

MARLOW - MAIDENHEAD PASSENGER ASSOCIATION



Newsletter Number 147

Autumn 2010

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The Association was set up as a pressure group to oppose closure of the Marlow Branch some 40 years ago. With the operation of the Branch having been secured the role has changed and the Association now serves to monitor the performance of the Branch and transport in the surrounding area and raise and attempt to resolve issues arising with the relevant organisation including but not limited to Network Rail, First Great Western, Chiltern Railways, bus operators and local authorities. We also liaise with local interest groups to ensure we their interests can be represented in our meetings with the various organisations. In endeavouring to ensure better service and resolution of problems the Association tries to encourage people to use the Branch more since that's the best way to assure its long term survival.

MMPA covers transport in Maidenhead - Marlow, High Wycombe and Twyford - Henley-on-Thames.

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Turbo Refresh

Members of the Committee joined with members of the Chiltern Line Promotion Group and Oxford County Council Transport Department on a briefing and tour of the Turbo unit refresh programme at the FGW Depot in Reading. At the moment only class 165 is undergoing refurbishment. A 166 set is away in Derby undergoing tests on a new air conditioning system. A note has been received from a member regarding the refurbishment programme which I have endeavoured to answer below the points raised.

I've been travelling on First Great Western from Bourne End to London most days over the past two months so I have encountered some of the newly refurbished 165 units. I mostly like what I see but there are a couple of 'shortcomings' when you see what has been promised and what seems to have been delivered.

The floor is new but is not carpet as mentioned in the Spring newsletter (maybe 166s only?).

The flooring in standard is vinyl but first class is fitted with carpet.

A few of the windows already have unsightly etchings from vandals. Is there no way of preventing this?

All the windows will have a protective film which although can be 'etched', in an estimated 90% of instances will only require the film to be replaced during routine maintenance.

The Information Screens are still the early 1990 era, green LCD screens, a few of which are unreadable. The plastic casing around it has been replaced so it has not been 'forgotten' by the fitters.

The replacement system had gone on trial in one unit at the time of the visit which I had seen in operation the previous week. It is a horizontal scrolling orange LED display which has much better definition than the LCD displays and unlike the old displays it updates during the course of the journey so

that only calling points to come are displayed and not all stations on the journey.

The latter improvement is highly anticipated and rather overdue, would you be able to ask First what their plan is for their replacement?

The new displays will be installed once the system tests have been completed which may be the case at the time of publication.

FGW meeting

At our recent meeting with FGW senior management performance figures and issues were presented by their team. Local services in the latest Period (P5) achieved 93.6% 'on time arrivals overall down to 89.3% in the peak periods. Network Rail has suffered from a number of cable thefts resulting in service cancellations. FGW consider that too many (NR) infrastructure failures and engineering possession overruns are occurring and they are seeking a recovery plan from NR particularly in respect the preliminary works for the Reading Station remodelling.

The early Sunday morning service added to the current timetable appears to be well patronized.

38 of the Turbo fleet of 151 units have now been refurbished and returned to service. The class 166 unit currently having a new air conditioning system tested is expected back in October. Refresh of the class will commence in February. The new Passenger Information System on trains is still under test but will be fitted to all units by Christmas if the results of the current tests are successful.

CCTV in Maidenhead, Bourne End and the Henley branch stations has been installed; provision of CCTV and the new Customer Information (CIS) at Furze Platt, Cookham and Marlow are 'costed options and may only happen if financial support can be obtained from local authorities. A decision is expected late September. The programme for installation of the replacement station CIS is delayed. Passengers may notice the absence of clocks at some stations as a result of this delay because the clocks are apparently all linked to the new system. Installation of CIS at Maidenhead should be complete by February and stations on the Henley Branch including Twyford should be installed by January or February 2011.

Help Points at Maidenhead, Furze Platt, Cookham and Marlow should be installed by October. It should be noted that the Help Points are not just for emergency use but can and should be used to make train enquiries. When promised details of how to use them are received from FGW I will include these in a newsletter.

FGW has proposed a new weekday early morning service from Paddington to Reading calling Maidenhead 07:47 and Reading 08:02. This connects with the 07:39 Maidenhead arrival from the Branch. This service will allow connections at Reading to the West Country and Midlands 30 minutes earlier than currently available with this Branch service. The new service has been bid to Network Rail and a response is expected shortly.

