

Milton Keynes and Bletchley Rail User Group

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

Saturday 28 October 2006

Present: Louise Green, Alan Francis, Michael Green, Sam Hodder (Govia Ltd), Mark Steward (Route Director, Silverlink County), Paul Bryan (Group Station Manager, Silverlink County), Steve Leyland (Virgin Trains), Peter J Smith, Phyllis Starkey (MP for Milton Keynes SW), Andrew Couldrake, Philip Lawton, Andrew Fisher

Apologies: Chris Wright (OBRAC)

1. Minutes of the 2005 AGM

Steve Leyland pointed out that he had attended the previous AGM but he was not shown on the list of attendees. Otherwise the minutes of the previous AGM were approved.

2. Election of Committee

Alan Francis confirmed that all current members of the Committee were happy to stand and those present supported this.

The membership fee is currently £5 and it was agreed that it should remain at this level. Peter Smith stated that it was important that we organise collection of the membership fee and the Committee agreed to arrange this at the next meeting.

Alan Francis declared the AGM closed and introduced the guest speakers.

3. Dr Phyllis Starkey MP

Although Dr Starkey was not scheduled to make a presentation, Alan Francis asked if she would like to raise any issues. Dr Starkey reported that she has set up a meeting with the new rail minister. At this meeting she will be putting forward our wishes for the 2008 timetable together with those of the local council. There has been some activity regarding the East/West rail link. A private company is apparently interested in building along parts of the existing railway and it has been suggested that funds for the East/West rail link could be raised by levying a

charge on developers building on the route. The publication of a study on the East/West link has been delayed as the writers feel it is imperative to have all the questions it raises answered before going to press.

Peter Smith asked Dr Starkey if she has heard anything about the development of Willington Rowing Lake. She reported that she has heard various views on this. People in the locality think that it is not relevant.

Alan Francis assured the meeting that the group's requests have been fed to Dr Starkey and she will put these to the minister when she meets him. Indeed, she has already raised some concerns on the floor of the House.

(Dr Starkey had to leave for a British Legion Meeting.)

Alan Francis explained to the meeting that major work is planned for MKC and Bletchley stations. A planning application is now with Milton Keynes Council and can be viewed by the public at their offices. A new line is proposed at the back of platform 5 together with a through track on platform 1. The plans also include a short bay platform which will allow trains from Bedford to come to MKC. This would also allow Oxford/Cambridge trains to stop at MKC if that project gets the go ahead. There will be re-signalling work and the platform for Bedford trains at Bletchley will be moved to the flyover.

MKBRUG has written to the DfT outlining what we would like to see in the new West Midlands Franchise and the 2008 timetable. We are awaiting the outcome.

4. Mark Steward – Route Director for Silverlink County

Mark introduced himself and explained that he was originally Operations Manager and had then moved to Route Director of Silverlink Metro. He is now Route Director for County. He confirmed that he would like to be involved in the work of the MKBRUG where possible.

He reported that the PPM for Silverlink County was 86.3 in 2005 and had risen to 91.0 in 2006. They are extremely pleased with their performance and noted that they were sixth overall in the league table. A new depot opened at Kings Heath this year, looking after Desiros. The 321s have performed extremely well and are, in fact, the best in the rail industry. Bletchley depot will remain open at least until the new franchise begins.

Andrew Couldrake asked if the timetable could be tweaked and Mark confirmed that it could but only minor changes were possible. He explained that from the December timetable an extra train will be introduced on Saturday, bringing the number per hour from 5 to 6.

Mark reported that a special Leaf Fall timetable has been put in place to ensure trains arrive on time. This timetable builds in extra time to allow for the extra acceleration and braking time required. The Class 321s have sanders fitted which aid adhesion to the rails. Class 350s are built with sanders. Computers release sand at lower brake capacity. The Class 150s (Bletchley to Bedford) also have sanders fitted which work on driver demand.

Alan Francis then invited questions. Philip Lawton asked Mark Steward why, if the service is so good, are they not keeping the franchise. Mark confirmed that Silverlink had not been shortlisted but suggested that the RUG liaises with the shortlisted candidates to explain what they want from their service. Alan Francis agreed to copy the Group's letter to Dr Starkey, to Sam Hodder at Govia.

5. Steve Leyland – Virgin Train Services

Steve reported that there had been a 14% year on year growth on the West Coast route. The airline/railway split has begun to recover and is now 70:30 in favour of rail on the Manchester route. This has presented some problems in terms of overcrowding and Virgin are currently building a business case to extend Pendolinos to 10 or even 11 or 12 cars. The Virgin franchise runs until 2012. Performance has been at around 90% for some time, dipping a little on occasion.

From the 2009 timetable there will be an hourly service to Manchester, Birmingham and Chester with additional peak service trains to Liverpool and Scotland. The peak service in general remains largely unchanged.

Philip Lawton asked if there were more paths in the morning peak that would allow for fast services from MKC to London. Steve responded by stating that in 2004 some rail colleagues did hide behind the SRA stating that the SRA would not allow them to run fast services. Steve confirmed that he had not done this and that even without such direction, Virgin may well have taken the same course of action as the Virgin market is long distance.

Peter Smith explained to Sam Hodder that Virgin have a block on using cheap tickets during the peak out of Euston where as

Silverlink do not. He asked her to report that rail users would not wish Silverlink's policy to change. He also pointed out the differential fares between Silverlink and Virgin which leisure users in particular would like to keep.

6. Sam Hodder – Communications Director, Govia Ltd (shortlisted for the Silverink Franchise)

Sam explained that she was not attending the meeting in order to make a presentation but wanted to hear what the Group has to say. She will take our comments back to her company.

7. Close

Alan Francis closed the meeting by thanking everyone for attending. He thanked Paul Bryan in particular for the use of his conference room. Paul informed the Group that they would be welcome to hold their monthly meetings at the station if they wished to. He also confirmed that the RUG poster will be up in MKC and Bletchley stations within the next couple of weeks.