

MARLOW - MAIDENHEAD PASSENGERS' ASSOCIATION

Newsletter Number 142 Winter 2008



New Timetables

With this newsletter we are distributing copies of First Great Western winter mini-timetable leaflets which come into force from 14th December and stay in effect until May 2009. While the changes to the timetable are generally minor they don't address the connection problems at Maidenhead for trains to Reading and onward connections that have been reported before. Clearly there is scope for FGW and other train operators to review connections for people journeying cross-country to improve their journey reliability.

For the December timetable FGW have proposed to amend the format of their mini-timetable leaflets to issue one new booklet covering all FGW routes for weekdays and individual leaflets for weekend services in separate areas. MMPA have made representations against this change to FGW because we felt their plan would complicate matters rather than simplifying things. This is because of the need to carry a multitude of mini-timetables for any weekend travel which isn't solely on a line covered by a mini timetable e.g. any journey from the branch line to further away. As an example a journey in the weekend from anywhere on our branch to Heathrow Airport would require 4 mini-timetables as originally planned by FGW under the proposed new scheme. The timeline for the proposed change has been extended following feedback to FGW from both MMPA and their own Customer Panel.

Please let MMPA have your comments on how the proposed change would affect you.

The MP for Maidenhead, Theresa May, has issued the following comments regarding the new timetable:

"The First Great Western service has improved this year so I have not felt the need to send so many emails out but I thought it would be helpful to send an update in advance of the December timetable change.

On Monday 11 November I held one of my regular meetings with Sue Evans, Director of Communications and Richard Rowland, Regional Manager-East at FGW to pass on the concerns raised by constituents and discuss the proposed changes to the December timetable.

I have been pleased to see a dramatically improved service over the last year and FGW explained that the last four weeks has seen their highest Public Performance Measure ever – 95% of trains ran and were on time and their overall PPM has improved 12 – 13% since they won the franchise in 2004. The changes put in place last year were a direct result of continued pressure from me and others, particularly commuters who contacted FGW directly, and has made a huge difference to all rail passengers using the service, from commuters going to London to tourists using the branch lines.

After such a successful timetable, the changes being brought in to the 2009 timetable are limited:

Changes:

- 1. I am very pleased to see the introduction of a fast service from Paddington arriving at Maidenhead at 0832 which will make a huge difference for commuters coming into Maidenhead.*
- 2. Regrettably, the 0603 from Bedwyn which calls at Maidenhead at 0702 on its way to Paddington will be lost due to refurbishment of the Turbo fleet. This is a temporary situation and FGW hope to have finished the £6 million*

refurbishment by next year. In the meantime the 0703 High Speed Train from Maidenhead will have the capacity to take the passengers who this year travelled on the 0702 and the 0704.

- 3. Many of the services are changing by a couple of minutes to reflect the amount of time the trains have to 'dwell' in the station as passengers board and alight so please DO LOOK CAREFULLY AT THE NEW TIMETABLE.*
- 4. The Twyford–Henley-on-Thames service will run every 45 minutes rather than every hour.*
- 5. The 0545 Oxford – Paddington (currently 0550) will now stop at Maidenhead at 0631 and the current Slough stop at 0640 will be removed. This will provide another early morning commuter service for passengers.*

I raised a number of other concerns with FGW regarding overcrowding and their long-term strategy to combat this. I was told that they have put in a bid for extra carriages and trains as part of the Government plans and are awaiting the outcome. I will continue to monitor this situation as I am fully aware of the rush that many people face during peak hours.

In September I opened the newly refurbished Maidenhead station which cost £1 million. I was very impressed with the results which included a 150-metre extension to platform one, new ticket machines, toilets, vending machines, better disabled parking, and improvements to the subways for platform access and expect that this will ensure a better service for passengers. However, the display board that used to be at the Shoppenhangers Road entrance has been removed and I raised this at the meeting. I understand that this can be incredibly useful for people who are being dropped off and FGW have promised to look at replacing it.

The lack of fast return services from Paddington to Maidenhead in the evening continues to be a problem. This has not been addressed in the December timetable due to a lack of trains but is something I will continue to press FGW on.

I am very hopeful that this timetable will further improve the service and that it will ensure we retain a good service for Maidenhead and Twyford.

I would like to thank you for writing with your observations and suggestions and continue to welcome any comments you might wish to send."

Should you wish to add your voice to Theresa May's campaign it would be helpful if you could copy in the MMPA (www.mmpa.org.uk) so that we can collate all the comments.

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January Fare Increases

Fare increases come into effect on Friday 2nd January 2009. Regulated fares are capped by Government (based on the July 2008 Retail Price Index of 5%, plus 1%), e.g. Season Tickets and longer distance, Off-Peak fares, will rise by 6%.

Unregulated fares, e.g. most leisure and Advance fares, will rise by varying amounts, according to train operator: Chiltern Railways by 7.5% and First Great Western by 6.6%.

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Chiltern Railways – Project Evergreen

Chiltern Railways, now part of the Deutsche Bahn (DB) railway group, is planning the next phase of its Project Evergreen upgrade for the line. The completed Phase 2 of project consists of:

- Two additional platforms at Marylebone station: this will enable further growth and allow Chiltern Railways to meet the continuing increase in demand for its services.

- More signals between Bicester and High Wycombe (27 miles), between Princes Risborough and Aylesbury, and in the Neasden area: this allows more trains to run on these stretches of track, as well as enables Chiltern Railways to recover faster from delays and so improve punctuality.
- Straightening the tracks at Beaconsfield: this allows trains to run faster by raising the speed of the line.

