



ABFLY newsletter

www.abfly.org.uk

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LATE NIGHT SERVICE SETBACK...

Earlier this year the Community Rail Partnership (CRP), prompted by ABFLY, submitted a proposal for a trial of late night services on the Abbey Line. The trial was to have taken place in December, marketed as an opportunity for Christmas shoppers to 'let the train take the strain', but also to gauge demand for longer-term reinstatement of these services.

The issue was debated by London Midland's 'Train Service Delivery Group' but sadly the proposal was rejected on the grounds of safety. In their opinion, late evening services would have had an unacceptable risk of disorder, an increased possibility of assaults on staff and damage and/or soiling of the train.

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY...



SANTA SPECIALS

Saturday 19th
December

Times TBC

Look out for
posters at stations
for details

...BUT BEER TRAINS A SUCCESS!

Contrary to LM's pessimistic predictions of violence and disorder, the extra late-evening trains laid on in early October for the St Albans beer festival passed without incident! Keen ABFLY contributor and station adopter Paul Spelzini took the trouble to monitor usage on these services, running on Friday 2nd and Saturday 3rd October at 2243 and 2322 from St Albans Abbey. The key findings were:

- On Friday 2nd, there were 8 people on the 2243 and 37 on the 2320. On Saturday 3rd it was 22 and 45, respectively. Earlier services on both evenings attracted around 12-15 people, by comparison. These figures indicate that there would clearly be an advantage for running one or two trains post-2300, to cater for pub closing times, but perhaps this could be balanced by a sparser service between 8pm and 10pm?
- Few beer festival bags were seen on the trains but ridership was very mixed with both old and young, singles and couples present.
- There were no incidences of violence or bad behaviour, not even the one person seen drinking on the train!

Paul's observations are a useful counterpoint to LM's opinion. ABFLY will continue the campaign!

"WATFORD SHUTTLES" CONFIRMED

extracted from RAIL magazine, issue 629, page 21

Funding has been agreed between the Department for Transport (DfT) and London Midland (LM) that will see extra peak-hour trains operating into and out of London Euston, giving an additional 1349 seats on the route.

The new services will start from the December timetable change, with LM retaining seven class 321 Electric Multiple Units for the purpose of both lengthening peak main line trains, and operating on the Abbey Line.

There will be three additional peak morning trains from Bletchley and Watford Junction to London Euston, and two in the evening from London to Watford Junction and Milton Keynes. One of these trains has been operating since June at LM's cost, says the DfT, although the LM track access application (TAA) differs slightly. According to the TAA, the proposed new services are:

- 0633 Bletchley – Euston
- 0754 Watford Junction – Euston (re-timed from 0803)
- 0815 Watford Junction – Euston
- 0832 Bletchley – Euston (starts at Tring 0848)
- 1728 Euston – Watford Junction
- 1804 Euston – Milton Keynes, extended to Northampton
- 1820 Euston – Milton Keynes

Extra ticket barriers at Euston's platforms 8-11 will cater for the passenger flows. Assuming no major changes to the Abbey Line timetable in December, the new 0815 Watford Junction – Euston shuttle could be a bonus for branch passengers using the 0745 departure from St Albans Abbey (arrives Watford Junction 0801). Currently the 0803 'shuttle' (to be re-timed to 0754) gives very little time for the change. Full details of the changes and implications for branch line connectivity will be published when more is known, in the new year.

LEAF FALL TIMETABLE BEGINS

Please note that, from Monday 26th October until Sunday 13th December, a special leaf-fall timetable will operate on the branch. A number of Abbey Line departures have been moved, in order to allow for the extra time it takes for trains to accelerate and brake in these slippery autumn conditions.

In a departure from previous years, there will be no change to the main line timetable. This is a reflection of how the rail industry has become better prepared for the problem of 'leaves on the line'. A year-round programme of lineside tree maintenance, special railhead treatment trains that patrol the network all through the autumn, and better driver training, should ensure that delays this year are lower than they have ever been.

Please check for posters and leaflets at stations, the London Midland website or <http://www.abbeyline.org.uk/timetable.htm> for further details of the Abbey Line leaf fall timetable.

MINI-TIMETABLES

The Abbey Line mini-timetables issued earlier in the year (coloured green, marked "14th December 2008 until further notice") will not be valid during the leaf-fall period. We are not yet sure what happens after that, because timetable details for December are only released 3-4 weeks in advance. Either a clarification note, or new mini-timetables, will be issued in early 2010.

WELCOME!

ABFLY would like to welcome Rosalind Devlin to the committee, as 'Operations Monitor'. Rosalind's role will be to:

- Act as official monitor for 'day to day' operation of the Abbey Line and connections
- Collect feedback about punctuality, reliability, staff conduct etc. and timetable changes
- Collate the feedback into a short report for presentation to London Midland at our quarterly liaison meetings

The role is a new one for the committee and, subject to members' approval, will be ratified at the next AGM. However, please give your support to Rosalind and if you have any complaints regarding the service, do not hesitate to make contact with her: feedback@abfly.org.uk (if you would rather use the phone, please contact John Webster in the first instance, see bottom right panel).

We still however have vacancies in the following roles:

- Membership secretary
- Website editor
- Publicity officer

Please do not hesitate to come forward: ABFLY NEEDS YOU for us to function most effectively – no qualifications, just enthusiasm and a bit of free time necessary!

APPROVAL FOR BRICKET WOOD TAKEAWAY PLAN

On October 12th it was announced that St Albans District Council (SADC) had granted planning permission for the conversion of Bricket Wood station building into an Indian restaurant, serving snacks by day and takeaway by night. Details can be viewed via the planning application section of the SADC website, search for 5/2009/1391 'change of use'. Negotiations between the promoters and Network Rail are ongoing and we will bring you more details in a future edition.

