

Milton Keynes and Bletchley Rail User Group
Minutes of the Meeting of Tuesday 7 February 2006

Present: Nicky Simpson, Louise Green, Andrew Fisher, Andrew Couldrake, Stuart Nightingale, Robert Prosser, Alan Francis, Peter J Smith, Sean Hickey, Robert Webb, Paul Bryan (Silverlink Trains), Steve Leyland (Virgin Trains), Martin Phillips (Business Manager, London, Virgin Trains), Tony Sadler (Head of Operational Planning, Virgin Trains)

Apologies: Philip Lawton

1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Outstanding Issues

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

Sean Hickey apologised that the Chamber of Commerce meeting room had not been made available last month.

Nicky Simpson confirmed that she had not sent out any letters to the Department of Transport but she intends to do so before resigning as Chairman. **Action: NS**

Robert Prosser emailed Julian Drury to express the Group's support for the proposed Marks and Spencer outlet in the station building. Julian has reported back that the owners of the building, Zurich Insurance, will not agree to any new tenancy that provides off-sales of alcohol. M&S see this as an essential part of the franchise offer and therefore the two parties have reached an impasse.

2. Update from Silverlink Train Services

2.1 Paul Bryan reported that the performance for January has been outstanding. The public performance measure was the second highest ever and the charter performance stood at 95.02%. Andrew Fisher commented that the performance is good due to the large amount of slack in the timetable.

2.2 A community notice board will be put up at Milton Keynes and Bletchley. The poster the group has supplied will be printed and placed on those notice boards. Paul will show the group a draft poster for approval as soon as it is ready. **Action: PB**

2.3 There are now four ticket machines in the MK station foyer although there have been some problems processing credit card payments with one of them.

2.4 All ticket windows are now open and in addition the information desk can sell tickets for purchase with a credit card.

2.5 Andrew Couldrake reported that the 18.22 is overcrowded on occasions. Paul Bryan noted this.

2.6 Robert Prosser asked how the no smoking ban will be enforced. Paul Bryan informed the group that extra notices have been put up and, when staffing levels permit, a floor walker is employed to enforce the ban.

3. Update from Virgin Train Services

3.1 Steve Leyland reported that Virgin have achieved record breaking performance levels.

3.2 The Rail Passenger Council is now known as "Passenger Focus". This organisation has link managers and Julie Warburton covers the West Coast Mainline. She has expressed an interest in attending MKBRUG meetings and Steve Leyland confirmed he is happy to act as a go between and invite her to one of the group's meetings.

3.3 Nicky Simpson asked if the 5% discount applies to season ticket holders, given that the annual average punctuality performance is still below the target. Steve Leyland was unsure and will ask a colleague to contact Nicky. (Steve confirmed via e-mail that the discount does not apply because VT are within 3% of their target.)

Action: SL

3.4 Nicky Simpson asked if there was a reason why trains are slowing between Coventry and International. Tony Sadler confirmed that this may be caused by the Virgin train having to wait for a slower Southern train to pass. There are no particular engineering works.

3.5 Steve Leyland introduced Tony Sadler who is Head of Operational Planning for Virgin. He agreed to answer queries regarding timetabling. Tony confirmed that the timetable is devised taking into account the number of trains available, a fixed amount of train crew, the complicated contractual obligations and the set amount of track capacity. He also confirmed that, effectively, the timetable has to be approved by the Department for Transport who currently veto everything Virgin Trains does. The Virgin Franchise is being re-negotiated and once this franchise has been settled, Virgin should have more flexibility. A decision should be made by the end of the year and the franchise will run until 2012.

3.6 Alan Francis asked what Virgin would like to see happen when MK has the extra track and platform. Martin Phillips confirmed that Virgin want to shorten journey times in the 2008 timetable. Alan asked how the group can feed their views into the 2008 timetable. Steve Leyland stated that we must consult with Passenger Focus and write to our MPs and the DfT.

4. Focus Topic

The Committee counted the discussion on timetabling as this meeting's focus topic.

5. Feedback from Alan Francis

5.1 Alan reported that he had attended a meeting about the development of MKC station. This meeting had been attended by Simon Maple, a senior member of staff

from Network Rail, who stated that the MK and Bletchley works are unlikely to be completed by 2008 and therefore an interim timetable will be used. The work will cause some disruption to services in 2007.

5.2 The funding of an extra bay and platform at MKC for the Bedford, and possibly Oxford, services is in doubt. Network Rail are happy to do the work but they are looking for £2.3m and this must be sought from local councils.

5.3 MK Partnership want to carry out a rail user survey for Bletchley and Alan Francis has asked them to include MKC and Wolverton also.

5.4 A proposal has been made to remove Platform 6 at Bletchley and have Bedford trains stop on the flyover instead, which is about 300 yards from the station. Alan Francis has been told that this is the only viable location as the other sections of land are not flat. Alan does not believe this to be the case and has challenged this. He is waiting for a response.

5.5 Alan Francis and Peter Smith attended a Passenger Focus meeting recently on behalf of Wolverton Rail User Group. MKBRUG was not invited and the group is unsure why. Alan confirmed that we need to establish a link with Kerry Williamson who has responsibility for the West Coast Main line and she should be invited to future meetings. Peter was concerned that Passenger Focus was not really clear about what they are doing.

6. Group Admin' and Appointment of New Chair

6.1 Andrew Fisher confirmed that he now has the necessary details to open a bank account and this will be done soon. **Action: AF**

6.2 Nicky Simpson informed the Committee that she is resigning as Chair with effect from the end of the March. Nicky is moving to a new job in Kent and will no longer be commuting. The Group thanked her for her work and wished her well. She asked the Committee if anyone would like to stand as Chair and Peter Smith nominated Alan Francis. Alan was concerned that Phyllis Starkey may object as he has stood against her in election but the Committee felt this should not hinder his appointment. With the full support of the Committee, Alan agreed to act as Chair for the time being.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 4 April 2006 at 19.30