

Milton Keynes and Bletchley Rail User Group
Minutes of the Meeting of Tuesday 1 November 2005

Present: Nicky Simpson, Louise Green, Alan Francis, Sean Hickey, Stuart Nightingale, Robert Prosser, Andrew Couldrake, Andrew Fisher, Steve Leyland (Virgin Trains), Paul Bryan (Silverlink Trains)

Apologies: Philip Lawton, Robert Webb, Peter Smith

1. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.
2. Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting:
 - Nicky reported that an email address has been set up for the group and can be accessed via yahoo.co.uk. The address is MKBletchleyRUG@yahoo.co.uk
 - Andrew Couldrake agreed to set up a web page for the group.
 - Nicky raised the issue of extension days rather than refunds for North bound commuters. Steve Leyland agreed to talk to Julian Drury and will report back. Paul Bryan informed the meeting that he had spoken to Julian Drury regarding this issue and it cannot be done under the current franchise, which has just been extended to 2007.
 - Nicky also mentioned that northbound commuters may not be aware that they need to send their season tickets to Virgin customer services to get a refund for lost days. This should be advertised in the station or by ticket office staff. Steve Leyland agreed to look into this and report back.
 - Paul Bryan has spoken to Julian Drury regarding Sunday services on the Bletchley to Bedford line. Julian has been in contact with their Rail User Group. Whether or not this can go ahead depends on the willingness of the relevant local authorities to underwrite the service and so far there has been no response.
 - The committee asked if there had been any progress regarding the coach service between MKC and London on a Sunday morning. Steve Leyland reported that Network Rail pay for the coaches but only on a North/South basis. They will not pay for other "routes". He advised the group to lobby their MPs.
 - Julian Drury has agreed to look at the gap in the service for Bletchley commuters leaving London between 16.24 and 17.04. Paul Bryan suggested that the 16.58 include an additional stop at Bletchley but Louise Green stated that if this were to happen, extra carriages would be needed as this train is often full and standing.
 - Julian Drury has also agreed to consider allowing the 07.26 MKC to London to stop at Bletchley rather than Watford. He will need to discuss this with his colleagues at Watford and therefore it will not be possible to make changes in time for the new timetable in December.
 - The committee agreed that the most important issues are to re-introduce non-stop services between MKC and London, and to improve the journey times north bound to Birmingham. Steve Leyland suggested he bring some working timetables, sectional running times, and information on submission dates for new timetables to the next meeting. The committee agreed this was an excellent idea.

- Paul Bryan reported that the problems with announcements on Bletchley station have now been rectified.

2. Philip Lawton emailed to raise the issue of heating in the waiting rooms on the platforms at MKC. He reported that some were blowing tepid air and others were not working at all. Paul Bryan agreed to investigate this and any that are not working will be fixed. He will report back.

3. Nicky Simpson reported that she had been asked by a fellow north bound commuter to raise the issue of announcements on trains and platforms for those with sight difficulties. It is extremely important for commuters to be informed if the train is in reverse formation. In addition, if a train is late an estimate of the revised arrival time is helpful. Steve Leyland stated that he can arrange for announcements to be made on trains. He was less sure that he could make the necessary changes regarding announcements on the platform but agreed to start a campaign on this issue.

4. Philip Lawton had suggested the idea of a Christmas gathering. After some discussion it was agreed that the committee would hold its January 2006 meeting in a room where "refreshments" would be available. A venue would be decided on at the December meeting.

5. Any Other Business:

- Alan Francis reported that he has flagged up the difficulties with the proposed new platform at Bletchley, with Network Rail. They have agreed to look at it again.
- Nicky Simpson will write to Tony Francis and Louise Green will send him a copy of the minutes.
- Alan Francis informed the committee that he has been asked to report back our views on the types of blockades we would prefer when the re-modelling of MKC goes ahead. The committee confirmed that it would generally prefer a small number of longer blockades but this question will be put up on our web site.
- Louise Green asked Steve Leyland if Virgin staff are allowed to board and alight from trains that regular commuters are not. Virgin staff have been seen getting off trains that stop north bound at MKC during the evening peak. He confirmed that some staff would have legitimate reasons for doing this, but not all.
- Louise Green asked why the TV screens are switched on before 6am when platform announcements cannot be made. Paul Bryan noted this point and will investigate.
- Andrew Fisher reported that he has obtained the necessary paper work for opening a bank account and he asked whether the committee would prefer a current or deposit account. After some discussion, the committee agreed that a current account would be adequate and suggested the Co-operative Bank. The four signatories will be the Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer and Secretary.
- Steve Leyland reported that Virgin Train performance has recently been good but there is a possibility of disruption on Thursday 3 November 2005 due to the severe weather warnings currently in place.

8. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 6 December 2005 at 19.30 at MK Chamber of Commerce