

Milton Keynes and Bletchley Rail User Group

Minutes of the Meeting of Tuesday 6 February 2007

Present: Louise Green, Alan Francis, Andrew Fisher, Sean Hickey, Andrew Couldrake, Stuart Nightingale, Steve Leyland (Virgin Trains)

Apologies: Paul Bryan (Silverlink Trains)

1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Item 2.2 Andrew Couldrake asked that it was noted that the 17.55 and the 18.23 are now also crossing over to the slow line at Hemel Hempstead. Steve Leyland agreed to have a look at the working timetable to see if there was any particular reason for this. Paul Bryan had also agreed to investigate this at the previous meeting. **Action: SL/PB**

It was noted that the Group still needed to post details of our accounts on the web. Andrew Fisher will send these to Andrew Couldrake for posting on the internet. **Action: AF/AC**

The minutes of the previous meeting were then approved.

2. Update From Silverlink Trains

Paul Bryan had sent his apologies. His email also reported that overall, performance on Silverlink is good with charter performance reaching 95% this period and overall performance for all services reaching 92.3%. New lifts are up and running on platforms 3 and 4 at MKC and the station service lift will be completed by the end of March. A new display stand in the main booking hall is giving information about the development of the city of Milton Keynes.

4. Update From Virgin Trains

Steve Leyland reported that performance was at 81% for the period just ended. This figure is due to the disruption caused on one day due to strong winds. This figure is an improvement on last year but still rather low.

5. Service on 18th January 2007

Steve Leyland reported the sequence of events on 18th January. At the beginning of the day Network Rail had imposed a blanket speed restriction of 50mph due to the strong winds. Trains were therefore taking twice as long to complete their journeys. By lunch time the winds were much stronger and ten trains were trapped. There were numerous overhead line faults and trees on the line. The service was then suspended and there was no indication when it would resume. Steve Leyland confirmed that an error had been made with the 17.30 from Euston to MKC. He had checked the train for capacity but only as far as Coach E. In addition, the announcer had stated that the train would stop at Watford and MKC and this should not have been done. From that moment onwards, Steven instructed the announcer to state that trains were only stopping at Wolverhampton, Rugby etc. Watford and MKC were only added if there were still spaces on the train. Trains were then sent out full and the system worked well.

The Committee noted that Paul Bryan and Anna-Maria Izzard had done an extremely good job that day and had been seen working hard at Euston to get everyone home. The Group sent a vote of thanks to Silverlink and Virgin.

6. Parliamentary Questions re Platform Length

Alan Francis reported that Mark Lancaster had asked a question in Parliament regarding the policy of not allowing Virgin Trains to pick up commuters at MKC. The Secretary of State's answer implied that this was not possible because the platforms are not long enough. Platform length is not the issue. Platforms are 15 carriages long, an extended Pendolino will only be 11, so will easily fit. Alan has been in touch with Mark Lancaster and he is submitting some detailed questions to flush this out. These usually take two to three weeks to answer.

7. Virgin Trains Set Down Only Policy

Andrew Couldrake reported that on Monday three conservative representatives had been handing out leaflets at MKC regarding the railway service. This leaflet stated that they did not think the "set down only" policy was valid as there is no alternative fast service. The Committee was pleased to see that this was receiving publicity and that together with the parliamentary questions, this issue was still being highlighted.

8. Milton Keynes Stations Working Group

Alan Francis reported that work on the extra platform at MKC has begun. The slope behind platform 5 has been cleared. When the parking spaces behind the station are closed down,

there will be a net loss of 20 spaces. Talks about a second multi-storey car park have begun. The brick bridge to the north of the station will be demolished over the Christmas closure this year and the new one is due to open in May 2008. The costing of platform 5 for Bedford trains at Bletchley is still to be carried out.

9. Any Other Business

Andrew Couldrake stated that he endorses Mark Lancaster's efforts and he hopes that he will be able to attend one of our future meetings.

Alan Francis confirmed that he has not been able to find contact details for one of the bidders for the new franchise. Once the preferred bidder is known, the Committee will arrange to talk to them.

10. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 6 March at 19.30