

TWO MORE YEARS

Silverlink awarded two year franchise extension

This October saw the end of the original 7½ year franchise term for Silverlink, the operator of the branch line. The SRA has extended this franchise by two years until October 17 2006. Terms of the franchise remain largely the same, certainly in respect of the Abbey line.

Alterations to the franchise make provision for Silverlink's greater role as a commuter carrier, especially from Milton Keynes, where Virgin has ceased to call in peak hours, much to the anger of many commuters from the town. Initially Silverlink is having to use locomotive hauled carriages (there is an irony – they are ex-Virgin carriages!) to bolster services until December 2005, when new 12 car 'Desiro' trains will be delivered. Many platforms between Euston and Northampton have been lengthened to accommodate these 12 carriage trains. Public subsidy for the two year period is set at £120.2 million!

However, from the September timetable change, Silverlink ceased to run through to Birmingham, and now operates only as

far as Northampton, with services between Northampton and Birmingham being operated by Central trains, with some very bad connection times. This has all been at the insistence of the SRA in the name of efficient timetabling and to make the most of the new faster Pendolino trains. This is all well and good for long distance passengers between London and Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow, but what about passengers at intermediate stations - it's hardly going to encourage more people onto the trains, when you either have to change trains or pay a higher fare to travel with Virgin!

There is certain to be yet more upheaval however, as the Government has indicated that it wants to reduce significantly (from 26 to 19) the number of franchises by 2007. Central trains is to be split up and divided between Chiltern Railways, Midland Mainline, Virgin Cross Country, the new Northern franchise, and Silverlink. So Silverlink could end up operating through to Birmingham once again!

Ian Hibbert

SANTA IS COMING...

Silverlink is this year running promotions in the run up to Christmas. This is an exciting development and is very welcome on the Abbey Line.

During all the Saturdays before Christmas, that is 4th, 11th, 18th December, you can travel between St Albans and Watford (or any station on the line to Watford or St Albans) with 2 people travelling for the price of 1!

Travel is valid on any train on Saturdays in December to take advantage of the 2 for 1 offer. There are NO railcard discounts in conjunction with this offer.

On Saturday 18th December, the Abbey Flyer will be a Santa Special. There'll be a Santa's Grotto, Great Balloon Art and FREE goody bags and toys for the kids – all on your journey! See the panel below for all the departure times.

Please bring all your children, friends and relatives, have a great trip to Watford or St Albans and enjoy a day of shopping and sight seeing. Please support this venture, tell friends about ABFLY, the Santa Specials and 2 for 1 deals. Come on – let's have some fun!

SANTA SPECIALS – SAT 18TH DECEMBER

From Watford	From St Albans
0946	0922
1031	1007
1116	1052
1201	1137
1246	1222

2 for 1
FARES

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

After 7 years I would like to stand down as Membership Secretary and wonder if there is any member who would like to take over? Most of the information is entered on a database (unless members have specifically requested otherwise) so someone with a computer would be able to take over that file - but don't let that put off anyone who does not have one as 'hard' copies are held as well. Anyone who would like to volunteer please contact me for more details on 01727 872036 or e-mail at xfo28@dial.pipex.com

Tricia Jennings

CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR SERVICES

Please make a note of the alteration to train services over the Christmas and New Year period :

- Fri 24th Dec early shutdown around 9 p.m.
- Sat 25th Dec Christmas Day – NO SERVICE
- Sun 26th Dec Boxing Day – NO SERVICE
- Mon 27th Dec SAT service with later start around 8 a.m.
- Tues 28th Dec Normal SAT service
- Wed 29th Dec Normal SAT service
- Thur 30th Dec Normal SAT service
- Fri 31st Dec Normal SAT service
- Sat 1st Jan SAT service with later start around 8 a.m.
- Sun 2nd Jan Normal SUN service
- Mon 3rd Jan Normal SAT service
- Tues 4th Jan Normal services resume

DECEMBER TIMETABLE CHANGE

There are more changes to the December Timetable, effective from Sunday 12th December. The majority of changes relate to early morning trains Monday to Friday on the Flyer. There are also slight changes in timings of connecting trains. Please study the pocket timetable carefully, especially for trains to and from St Albans in the morning Monday to Friday. Saturday and Sunday Flyer times are unchanged.

