



The Abbey Flyer Users' Group.

The Abbey Flyer Newsletter

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Govia wins the New Franchise

Govia have been successful in gaining the new West Midlands Franchise, which runs until September 2015.

The franchise will be known as London Midland 'Express' or 'City', with new trains and station facilities promised, including smartcards, full staff training and new technology.



The franchise will combine Silverlink County and Central Trains, as Silverlink Metro will become a

separate franchise run by MTR Laing.

The timetable will be similar initially, but 30 year old class 313s and 321s currently used on the branch will be phased out.

Other features will include improved car parks with variable charging, environmental improvements and the novel 'Parry People mover'.

BREAKING NEWS

Industrial action is planned for all Silverlink services on Mondays 30th July, 13th and 27th August. Please check before travelling.

The Editor.

Passing Loop Update

Steady progress is being made with the Passing Loop. Since designation of the Abbey Line in June 2005 as a 'Community Railway', a small client group, consisting of Network Rail (NR), Herts County Council (HCC), the Department for Transport (DfT) and Silverlink Trains, has been working to put together a business case for a passing loop at Bricket Wood - a long-held key ambition of ABFLY.

The current proposal is for a half-hourly service running during the day

Weekdays, with an hourly service evenings and Sundays. Later trains would also feature. The expected cost is around £2 million, this money already earmarked under the HCC Local Transport Plan. The business case was submitted to the DfT some months ago.

On Tuesday 26th June, however, HCC signed a 'Basic Service Agreement' with NR, which means the project is taken to 'Grip 3' planning level, and detailed design work has be-

gun. The results of this work are expected at the end of September. In the meantime, we wait to hear whether the DfT will approve in principle the extra services.

Originally we had expected to see an announcement when the new West Midlands franchisee was announced, but none was forthcoming. Things should become clearer by the autumn, but ABFLY welcomes this positive step by HCC.

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ABFLY members David Horton and John Crowhurst, along with Alissa Ede (Abbey Line CRP officer) attended a conference on 7th June, organised by the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP). This brought together the great and good of the Community Rail movement to answer the vexed question, "What next for Community Rail?"

The keynote address was given by Rail Minister, Tom Harris MP, who reiterated the government's support for the community rail movement, and restated the fact that there was no agenda for railway closures. The need for detailed research into market segments on community rail lines was highlighted by Anthony Smith, Director of Passenger Focus, to provide a base for future marketing development. Neil Buxton (General Manager, ACoRP) and Paul Salveson (Northern Rail) both talked about the need for the Community Rail movement to 'move on' and engage with topical issues such as the environment, sustainability and diversity, or risk being seen as superficial.


Chris Watson, CRP officer for the 'Poacher' Line, expressed doubts about progress on the government's Community Rail Development Strategy (CRDS), launched in 2004. It suffers from a lack of funding, particularly by Regional Development Authorities (RDAs), and with the strategy nominally lasting for 5 years, there is a 'ticking time bomb' perception. The re-franchising process, he claims, messes up everything, and Network Rail are somewhat impenetrable as an organisation.

Answering these accusations were Jerry Swift, Account Director for Community Rail at Network Rail, and David Hibbs from the DfT. Mr Swift pointed out that, despite the many challenges on the main line railway, Network Rail are very much involved with the movement. They are especially interested in the use of lightweight rail vehicles, widely used in Europe.

A trial of 'tram-trains' in the north of England is expected to be announced this coming autumn. Could such vehicles have implications for the future of the Abbey Line? More about this in another issue. David Hibbs spoke about the 'ticking time bomb', reiterating Tom Harris's statement that there was no agenda for closures, and no time limit attached to the CRDS.

Finally, Stephen Sears, of the dynamic Ealing Community Transport (ECT) group, restated that not enough had been achieved of the original CRDS objectives. He put forward some radical ideas of how things could change, from micro-franchising to rail re-openings. He also called for ACoRP to become more aggressive, and to play a greater strategic role.

Around the Line



The Post Office have announced the closure of 2500 sub post offices, which will impact locally.

Network Rail have cut back trees within 6 metres of the line.

The CRP are promoting 'Tintin' at the Watford Palace Theatre, July 28th-August 11th, with a '2 for 1' offer.

Punctuality on the line is now at 99.4% which is one of the best results nationally.

A landscaping scheme is also planned for Park Street by May 2008.

More local improvements are now complete, including Watford cycle racks and How Wood shelter.

Abfly were represented at the Prae Wood school Summer Fete in June.

The summer timetable is unchanged, except for a peak leaf fall timetable, running about 2 minutes earlier, this Autumn.

The new 346 bus service was recently extended to Watford town hall.