the usually well-informed employees of Network Rail when speaking at our AGM have wrongly referred to it as "the branch line from Ely". It is, of course, very much a main line with direct through services to London and annual passenger usage of over 4 million. Your support of FLUA helps us keep all of the Fen Line on the map!



# Down The Line

## A STATION BY STATION ROUND UP OF WHAT'S HAPPENING

### King's Lynn

Congratulations to all the staff for their award for excellent results following a recent QuEST (Quality Experience of Stations and Trains) audit of the route. In a separate poll the results from the Spring 2018 National Passenger Survey showed the station achieved 100% overall satisfaction.

Norfolk County Council has made funds available to pay for additional cycle racks at the station. If GTR take up their offer it is hoped that these might be installed early next year.

Following a request from one of our members for additional seating, two new benches have been installed at the south end of platforms 1 & 2.

### Watlington

As a taste of things to come we now have an 8 car train which stops at Watlington. The weekday 18:12 King's Cross to King's Lynn service calls here utilising "Selective Door Opening" (SDO) so that the doors only open on the front 4 coaches. Unfortunately, this option cannot currently be used at either Littleport or Waterbeach as the rear 4 coaches would block the level crossing. Although this was a common occurrence on some routes in years gone by, the Dept of Transport no longer permits this for safety reasons.

### Downham Market

There are currently no plans for the much-needed extension to the car park. The Town Council is considering the introduction of parking fees in the town and if this goes ahead demand for parking at the station is likely to increase further.

As no regular bus services call at the station any more the bus shelter in the car park is likely to be removed in the near future.

Funding has now been secured for an additional shelter on Platform 2 for passengers waiting for trains to King's Lynn.

### Littleport

The application for the new stairs and ramp to provide access to Platform 1 has been lodged with East Cambridgeshire District Council. This will allow the passenger "barrow crossing" at the north end of the platforms to be closed. FLUA fully support this action as it provides safer access for passengers and is a key step towards longer trains being able to stop at this increasingly busy station.

To deter vandalism poster boards at the station have been repositioned but are now too low to be easily read. We understand that a solution for this is being sought.

### Ely

The Southern By-pass was officially opened on 31<sup>st</sup> October and, it is hoped the number of "bridge bashes" and consequent delay to rail services will reduce now traffic is routed via the new road.

There is no update on proposals by station operator Greater Anglia for a new 100 space multi-level car park, provision of additional cycle racks or installation of a new ticket gateline.

A consultant has now been appointed to conduct both the road and rail studies at Queen Adelaide as part of the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements (the official name for the work which includes improvements to Ely North Junction) and a business case will be compiled by May 2019.

### Waterbeach

It has been reported in the local newspapers that plans for a new station at Waterbeach have now been passed by South Cambridgeshire District Council (subject to consideration by the Secretary of State) with the developers aiming to deliver a new station by 2021. Network Rail have confirmed that it is still the intention to lengthen platforms at the existing station to take 8 car trains but that timescales are still to be confirmed.

### Cambridge North

When the station was designed one of FLUA's concerns was the absence of full length canopies along the platforms as it was felt this could lead to potentially dangerous overcrowding and blocked stairwells during bad weather. Although not an ideal solution, additional shelters have now been installed.

During disruption the station has been used as an alternative location to Cambridge for operating rail replacement buses as there is more space available and it is easier to access.

### Cambridge

A number of bicycle thefts have raised concerns about security at Cambridge Cycle Point. This purpose-built complex, which is the largest of its kind at a UK train station, provides undercover spaces for 2,850 bicycles and is monitored by 84 CCTV cameras. Greater Anglia which provides the facility says: "When we were planning the new cycle parking at Cambridge Station, our aim was to build a safe, secure and brightly lit place for cyclists to park their bikes. The number of thefts from Cambridge Cycle Point is very low, and we will continue to work closely with British Transport Police to drive the figure even lower. Customers can look out for free cycle marking events in the area. When thefts do occur, we support the police with their investigations wherever possible." Travellers should note that cyclists leave their bikes here at their own risk.

# Essential Maintenance

There are only two sections of the Fen Line that are cleared for 90mph running and it is ironic that one of these, the single line stretch between Downham Market and Littleport, is notorious for being the roughest part of the route. One regular traveller says at times he has “feared for his life” on this section and another, who happened to be sitting forward in the seat of a Class 365 a few years ago, received such a jolt that she is still suffering with her back today. The track is, of course, regularly inspected by the civil engineers and especially when our drivers, who know every dip and bump better than anyone, report anything out of the ordinary. The problem here is very much a historic and regional one; laying railways or indeed roads across the fens was never going to be an easy task due to the soft conditions and the shrinkage that occurs particularly in dry weather. (When Network Rail were driving test piles into the ground at the proposed site for the new Waterbeach station they had to go down over 30m before they reached solid ground!) Balancing the needs of engineering staff with later last trains and earlier departures means that the amount of actual working time on weekday nights is often little more than an hour or two and this sometimes leads to the cancellation of late evening trains in addition to planned weekend work. Engineers were working on the section near Littleport on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> September but at the time of writing a 50mph speed restriction is still in place.



*No Trains Today - King's Lynn Station - Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> September*

# Other News

## **Rail Replacement Ruination!**

One of our members who used the replacement bus between Downham Market and Ely on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> September (see above) was less than impressed with what was on offer. The journey out was anything but peaceful: “Radio 2 was obligatory throughout the saloon and the driver needed a lesson in presentation and customer care skills” whilst on the return trip it seems passengers were lucky to get back at all: “The coach was 18 years old, had 57 seats (very uncomfortable), the driver needed guidance in finding Downham station, then promptly drove past it!”. Perhaps this wasn't surprising when the coach operator providing the service came all the way from Hitchin!

## **Delay Repay on Greater Anglia services**

Greater Anglia is hoping to offer a similar compensation package to that given by GTR. They write: “We continue to work hard on the project to try and secure an agreement to introduce Delay Repay 15 for customers on Greater Anglia, which would see compensation become available for any delays over 15 minutes, as opposed to the 30 minute threshold currently in place. A further submission has been made to the Department for Transport and we are doing all we can to assist them and reach a positive outcome”. If you are travelling on a delayed Greater Anglia service make sure you get the correct form (GTR forms are not valid) or go to GA's website to register your claim.

# Subscription Renewals

**If your subscription expires with this issue, please use the renewal form enclosed. Your continued support helps us to keep up the pressure for longer trains and more frequent services on the Fen Line.**

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