The first three departures from Watford and St Albans have all moved one minute earlier from all stations. The 0816 departure from Watford and 0837 departure from St Albans have both moved 7 minutes earlier to 0809 and 0830 respectively.

MEMBERS' MEETING

On Tuesday 9th November there was a Meeting for ABFLY members at St Stephen's Parish Centre, Bricket Wood. There were around 30 members present, quite a good turn out considering the inclement weather!

Invited guests present were Julian Drury (Silverlink County Route Director), Clare Costello (Strategic Rail Authority) and Geraint Hughes (Hertfordshire County Council).

Mr Drury gave a presentation on the status of Silverlink services. A train is deemed to be late if it arrives at its final destination 5 minutes or more late. For the Abbey line 95.4% of trains have been on time, with just 0.24% of trains cancelled. As a comparison, of mainline County services, 64% were on time, with 1.85% cancellations.

Mr Drury told of how many problems after the new timetable in September had been caused by faulty new infrastructure. There is more engineering due in 2005 on the mainline, and this will sometimes require closure of two of the four tracks. He confirmed that Silverlink welcomed the choice of the Abbey line as one of five Community Railway pilots.

A number of members asked questions of Mr Drury relating to timetabling, fares and integration of buses. He agreed to investigate these and report back to committee. We will let you what he comes back with. The issue of Sunday closures was raised again, particularly with reference to the use of the line for skidpan training. Mr Drury confirmed that Silverlink had asked Network Rail to look for a suitable alternative venue.

Clare Costello of the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) gave a presentation about the limited future of the SRA and the development of the Community Rail Partnership and Pilot. She explained how the SRA's responsibilities are to be carved up between different bodies and what the SRA saw as would be coming from the CRPs.

Geraint Hughes gave an overview of Hertfordshire County Council's role in the CRP. He confirmed HCC's support of the Pilot and Partnership, both financially and for a definite period of 5 years from July 2005. Mr Hughes identified the following initial projects as an action plan:

- Raise awareness of the CRP identity through the development of a logo, website and a launch event.
- Promote the service to increase revenue collected.
- Work on infrastructure, including links with other local transport and station enhancements.
- Promote community links with for example local businesses

to adopt stations and consider a use for the building at Bricket Wood station.

The evening was very useful for members to meet some of the people actually in charge of our railway and they were able to ask questions of them and, mostly, get direct answers.

ABFLY GOES NATIONWIDE!

As you may have heard for yourself, ABFLY Acting Chairman, John Webster, was interviewed for the Today programme for BBC Radio 4 broadcast on the morning of Monday 22nd November. The Department of Transport was officially launching their Community Rail Partnerships Scheme on that date with the now seven pilot projects confirmed. John spoke to Sarah Nelson of BBC Radio 4 on St Albans Abbey station. He was asked how and what groups like ABFLY could do to increase patronage. John spoke about the imminent Santa Specials as just one example of getting people more involved with their railway and attracting more passengers to the line. He also said that this initiative would promote the line and give it a much higher profile.

The Today programme also went on to interview the Secretary of State for Transport, Alastair Darling and John Hibbs, Professor of Transport Management at the University of Central England. Mr Gibbs was very sceptical about the future of the lines that are involved in this project. He believed that eventually they would all have to close anyway. To him, their benefits could never outweigh their costs. We must prove him wrong!

From what Alastair Darling said in his interview it was clear that the Government is willing to try to help rural and branch lines to be more profitable and attract more passengers. However he made it clear that if they did not improve, they would face closure. As he said, '...we cannot be in the business of carting fresh air round the country...[but]...if you can make a go of it then we will support you'. Food for thought indeed!

THANK YOU!

Since the last Newsletter and Members' Meeting, we have had a number of people offering their services, wanting to serve on Committee – but we still need someone who could be membership secretary – see front page.

We would love to hear from frequent users of the line. Perhaps you are a member already and know others who use the train every day who might be interested, or be persuaded they should be interested!, in joining ABFLY and helping our cause.

If you have any complaints, problems or suggestions that you would like us to approach Silverlink or Network Rail about then please do get in touch. Contact details for Committee members are in the box at the bottom of this page.

Lastly, Committee would like to wish all our members a very happy Christmas & New Year – thank you for your support!

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