



Newsletter 132

Summer 2006

FIRST GREAT WESTERN

With effect from 1/4/06 the former franchises of First Great Western, First Great Western Link and Wessex Trains ceased to exist, having been combined to form the new First Greater Western franchise. This is due to have a life of 10 years. Let us hope First Group can transform travel to serve their customers in a more positive way than in past months and that they and the industry regulators can sort out a constructive timetable for customers reliant on the Thames Valley trains for their daily travel requirements.

With reissue of timetable information from 11th June we have been advised of 2 changes to times of local trains.

1. Commuters using the 0725 HST service to Paddington will, we hope, arrive at a more consistent time in London - bringing the departure time forward by a couple of minutes means that this train should clear Airport Junction ahead of Heathrow services rather than just behind - this of course assumes that the train arrives at and departs from Maidenhead on time! (Please note this change has already been implemented).
2. The current 0739 Maidenhead to Banbury train will in future depart at 0741 - this is to provide better connection with the 0725 from Bourne End.

We would advise that you check the new timetables to ensure that there are no other changes to your regular trains. Also note there are also some seasonal changes to inter-city services for the duration of the summer timetables. .

With reference to the December 2006 timetable consultation, we understand that ideas have been considered and put forward for review. Some readers will already have noted the FGW announcement of a proposal for an extra fast train from Twyford (dep c.0700) and Maidenhead to Paddington. This is a start but we need more capacity later in the morning peak - let us hope further revision will provide this.

CHILTERN RAILWAYS

Chiltern continues to make minor amendments to timetables - please ensure you check your services from 11th June from High Wycombe and Beaconsfield.

The temporary facilities at High Wycombe are likely to remain for a while. It is probable that there will be a delay in completing some repairs as the area is part of the proposed station renewal project - a scheme for which planning consent is awaited.

The centenary of the opening of the railway by Great Western and Great Central Joint Company from Marylebone to High Wycombe was celebrated over the weekend of 1st/2nd April with a few steam excursions. This provided a lot of local publicity and a good time was had by all those involved.

The additional platforms being built at Marylebone station will soon be open - with modified access around the station. Local notices will be posted at the station - the majority of this work should be completed by October

CHRIS WALLIS

We were all stunned to learn of the sudden death of Chris Wallis. Chris was a founder member of the MMPA and had been closely involved in the Association for over 30 years, being a Committee member for some of that time and inspiring us all with his love of engineering and dry sense of humour. He was at the recent AGM and in his usual good form sounding really optimistic that he could see the time when one of his pet projects, the Light Railway joining High Wycombe and Bourne End, would come to fruition. Our thoughts go out to his wife Barbara and family. A true character, he will be greatly missed!

FREE BUS PASSES

Over the last year there has been much discussion regarding the issue of free bus passes to all senior citizens. The English schemes were introduced from 1st April but are not as comprehensive as in Wales and Scotland.

For the next two years free passes will be available for use within the area of the borough issuing the pass, with some operating concessions agreed between bus companies and local authorities. In our area that is mainly either Windsor and Maidenhead or Wycombe.

You travel free on buses within the council boundaries, but you can also travel free beyond the borough boundaries providing you do not change buses en route. For example, you can travel to Heathrow, Slough or High Wycombe from Maidenhead with a bus-pass issued by Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

ADOPT-A-STATION SCHEME

Last summer MMPA was asked to help with expanding community involvement at Maidenhead station - part of First Group's policy at a number of stations around Western region. This was followed by Braywick Nursery's replanting of flowerbeds and tubs.

A few weeks ago we were able to complete a small photographic and digital imaging display in the main waiting-room at Maidenhead station. This has been achieved through the support of Maidenhead Camera Club and Thames Valley University, both of whom we hope will continue to help with updating of the display.

FIRST GREAT WESTERN CUSTOMER PANEL

The First Great Western Customer panel continues to receive regular input - some of the correspondence is dealt with as part of normal activity of the FGW Customer Relations Department, but messages may also be referred to panel members for consideration and response. All clerical activity is coordinated through the FGW Customer Relations team.

