

29th January 2009

History of MK Rail Users

The rail users group now known as **MK Rail Users** was formed in 2004 following a timetable change that failed to meet the needs of local commuters.

The loss of fast trains saw commuters facing an extra two hours per week commuting. A protest meeting, attended by Dr Phyllis Starkey MP and representatives of the Department for Transport, Network Rail, Virgin Trains and Silverlink, attracted over 250 rail users. Following the anger and frustration expressed at that meeting, it was agreed to set up a user group to ensure that the voice of rail users would be heard and improved services campaigned for (including restoration of the axed Milton Keynes -Gatwick services).

Subsequently, the group has met regularly, firstly as the Milton Keynes & Bletchley Rail Users Group (MKBRUG) and for the last year as the **MK Rail Users**. Throughout this period the group has had regular contact with the train operating companies and maintained contact with Milton Keynes Council, MK Partnership and the local MPs.

Since the formation of **MK Rail Users**, the West Coast Mainline modernisation has been completed with £120M of investment secured to provide greater flexibility and extra track capacity at Milton Keynes Central. It was hoped that this would be the stimulus for the re-instatement of fast services to Euston. It may be that the formation of MKBRUG was the catalyst for this extra investment.

As there is a Wolverton Rail User Group, a Bedford Bletchley Rail User Group and an Oxon and Bucks Rail User Committee (pressing for services to Oxford), **MK Rail Users** concentrates on main line issues whilst supporting the aims of these other, but no less important, groups.

For over 3 years the Milton Keynes & Bletchley Rail Users Group campaigned for re-instatement of lost non-stop services to and from Euston in the peak period. The announcement of a new platform and track layout enhancements at MKC, an investment supported by the MKBRUG, suggested that the battle had been won. Indeed press statements confirmed the group's belief. However, publication of the December 2008 timetable in August 2007 failed to deliver, not only the fast non-stop commuter services and re-instatement of lost Bletchley services, but also cut back on destinations to the north served by Virgin trains direct from Milton Keynes Central.

At the groups AGM in October 2007, presentations by Virgin Trains and the new franchisee, London Midland, gave the group, and therefore the public generally, little hope that rail services from Milton Keynes would improve. Accordingly the group attracted new members and in December a revitalised Committee was elected headed by commuter of 10 years standing, Philip Lawton. The new Committee also changed its name to **MK Rail Users** to more accurately reflect its role in representing the wider community who use Milton Keynes Central & Bletchley stations.

The last 12 months have seen the group increase its engagement with all the rail stakeholders and to date have had regular meetings with London Midland and our MPs, together with representations to the Department for Transport, Virgin Trains, Milton Keynes Council and MK Partnership.

In this day of increased web activity a website is essential and 12 months ago the group's first website was launched. designed to give the travelling public the information they need about rail travel in our area.

29th January however sees a change of emphasis in the group. Having worked quietly, but tirelessly behind the scenes, the deterioration in services experienced over the last 12 months has brought greater focus to the group and a realisation that its voice has to be heard if services are to be maintained and improved.

Accordingly the Committee of **MK Rail Users** has now embarked upon a campaign to bring back effective rail travel to our area and launched in tandem the CAmpaign for Real Rail and a new livelier website designed to give the travelling public a greater insight into what is happening to their railway service.