Cookham, Maidenhead and Twyford stations have been recognised under the Department for Transport's Secure Stations Scheme as secure stations. The Secure Stations accreditation looks at station design to increase safety, crime figures, customers' perceptions of security and good station management. The Committee consider that particularly in respect of Cookham the secure tag is misleading due to the frequent vandalism at that station. The certification requires certain design and management changes. It's possible the Maidenhead remodeling qualified but it's not clear that anything has been changed recently at Cookham or Bourne End. There is also a requirement for passenger surveys to be done to document that passengers feel secure but we are not aware of that having been done. Certainly Furze Platt and Marlow are conspicuous by their absence in the scheme. They are the branch stations most in need of Secure Station improvements, but some real design or management action and changes would be required. In addition to the further research being done by Teresa May's researcher on this topic, on our part we would propose that if Secure Stations certification was deemed important for some branch line stations, we requested that it be obtained for ALL branch line stations, including those requiring real action or investment to accomplish. We will formally resubmit our requests for station solutions at Cookham that have been previously been denied on the basis of "insecurity." This includes enclosing the shelter and installing a ticket machine and cycle storage.

MMPA raised the issue of the short notice of departure platforms at Paddington. This is particularly a problem for platform 13 or 14 departures where there is often insufficient time to get from the Lawn concourse to the train especially for mobility impaired passengers.

MMPA also requested that the removal of the post box at the entrance to Paddington be overturned and the box replaced. It was pointed out that the Post Office in Praed Street has closed and moved near to Edgware Road which is not convenient for passengers entering the station. FGW has agreed to look at both issues.

Integrated rail and bus travel

There is a useful website provided by the Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group at <http://www.bedwyntrains.org.uk/>. It has a helpful Hints and Tips section relating to Penalty fares from a consumer viewpoint.

The FGW web site has buried within it notes on the availability of integrated train/bus tickets (as opposed to Plusbus tickets which are a different thing). The last time our Secretary travelled to Marlborough (via Bedwyn) he saved significantly on the price of buying a separate bus ticket from the driver by specifying 'Marlborough Bus' as his destination station with the train ticket. These tickets are not well publicised. The website requires a call to Customer Services for more information.

They apparently can be used when travelling to Abingdon, Marlborough, Wallingford, Witney, Chipping Norton and other locations where trains used to run to before Dr Beeching axed the various branches. Sometimes there are choices as to where you board the bus eg Abingdonbus as a destination, is available from at least Didcot or Oxford and Marlborough from both Bedwyn and Swindon (although via Swindon is considerably more expensive largely due to the rail component). It always works out cheaper to travel this way compared to buying the bus ticket separately on the bus so it's always worth checking with ticket office staff (for stations fortunate enough to have such a luxury in this day and age) to see if the final destination has such a ticket. If it's a location that used to be served by rail (at least around these parts) there's a good chance it will. A cautionary note is that some... ahem... less experienced ticket office staff also don't know/ have forgotten about these and will deny such a ticket even exists so customers need to ask for the manager if they know what they've requested, is in fact available.

There are currently 102 destinations available with a combined Train&Bus ticket across the FGW network. You can buy a ticket all the way to your final destination, including your train travel and travel on a RailLink bus service. These tickets also offer various different journey opportunities including:

- A single, or return journey on a bus route from a rail station to a specific destination.
- Unlimited travel on a bus route from a rail station to points along that route.
- Unlimited travel on all bus routes in a specified town.

FGW travel offers

First Group has set up an exclusive train offer for those aged 55 and over which gives you access to some fantastic deals on train travel across England and Wales from 20 September to 30 November 2010.

Prices start from just £15 return to travel within one zone and then you add £10 per additional zone you travel in. As long as the train operator you use is part of the First Group network, these special prices will apply.

Return First Class tickets start at £25 plus £15 per additional zone you travel in.

Plus, if you already have a Senior Railcard, you will benefit from a further 20% discount on these promotional prices.

A404(M) bridge replacement over the Western Main Line

FGW were asked about the schedule of closures of the main line between Reading and Maidenhead for the bridge reconstruction works. At the time of the meeting (September 16) they had no information on closures. In addition the Highways Agency (via their website) has suspended the closure programme for the A404(M) itself.

MMPA membership

If you are a branch line passenger or local transport user please help MMPA get what's best for our community by joining now. With preliminary consultations on franchise rebids beginning next year, now is the time to begin building strength so that our voice can be heard before it's too late to protect local interests and push for improvements Please also spread the word amongst friends, neighbours and fellow passengers who could benefit by having our public transport services be the best they can be by joining us. With your support, MMPA can have a positive impact for all those living, working or visiting in the area served by the branch line. Many thanks!

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TRAVEL INFORMATION

BBC Radio	95.4, 104.1 fm and DAB.
Berkshire:	(also phone 08459 - 311333)
National Rail	08457 - 484950 (24 hrs)
enquiries:	or www.nationalrail.co.uk or text
First Great Western:	08457 - 000125 (0700 – 2200 daily)
Chiltern Railways:	08456 - 005165 (08.30 – 17.30)
Arriva Bus:	0844 8004411 (0900 - 1700 Mon - Fri)
First Berks Buses:	01753 524144
Carousel Buses:	01494 533436
Traveline:	0871 - 2002233 (0700 - 2200 daily) 10p/min on BT landline
RBWM	01628 796666
Transportation helpline	

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

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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.

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