Contact - email: customer.panel@firstgroup.com

- post: Customer Panel, c/o Customer Relations, FGW, Freepost SWB 40576, Plymouth PL4 6ZZ

Do you have an interest in rail travel - not necessarily as a daily commuter? Would you like to know more about First Great Western and have a chance to review plans and performance? Now's your chance. First Great Western's Customer Panel acts as an interface between the company and its customers. Their operating area has been divided into groups of stations - Marlow to Maidenhead being one such group. FGW is looking for a volunteer to represent the interests of our area. If you would like to know more about the Customer Panel, and how you could help, please contact Customer Services at Milford House, 1 Milford Street, Swindon SN1 1HL ([Lesley Colman](#)).

CONTACTS WITH MMPA

MMPA WEBSITE - www.mmpa.org.uk

SECRETARY - 15 Calder Close, Maidenhead, SL6 7RS

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In addition to the FGW customer panel, MMPA committee members continue to respond to complaints passed to us either by mail or through the website. Members of the committee are aware of many on-going problems, especially along the branch lines, and have regular meetings with FGW to discuss these. However, we cannot monitor all problems - please let us know when things go wrong, (and when praise is needed!). We are here to help. We may not always be able to resolve things but we will try to do so - after all, your problem may be symptomatic of a much wider problem.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Many thanks to all members who have already renewed their subscriptions for the current year which runs from 1st April 2006 to 31st March 2007, and grateful thanks to those who added a donation to their subscription - it is very much appreciated by your Committee and helps to combat the ever increasing costs. Postal rates have gone up again recently and this plus stationery costs are a major expenditure for your Association. However, by careful housekeeping, we are able to hold the subscription rates again for the current year, so that is one bit of good news!

If you have already renewed, then your membership card is attached to this Newsletter, unless you sent me a SAE, in which case you will have already had your card.

If you have not yet got around to renewing, you will find a reminder form with your newsletter. However, if you have renewed, please do not renew again! **Remember**, you only need to renew if you have a reminder form with this issue of your newsletter!

Your membership is very important to the Association. The stronger we are, the louder we can shout about local transport matters. First Group have now been awarded the franchise for the Greater Western area from 1st April, and are promising to take action to improve timekeeping and upgrade the trains and stations. We have, over the past two years, forged a good working relationship with the First Group management team, but with far reaching timetable changes in the offing in December this year, we must not allow ourselves to be complacent. We need to make our presence felt to ensure we get the best local transport for passengers in our area. A strong membership is essential if we are to meet our aims to continue monitoring and improving the transport system.

So, **PLEASE**, if you have not renewed, **DON'T DELAY - RENEW TODAY!**. Printing reminder forms and distributing them is an unnecessary and unwelcome expense for **YOUR** Association. Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to either "MMPA" or "Marlow-Maidenhead Passengers' Association" and sent to:

The Secretary, MMPA, 15 Calder Close, MAIDENHEAD, Berkshire, SL6 7RS.

One final plea! If you do not wish to renew your membership or the addressee has moved away, do please let me know, either at the address above or via our website at www.mmpa.org.uk. We don't want to trouble you if you do not wish to be involved. Equally, we do not want to waste the Association's funds by sending newsletters to old addresses, and to people who are no longer interested, for whatever reason. Many thanks in anticipation for your continued support. It really does make a difference!

VISIT TO FAWLEY MUSEUM RAILWAY

Arrangements for this visit are being handled by our Secretary, who will be in touch with everyone who expressed an interest in this visit.