MORE ON THE 'HUMP'

There was some discussion and further explanation about the objectives of the St Albans Abbey Station Easier Access Area at the last CRP meeting.

As previously reported, Network Rail have now raised one portion of the platform at St Albans Abbey Station to make it easier to step on and off the train. This has long been an aspiration of the County and other partners as the vertical gap between the platform and the train at this station is very high.

St Albans Abbey Station was selected by Network Rail to be a part of a trial to address this issue across the country. The aim is to find a cost effective way to provide better access to the trains where platforms are lower than standard at stations which are less well used and would not merit a completely rebuilt platform. This is the second trial; the first was in Harrington, Cumbria. The trial is fully funded by the Department for Transport and Network Rail. The platform hump is constructed of Glass Reinforced Plastic and is bolted to the existing platform.

The purpose of the Easier Access Area is to raise the platform to a standard level so that the stepping distance is reduced. This will make it easier for people with mobility issues, luggage, push chairs etc to get on and off the train. The structure does NOT provide wheelchair level access (nor was that ever the intention). This is because there must still be a certain clearance between the train and the platform edge to allow for vehicle movements (Railway Engineers call this the 'structural gauge'). You may see genuine 'level access' on trams or certain parts of London Underground, but that is only because the tolerances on vehicle movements and track position are much tighter than is currently the case on the Abbey Line.

To achieve 'level access' at St Albans Abbey, a ramp is still required. The ramp will now be able to be placed at an angle that is DDA compliant, whereas in the former situation (pre-hump), it was actually too steep. The aim of the trial is to see whether this is a workable solution. It has already been accepted as permanent at Harrington and it is hoped that at the end of the trial period it will be accepted as permanent at St Albans Abbey. The projected cost of the raised platform area is well under £50,000.

COMPLAINTS LOG

Please note that ABFLY keep a log of incidents where the standard of service on the Abbey Line has been poor. For example, over-zealous 'right-time' despatching of branch trains when connecting mainline service is less than five minutes late (see above), a lack of revenue collection, delays or cancellations without information, rude staff etc.

The more incidents we record the more evidence we can present to London Midland at our quarterly meetings with them. Even if it happens time and time again, please e-mail feedback@abfly.org.uk stating time, date, description of the incident and any staff involved (if applicable). Things will only improve if we can provide "more-than-anecdotal" evidence and gather data on these important issues.

CONTACT DETAILS

To make a complaint about London Midland, write to:

Customer Relations, London Midland, PO Box 4323, Birmingham, B2 4JB.

E-mail: comments@londonmidland.com

Do also keep ABFLY 'in the loop' by sending a copy of your letters to either of the addresses below or BCC ("Blind carbon copy") your e-mails to feedback@abfly.org.uk.

General enquiries on ABFLY matters:

John Webster, 17 Faircross Way, St Albans, AL1 4RT.

E-mail: chairman@abfly.org.uk
Tel: 01727 752613.

Membership enquiries:

David Horton, 8 Leighton Way, Belper, DE56 1SX.

E-mail: membership@abfly.org.uk
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NEWS FLASH

Abbey Flyer Users' Group (ABFLY)

Lord Adonis announces trams for the Abbey Line

From the Department for Transport, Friday 30th October 2009



Photo left: Lord Adonis (second from left) announces the plan for trams at St Albans Abbey station on the morning of Friday 30th October. Photo right: Could there be a similar scene at Watford Junction in 2011? Here a light weight vehicle running on the Karlsruhe system in Germany (right) interchanges with a 'heavy rail' service run by German national train operator Deutsche Bahn (left).

Rail passengers travelling between Watford and St Albans are in line for more regular and more frequent services thanks to exciting plans to create a new tram service, announced today by Transport Secretary Andrew Adonis and Hertfordshire County Council.

The proposed improvements would enable passengers to travel between St Albans and Watford on a regular half-hourly tram and allow for the possibility of an even greater frequency of three trams per hour. The trams would replace the existing train service link, which currently operates on an irregular schedule with just one train every 45 minutes, providing a better service for around 450,000 passengers a year who currently use it.

Andrew Adonis said:

"To encourage more people to use public transport, it's vital we give passengers a service which suits them. The proposed new trams would provide a more regular service and I am glad to be working with Hertfordshire County Council to take forward these exciting plans.

The improvements would offer travellers the prospect of a better and more flexible service. Local people are best placed to make decisions about local transport which is why I am delighted that Hertfordshire County Council will be taking responsibility for this new tram service."

Under the changes, which will now be subject to a 12 week DfT consultation, responsibility for the line would transfer from Network Rail to Hertfordshire County Council, which would then put the service out to tender.

Councillor Stuart Pile, Hertfordshire County Council's Executive Member for Highways and Transport, said:

"Hertfordshire County Council has worked hard through the Community Rail Partnership to develop and promote this line. We have had many successes since founding the partnership in June 2005, particularly with improving the conditions of stations and raising passenger numbers by around 20 per cent.

However, this proposal offers to move things on dramatically and to deliver a much more useful link in the local transport network, which suffers from considerable traffic congestion."

Depending on the outcome of the consultation and the completion of legal and contractual issues, the new service could be up and running in 2011. The new service is also dependent on Network Rail agreeing to transfer control of the line and stations to Hertfordshire County Council on a long-term lease.

Work by transport consultants Mott MacDonald, working on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council has demonstrated that using light weight rail vehicles (probably to a similar design as those already used in Europe) ought to allow a more frequent service to be provided within the funding currently used for the heavy rail service.

Through fares would continue to be available on the new service.

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Further details, commentary and analysis will feature in the next Abbey Flyer newsletter.

Information on the DfT consultation will follow shortly.