



ABBEY FLYER USERS' GROUP

Watford Junction to St Albans Abbey Line

Abfly Members' Meeting

Date: 20th November 2017

Venue: St Stephen's Parish Centre, Bricket Wood

Present:

- Trevor Gurd (in the chair) (TG)
- Paul Thomas (Abellio – West Midland Trains/London North Western) (PT)
- Steve Leyland (Abellio – West Midland Trains/London North Western) (SL)
- Trevor Mason (Herts. County Council) (TM)
- Steve Helfert (London Midland) (SH)
- Kevin Ambrose (Note taker) (KA)
- Roz Devlin (Abfly Treasurer) (RD)
- Robin White (Committee member) (RW)
- 26 members (see appendix)

Apologies:

- Dave Horton (Chair, Abfly), Richard Haywood (Abfly social media & crowdfunding)

1. Hertfordshire County Council update

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

- Last year's consultation document "Transport Vision" has now evolved into the **Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP4) 2017** which is now open for consultation until January 23rd, (<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/consultations/transport-and-highways/proposal-to-introduce-local-transport-plan-ltp4.aspx#>). Of particular note is that the earlier option to convert the Abbey Line into part of the Busway proposal has now been dropped (see page 105). Members were encouraged to respond to consultation for which an on-line survey would assist.

St Albans Abbey - City Centre - City Station shuttle bus ("Hertfordshire's Greatest Secret") commenced, on a pilot basis, in January 2017. In response to concerns about inadequate publicity for this new service TM listed a range of publicity measures that had been undertaken (including business engagement, social media, press release, audio message on board the Abbey train, rail adgates at Watford Junction, 48 sheets billboard advertising). However, it does not yet appear on National Rail site. Numbers of users low but showing signs of increasing. No guarantee of funding beyond March 2018.

- **Through running from Abbey Line to London Euston.** This was not possible on current railway running at capacity but had not been ruled out after HS2 to Birmingham opens, freeing up paths on existing west coast main line.

2. London Midland Update

Steve Helfert reported that **Performance** was similar to 2016 with 97.5% trains running within 5 minutes of timetable. Passenger numbers were up about 1.5% up from 2016 (at 330,000 p.a.) in line with similar increases across the London commuter area of the franchise.

As the London Midland 10 year franchise ends on 9th December, SH listed some of the achievement and improvements in last couple of years, including:

- **Class 319 trains** where the distance between breakdowns had doubled and the units on the Abbey Line were now switched twice a week (instead of once) during autumn.
- **Cashless ticket vending machines along with CCTV** were now installed on all stations on the line
- **Station lighting** had been upgraded on all stations (apart, so far, from Watford North)
- Later evening service now running
- **Code of conduct** campaign, addressing anti-social behaviour and aimed primarily at school children held in August & September
- **Service disruptions** – tickets now accepted on 321 bus service when trains not running
- **Access improvements** for those with disabilities at Park Street station
- **Bricket Wood station Heritage project** – London Midland provided large proportion of initial funding
- **Awards** – ACoRP award to partnership between Oaklands College, Abbey Line CRP & London Midland

Questions from the floor covered the following issues:

- Lack of publicity for the later train service
- Bad behaviour by Marlborough School pupils – SH is taking up with school head
- No concessionary travel on Abbey Line yet competing 321 bus has free travel for bus pass holders – HCC & CRP to discuss with new franchisee

3. Introducing the new West Midland franchise holders

From 10th December, the new franchise holder for the Abbey Line will be West Coast Trains (branded in this area as London Northwestern). The meeting welcomed Paul Thomas and Steve Leyland currently the mobilisation team from Abellio/West Midland Trains/London Northwestern. At some point in the later stages of the franchise, a new West Midlands transport authority will be set up and the “West Midlands” part of the franchise will transfer to them. The remainder – the mainline from Euston to Crewe/Liverpool etc. will be known as London Northwestern (& will cover the Abbey Line).

PT explained that the service on in the new franchise as a whole will change but slowly. He outlined the new company’s plans for trains – the current 319s on the Abbey Line will be phased out in 3-4 years to be replaced by 350s. On the “main line”, new stock is being ordered to be introduced by 2021.

Questions from the floor covered the following issues:

- **Revenue collection** – this seen as important, not least in interfacing with customers
- **Use of Railcards on ticket machines on Abbey Line** - to be investigated
- **Chances of franchise failure?** - West Midlands seen as a “safe strong bet”.
- **Paper timetables?** – WM trains producing in time for new timetable

- **Timetable variations need to be displayed outside ticket barriers at Watford Junction** – noted & to be actioned
- **Platform 11 (Watford Junction) rebuild – will it accommodate 8 carriages?** DfT/Network Rail responsibility & need for business case. Works planned to be undertaken over Christmas (2018?) & line will be closed for 3 days
- **Disabled access from (Watford Junction) car park?** Currently, disabled passengers have to go through vehicle tunnel. SL noted issue and SH has added to his 5 page issues list for franchise handover.
- **What improvements over next 7 years?** By 2012 newer trains on line
- **Staffing – will there be sufficient?** WMT will inherit staff from LM & plan to recruit additional staff

The public meeting closed at 9.00 pm with TG thanking all the speakers for their presentations and for members attending. A special tribute was paid to Dave Horton, the outgoing chair, for his many years of energetic service to Abfly.

4. Abfly AGM

The main activities & achievements of the past year or so were listed:

- **Input into direct award and subsequent franchise consultations** resulted in later trains and a higher standard of cleanliness required of operators.
- **Major campaigns to resist Hertfordshire County Council's rapid bus transit options** in Rail Strategy and subsequent Transport Vision. Abfly withdrew from Abbey Line CRP whilst HCC (CRP host & chair) were promoting the closure of the rail line. Now this option has been dropped by HCC in their latest Local Transport Plan, Abfly prepared to re-join.
- **Feasibility study on increasing service frequency.** The Railway Consultancy has submitted a proposal to Abfly. Several local county councillors have committed £2,000 to fund and it is the subject of a current crowdfunding initiative
- **Treasurer's report** – Roz Devlin circulated the accounts for the current year to date and the independently examined accounts for the calendar year of 2016. These were approved by the meeting.

Questions from the floor covered the following issues:

- **Corporate contributions to Spacehive crowdfunding?** – Railfuture, Corus Rail were suggested
- Peter Brooks (former rail staff) offered to assist the committee
- **Steam Special – any developments?** - not likely to take place in May 2018 (160th anniversary) but not ruled out for the future.

Kevin Ambrose

mail@kambrose.co.uk

27th November 2017

Attendees:

Name
Alan Bradstock
Andrew Heates
Anne Wingate
Caroline Wheatcroft
Celia Evans
Chris Cox
Daphne Edwards
Dave Charlton (Abfly Committee)
David Pring
David Wingate
Derrick Ashley (HCC)
George Jabbour
George Wheatcroft
Iola Bilson
Jill Cain
John Edwards
Kevin Ambrose (Abfly Committee)
Les Carpenter
Leslie Freitag
Mr. Cunningham
Mrs Cunningham
Nick Horscroft
Pam Osler
Paul Thomas (WM Trains)
Peter Archer
Peter Brooks
Robert Bilson
Robert Yorke
Robin Hall (Abfly Committee)
Robin White
Roz Devlin (Abfly Committee)
Steve Helfert (London Midland)
Steve Leyland (WM Trains)
Trevor Gurd (Abfly Committee)
Trevor Mason (HCC)