TRAVEL INFORMATION

[BBC RADIO BERKSHIRE](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radioberkshire) broadcasts on 104.1, 104.4 and 95.4 MHz, FM

The travel hotline number is 01189 311333

National railway enquiries: 08457 - 484950 (24 hrs)

[First Great Western](#) Telesales: 08457 - 300700 (Mon - Sat)

[Chiltern Railways](#): 08456 - 005165 (0700 - 2000)

Arriva Bus: 01494 - 520941 (0900 - 1730 Mon - Fri)

Traveline : 0870 - 6082608 (0700 - 2100 daily)

Chiltern Trains (Holidays), Brunel House, 36 Station Road, Chinnor, Oxon OX39 4 GW (0870 - 8110150)

STATIONS

Bourne End - During recent weeks some of you will have been delayed by failure of the points and token system at Bourne End. Following maintenance and replacement work the ground-frame gave operational problems. We understand that this has now been resolved, but it has taken some weeks to achieve this. There is still much to do, with replacement sleepers and remedial work to the station buildings; the latter could involve closure of part of the main platform whilst the work is completed.

During recent weeks most of our local stations have suffered some degree of vandalism and graffiti-attacks. We try to maintain pressure on the authorities to keep on top of the continuing problems. With periodic success we think things have gone away only to reappear a few weeks later. We will maintain our pressure to get things back to the level we expect. It is not a welcoming sight for travellers to see litter, graffiti and groups of young people milling around.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting at Bourne End Community Centre - Friday 24th March 2006 (2000hrs)

In Attendance:

MMPA Committee:

Maurice Oram [President], Nigel Hunt [Chairman], Allan Machon [Secretary], Mark Jameson [Treasurer], Richard Porter [Webmaster], Georgina Kilner [Cookham], Ken Fulker [committee], Stewart Howard [committee]

Guests

Richard Rowland, David Mathieson, and Simon Langley - First Great Western

Trevor Fenwick of Chiltern Railways

Meeting Report

MO welcomed all those attending, and commented that many members who had been committee members more than 20 years ago were able to be in this meeting. He ran through the fact that whilst he no longer took a day-to-day role on the committee he was being kept fully abreast of the committee's activities and problem solving. MO made particular comment that the latest directives on bus pass were far from clear and how the matter was being treated varied very much in each area.

NH gave an oral report of events and activities during 2005 highlighting the Association's activity of the year full of change and problems. The December 2006 timetables were in everyone's mind, and he went through the background to the changes, and what was trying to be achieved. He also advised that under the new franchise, Link was no more - it was just First Great Western. During the year, he also reported that the RPCs had been reincarnated as Rail Focus, and how well this is to work has yet to be seen as the previous network no longer exists.

Dealing with local problems, he highlighted the effects of engineering work and how it was affecting weekend and evening travel, the problems of vandalism and graffiti. He also reported on the varied performance of guards/ticket officials on the branch.

NH also reported on Mary Dove, who following a stroke remains under care in hospital. He also stated that the FGW Customer Panel, on which he acts as chairman, is looking for an extra person to help represent the branch and Maidenhead. NH also thanked each of the committee members for their help and support, and particularly to Richard Porter for his web activity that is now a very vital tool. Finally, he mentioned the steam weekend on the High Wycombe line - 1st and 2nd April.

AM thanked members for prompt payments, and offered to take renewals for 2006 at the end of the meeting.

MJ presented the audited accounts for 2005. One query was raised on what we were doing with the reserve fund. MJ replied that a reserve was necessary in case urgent funding was needed to deal with railway matters, or if legal assistance was needed.

Election of officers followed - as there were no additional candidates, the existing post holders were re-elected en bloc. The committee is full listed above.

The business side of the AGM was concluded.

Transport Presentations - brief overview

Richard Rowland for First Great Western

Richard stated that their current performance was not bad but they had badly let customers down before Christmas with poor performance. He conceded that they had a lot to do.

The problems of investment in infrastructure continued to be a major cause of problems, and very long term engineering possessions. The line from Paddington had been modernised in the 1970's when HST's were introduced, but little major work had followed until very recent times. National Rail [NR] is now investing heavily in the route but due to the backlog this would take a number of years.

The new franchise from the start of April meant that the services were now only First Great Western, "Link" and other local names had gone. The Turbos [Class 165/166] continued to give good service, although door problems remained a concern, this would be the focus of performance modifications in the new franchise. As all 57 units were about the same age, sometimes-similar problems would occur on a number at the same time that could cause availability issues. All the HSTs are to be given a face-lift and be re-engined. The Class 180's performance has improved but could still be better.