At the time of writing Phase 3 is planned to consist of:

- Ø Line speed increases between Ruislip and Aynho Junction: for example raising from 75mph to 85mph the linespeed between West Ruislip and High Wycombe. Linespeeds will not exceed 100mph;
- Ø Revisions to track layouts at stations where speeds are currently constrained: particularly at Bicester North and Princes Risborough;
- Ø Building in capability to the route so that it can continue to perform highly whilst carrying a greater number of trains: for example by providing passing loops at key locations, improving turnback facilities at others, and creating a track layout suitable for bi-directional operation;
- Ø Constructing a new chord at Bicester and upgrading the Bicester-Oxford line to be predominantly double track with 90mph linespeeds and 5 minute signalling headways; with an independent access to Oxford station to avoid congestion and performance issues on the existing route there;
- Ø A recast timetable to reduce the number of stops made by long distance trains, whilst sustaining frequencies at key locations;
- Ø A programme to upgrade all trains with modern low weight engines and transmissions which accelerate more quickly and use less fuel than currently.

Subject to early sign off by stakeholders and the Government completion of the works required to deliver faster services on the existing network should be achieved from the December 2011 timetable change and Bicester-Oxford works completed to enable Chiltern trains to operate from the December 2012 timetable.

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Crossrail

Discussions and correspondence with the CrossRail team have established that as presently planned there will be only one through train to Paddington from the Branch in the morning peak and NO return workings onto the Branch in the evening. This means that it will be necessary when travelling from the Branch to beyond Maidenhead for passengers to cross from the new platform 6 to platform 4 or 5, the CrossRail platforms to continue their London bound journey or probably to platform 2 for the fast/semi-fast services calling at Maidenhead. In the evening with no through trains planned passengers for the Branch will have to cross from platform 1 or 3 to platform 6 to catch a Branch train. While CrossRail is not anticipated to commence operation until 2017 now is the time to raise any queries or comments about such issues. MMPA consider that the arrival of CrossRail should not disadvantage Branch line users which clearly these proposals do and will be campaigning to get the proposals modified. Please let us know how the proposals will affect you.

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Furze Platt Station user sought

Furze Platt station remains without a representative to keep an eye on things – we are eager for someone to fill this simple role and keep the Committee up to date. It's a way of helping to get the sort of station you want.

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TRAVEL INFORMATION

BBC Radio Berkshire 104.1, 104.4 and 95.4 fm. (also phone 01189 - 311333)
 National Rail enquiries: 08457 - 484950 (24 hrs) or www.nationalrail.co.uk
 FGW Telesales : 08457 - 000125 (0700 – 2200 daily)
 Chiltern Railways : 08456 - 005165 (0700 - 2000)

Arriva Bus : 0844 8004411 (0900 - 1730 Mon - Fri)
 First Berks & Thames 01753 524144
 Valley Buses:
 Carousel Buses: 01494 533436
 Traveline : 0871 - 2002233 (0800 - 2000 daily)

Also see our web site www.mmpa.org.uk for links.

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Great Western Route Utilisation Strategy

Network Rail recently gave progress update on the GW-RUS Consultation. A number of schemes have been identified and classified, the main categories being:

- those in the Government's High Level Output Specification (HLOS) which include Maidenhead and Twyford platform extensions on the relief lines, and Reading station remodelling.
- those in 'GRIP stage 3 or above' - GRIP is Network Rail's "Guide to Railway Investment Projects" and is a management and control process for enhancements. These include Paddington station platform remodelling and Crossrail to Maidenhead and Heathrow.
- other initiatives which include ERTMS (in-cab signalling), electrification, Airtrack (Reading-Heathrow via Staines) and the Bicester chord (see Chiltern item).

The next stage was to identify gaps between what the system can do now and what it needs to do. "Gaps" are mismatches between supply and demand, either now or predicted. Gaps are classified as Performance, Journey time or Capacity. Stakeholder aspirations are not gaps unless they have funding from the industry. Of 128 proposals put forward 21 were identified as gaps, the remainder being Options, Aspirations or Constraints. In our area there are seven gaps which relate to capacity and performance (including freight) between Reading and Paddington. In addition, gap 19 - station capacity - applies to many stations, and gap 21 concerns the impact of Heathrow Airport.

The next stage now in progress is to appraise all the gaps and options to determine a "Benefit/Cost Ratio" (BCR). The benefits can be both qualitative and quantitative. A BCR of 2 or above represents high value for money. Anything below 1.5 is unlikely to get through.

Due to the complexities of schemes being delivered within the Reading - Paddington corridor over the next ten years, four scenarios were constructed: with and without Crossrail, and with or without electrification "Tranche 1" to Oxford, Bristol and Cardiff.

The next briefing for the Wider Stakeholder Group (of which MMPA is a member) will be in the spring when the formal consultation is published. The consultation will last for a three month period.

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Membership

Thank you all for your membership renewals, and a warm welcome to our new members. If you are receiving this Newsletter you are either paid up for this year or are a complimentary recipient.

Richard Porter

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Contact MMPA

If you have any issues or comments regarding public transport in the area that you would like to raise please use the Contact Us links on the MMPA website www.mmpa.org.uk or telephone MMPA Chairman, Paul Murphy, on 01628 810959.

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Seasons Greetings

The Committee of the MMPA would like to offer season's greetings to all members and best wishes for safe and comfortable journeys in 2009.

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STOP PRESS

The Managing Director of rail franchise First Great Western, Andrew Haines, has unexpectedly resigned from his post citing personal reasons. He is replaced by the company's performance director Mark Hopwood.