



ABBEY FLYER USERS' GROUP

Watford Junction to St Albans Abbey Line

Abfly Members' Meeting

Date: 7th November 2016

Venue: St Stephen's Parish Centre, Bricket Wood

Present:

- Trevor Gurd (in the chair) (TG)
- Steve Helfet (London Midland) (SH)
- Trevor Mason (Herts. County Council) (TM)
- Edna Woname (CRP Officer) (EW)
- Kevin Ambrose (Note taker) (KA)
- 25 members (see appendix)

1. London Midland Update

Steve Helfert reported:

- Good progress since last meeting. **Performance** up (including reaching 90% across whole LM network on occasion), Network rail's improved efforts at lineside maintenance/tree pruning had positive impact on leaf-fall timetable. Passenger numbers now back to pre-December 2014 blockade and 13% up from 2015.
- **New timetable** form 11th December includes extra late evening train as campaigned for by Abfly. This now incorporated into new franchise requirement. Budget includes publicity for this train. (In response to question about publicity launch/photo opportunity for this new train, **SH said no resources for this but would welcome proposal from Abfly. Action: Abfly**)
- **Ticket Machines** now installed on remaining Abbey Line stations. Due to be operative form 8th November but Bricket Wood machine already vandalised. Police advised by SH
- **LM Website** Live form 8th November. Delay repay can be applied for.
- **WiFi:** From December being installed on Class 350 trains
- **New Franchise:** Bids from Abellio & Govia due end November, decision June and operative form November 2017.
- **Revenue collection:** In response to question from TG, SH reported that recent DfT survey showed 37% of passengers had not paid. Examples of lack of ticket collection offered by members present. SH informed meeting that next franchise obliged to introduce smartcard/Oyster style payments which should reduce problem. Problems purchasing season tickets highlighted. **Action: SH to investigate further**
- **Access from disabled parking in car park to platform 9/10 at Watford Junction:** Member expressed concern that, having parked, disabled cannot get through gate onto platform & have to proceed through two tunnels & lifts to get to platform. SH advised that CCTV & intercom being installed to allow non-season tickets access but stopping "tailgaters" gaining access without pre-paying.

- **Short term parking at Watford Junction.** Members reported cases of Arriva (bus) staff and rail contractors parking beyond 20 minutes allowed & blocking spaces for others. **Action: SH to take up management of this car park to ensure compliance**
- Other questions related to through running to Euston and problems with past bus replacement performance.

2. Hertfordshire County Council update

Trevor Mason (Herts CC's Rail Officer) reported:

- **St Albans Abbey - City Centre - City Station shuttle bus** would now commence a 12 month pilot in January (delayed due to bus procurement problems). Budget for project includes publicity for this new service. Fares not yet fixed.
- **Oaklands College:** are working with HCC exploring the tourism potential of the line
- **New franchise:** HCC have had meetings with both potential bidders (q.v.) about onward journeys to Euston, active CRP support and improved service frequency on Abbey Line.

3. Hertfordshire County Council – Transport Vision 2013 – 2015

Trevor Mason outlined the thinking behind this:

- Two years in preparation
- Current consultation open until 14th December. To be followed by further round of consultation before incorporation into next HCC Local Transport Plan by end 2017.
- Large range of policy options explored but narrowed down to four of which East-West (Hemel Hempstead – Hertford) rapid transit of most interest to this meeting
- Aim is to tackle congestion on A414 corridor where most of the 400,000 population increase in Herts is expected to be concentrated.
- East – West Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route not yet determined nor is technology – Transport Vision looking beyond current District Council Local Plans and beyond 2031.
- Not yet determined how Watford – St Albans corridor (particularly the Abbey Line) will relate to the main East - West corridor

Questions & comments from the floor included:

- Why just Hemel – Hertford; what about adjoining counties? TM response – extensive discussions with Essex, Bucks & London authorities, particularly as Essex planning major expansion of Harlow
- What about the relative costs (for improving the Abbey Line) of heavy rail, light rail and BRT? TM: No detailed costings – idea mainly conceptual at this stage.
- What about the period up to 2031? TM: - HCC committed to improving existing heavy rail character of Abbey Line
- Would cycle lanes be incorporated in any rapid transit route? TM: - probably; see Cambridge busway example.
- Why not a more sustainable energy solution (i.e. electric) for East – West route? TM: – almost certainly this will be the case.
- What about other key routes (apart from East – West) such as S.W. Herts to Heathrow airport? TM:- This is part of continuing discussions with adjoining transport authorities. Councillor Derek Ashley (HCC Portfolio Holder for Transport) keen to establish a body covering the wider London commuter catchment – issues transcend current government boundaries.

- Contrast between imaginative approach to transport improvements by TfL (e.g. London Overground service to Watford, Met Line extension/Croxley Rail Link) and HCC? TM:- Croxley Rail link originally a HCC scheme before being adopted by TfL.
- Why cannot Herts CC invest (or share cost) of Abbey Line passing loop/service improvement? TM: - HCC no longer receives funds for such investments – the Herts Local Economic Partnership (LEP) now the key body. The LEP's main project in its Growth Deal 3 focuses on Watford Junction station improvement.

4. Community Rail Partnership – Edna Woname (new CRP officer)

Edna introduced herself and commented:

- She had been in post for 8 weeks and had concentrated on meeting key stakeholders
- She had met with HCC & London Midland officers as well as the two bidders for the new franchise.
- Plans to develop a series of events to promote line and encourage more station adopters.
- London Midland has identified a specific contact officer for CRP matters and station adopters
- Details on CRP on new December timetable and on refreshed CRP website

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm with TG thanking all the speakers for their presentations and for members attending.

Kevin Ambrose

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8th November 2016

Attendees:

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