FGW's programmes included major refurbishments to be carried out to many of the stations; Maidenhead would be receiving major attention to the subway and ticket office. There would be upgraded ticketing for Bourne End and a machine placed at Marlow.

CCTV is to be fitted to all Turbos, and the relief line is to be re-aligned and upgraded from 65/70 to 90 mph running. Help points will be installed on all stations. The Customer Information system is to be totally upgraded to latest technology.

They were continuing with the work on the timetable consultation. The December 2006 timetable was the bid timetable, and this was the basis for the consultation draft timetable. Following consultation they were proposing changes, but only minor changes were likely.

Trevor Fenwick for Chiltern Trains

Trevor explained that he had only just taken up the post at High Wycombe. Chiltern had had a difficult year with the tunnel collapse at Gerrards Cross, the fire at High Wycombe station and bringing the new depot at Neasden onto line. Also, the Director of Engineering had recently resigned. He read from a prepared paper

that will be attached as an appendix to the printed minutes.

The presentations were followed by the question and answer session.

Michael Hedges questioned just how much of the relief lines towards Paddington could actually be operated currently at 90mph. RR responded that most at the current time could not be but that there was a franchise commitment to invest with NR in bringing the relief lines, where possible, up to 90mph. RR also stated that the track normally lasts 40-years, currently over 75% was more than 30 years old. Also many points and crossings had to be renewed.

Josu de la Fuente complained about failures of the 0624 from Bourne End, and the failure to communicate such information to passengers. He, and others, felt they were often left stranded. SL referred to help points and NH advised about the telephone contact Slough Panel - far from ideal - a help point is due to be installed on the platform. This led to much discussion.

SL said that FGW were studying recovery programmes and reviewing the position. It was suggest by the floor that information boards should be set out.

NH did suggest that compensation claims for branch failures should be treated as a special case failure, and not simply as part of the greater operating area

Colin Spires was concerned that the line may be subject to closure; RR said the line was there as far as FGW were concerned for the duration of the new franchise.

There was a general discussion on marketing and ticketing.

Peter Daniells raised the question on permit to travel machines, their implication in a penalty fares area, and the loss of connections when have to further stop for ticket purchase. Chris Burden was also concerned. RR took the observations on board.

Chris Burden also discussed passenger density with the major timetable revisions bought in two years ago, and for December 2006. There was great concern that not only there were cuts to services, but that passengers were treated worse than cattle. RR responded that these points had been made in the consultation and that these were being taken forward.

Barbara Wallis commented on difficulties in using the Princes Risborough/Aylesbury service, and the lack of interchange platform information. TF advised he would investigate.

Chris Wallis made his plea for the relinking of High Wycombe to Bourne End. He also referred to a meeting with Mr Emmerson of High Wycombe DC on 30th March about this issue.

Margaret Deuter was also very concerned about the connectional times at Maidenhead from December for travel to Reading and Oxford, and the interchanges and extra time involved.

An unrecorded speaker from the floor talked about evening failures, and the lack of co-operation and assistance from Revenue Protection Officers in such instances. RR said he would investigate.

Chris Burden also reported a spate of door failures before Christmas leading to cancellations.

Peter Daniells reported an instance of a two-car unit on the 1043 Maidenhead/Marlow in service with only one engine operable. RR responded that a unit can be kept in service with only one engine and would be replaced as soon as possible.

Mike Walker wanted to see the 165/166 refurbished to the same high standards as applied by Chiltern Railways to their refurbished units. RR responded that the units would be refreshed in a similar way to that in the FGWL franchise and that CCTV would be fitted to these units.

The meeting closed at 2145 hrs.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Following our recent AGM of Marlow-Maidenhead Passengers' Association, the following committee was elected:

Chairman - Nigel Hunt, Secretary - Allan Machon, Treasurer - Mark Jameson

Committee - Richard Porter, Ken Fulker, Georgina Kilner and Stuart Howard

Adult membership is £4 - Family £5 - Concessions £3.

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