

The Fenman

Newsletter of the Fen Line Users Association
www.flua.org.uk fenman@flua.org.uk

Issue 2/2017

Calling for the earliest delivery of the
'half-hourly' Kings Lynn-Kings Cross commitment

* *One track mind*

* *Lady – no, not that one – locked in station toilets!*

* *"Fares should be reduced"*

* *"The lesson for us is to keep on fighting now"*

"Our Railway Upgrade Plan is our strategy to provide more capacity, relieve crowding and respond to the tremendous growth Britain's railways continue to experience.... The key benefits include longer, faster, more frequent trains" said Network Rail on 9 June.

Launching its 'Railway Upgrade Plan', the Government-owned body adds: "the railway in Britain is the safest, and one of the most reliable, railways in Europe. It's also the fastest growing – and needs substantial improvements to continue its great success story."

We agree. There's more: "Passenger numbers have doubled in the last 20 years – this is more than the current infrastructure was ever designed for. That number's set to double again in the next 25 years. In many parts of the country demand continues to outstrip supply, with too many trains trying to use the same piece of track."

Precisely. Not only track through Ely, but, following money-saving economies made in 1984/5, between Kings Lynn and Watlington and Downham Market and Littleport as well.

Five miles and nine miles respectively of double lines - downgraded to single-track bottlenecks.



I'm standing here at Ely, says **Andy Gibbs**, as the train behind me is evacuated – broken air conditioning.

Things do go wrong, but **it's no joke having to wait around for another train when they're only once an hour**. Sometimes you can get a nice surprise, though – when the 0605 Downham to Kings Cross was cancelled at Ely (fatality at Waterbeach), I suggested ticket acceptance via Peterborough. Duly arranged, advertised on the screens, all aboard EMT's 0651 to Liverpool Lime Street (thankfully, 4 cars). The highlight was the 0741 Virgin East Coast Service, Peterborough to London, a very comfortable, very smooth HST. A frightfully civilised trip to work. 125s on the Fen Line? Gets my vote.

But, please restore the Kings Cross connection at Cambridge from the 0531 from Downham. I'm far from the only one who is being made to run furiously along the length of Cambridge station.



Roll up, roll up, take your places for tonight's big fight! The 1644 Kings Cross-Kings Lynn enters Cambridge station. New train, still the old ways.

4-cars will be detached and the already busy front four cars will go forward to Kings Lynn, packed to the last cubic millimetre.

An emergency in the train? No doctor would be able to get through the human crush! Seats free after Downham though.

Colin Sampson, Chairman 01366 388003

Robert Stripe, Hon. President

Ken Hubbard, Treasurer

Contact us:

Andy Tyler, Secretary

67 Goodwins Road, KINGS LYNN, Norfolk, PE30 5PE
07803 459 043 fluasecretary@flua.org.uk

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news and developments,
and members' section
www.flua.org.uk/membership from £5.25 a year

One track mind

A railway network like TSGN (Thameslink, Southern & Great Northern) is a system of highly interdependent interlocking parts. If you downgrade, you degrade. Not a problem for the Fen Line in the mid 1980s – there were only 8 trains a day departing Kings Lynn - but today it's 26! High house prices in places where there's plenty of jobs – Cambridge and London – mean more and more people choose the Fen Line to get to work. It's not all one-way of course, but the tidal flow is southwards out, northwards return. The promised longer trains and especially the committed 'all-day, half-hourly' trains cannot come too soon. True, the Ely area needs sorting for the latter - **it's great news that the Greater Cambridge, Greater Peterborough and New Anglia LEPs, and the Strategic Freight Network have funded £8.8 million of feasibility studies to prepare for early construction.**

Great Northern Mainline Route GN1 (Kings Lynn and Cambridge):
Kings Lynn – Ely – Cambridge – London Kings Cross
 Serving: Kings Lynn, Wattleton, Downham Market, Littleport, Ely, Waterbeach (one train per hour off peak only) Cambridge North, Cambridge and London Kings Cross.
 Some Monday to Friday peak trains may call at Royston.

	Proposed Frequency (trains per hour / intervals in minutes)				
	Mon-Fri Peak	Mon-Fri High Peak	Mon-Sat Daytimes	Mon-Sat Evenings	Sundays
Kings Lynn to and from London Kings Cross	2tph Every 30 minutes	2tph Every 30 minutes	1tph Every 60 minutes	1tph Every 60 minutes	1tph Every 60 minutes
Ely to and from London Kings Cross	2tph Every 30 minutes	2tph Every 30 minutes	2tph Every 30 minutes	2tph Every 30 minutes	2tph Every 30 minutes

Note: off peak Waterbeach is proposed to be served by Ely trains.

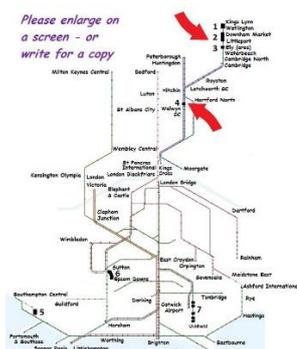
GTR 2018 timetable consultation Phase 1 of 15 September 2016. Except for Ely itself, this didn't promise 'half-hourly' all day (because of the Ely area deficiencies), but it's quite clear about **peak** trains 'every 30 minutes' to Lynn.

We've just been through Phase 2 of GTR's 2018 timetable consultation. It seems that Kings Lynn's 'every 30 minutes' peak service just isn't there.

For Ely, yes. And there's another promise – 8-car trains, for all stations. **But there's a sting in the tail.**

Thameslink has been in its planning stages since 1991. Kings Lynn direct to ... well, it's been Littlehampton, Portsmouth, Ashford - we have the T-shirts. Now Thameslink is from Cambridge only. 2-track Welwyn viaduct throttles ECML throughput.

It's a system. Bottlenecks degrade performance.



What bottlenecks?

Bottlenecks on TSGN* direct London services:

- 1 Kings Lynn-Wattleton single line - 5 miles
- 2 Downham Mkt-Littleport single line - 9 miles
- 3 Ely area regional crossroads - single lines
- 4 Welwyn viaduct 4 tracks down to 2
- 5 Fareham-Botley single line - 6 miles
- 6 Sutton-Epsom Downs single line - 4 miles
- 7 Uckfield Line 3 single line sections - 4 miles, 5 miles and 4 miles

All services affected by 2018 timetable consultation shown
*Some non-TSGN services also shown

Criticality depends on length, location and other factors

Although GN Fen Line trains will continue to run to/from Kings Cross, we recognise **precision timing will be required** to avoid causing the new Thameslink system severe delays (cross-London trains will branch off about a mile north of Kings Cross). GTR's proposed emphasis on longer station stops (such as at Cambridge) and on increased journey times would allow some 'catch up' time. Currently many trains pass at Downham Market, where a late northbound train running on the single track causes delay to the waiting southbound train.

We also understand that given the need for precision timing on the approaches to Kings Cross, **GTR proposes that trains cross at Littleport instead.** A late running northbound train here would not prevent a southbound train carrying straight on to the double track south of Littleport and reaching Kings Cross on time. But exact timings at Littleport are also determined by other trains elsewhere and the only northbound train 'slots' available would force on-time trains to **spend several minutes at Littleport waiting** for the single line to be free. Hence, **longer journey times.**

"Lengthening travel times by an average of eight minutes is **not good news for train travellers**" – **Elizabeth Truss MP.** "Kings Lynn businesses are getting increasingly fed-up with false promises and a lack of action. I welcome the bigger trains, but **we need them twice an hour, all day.** We need to make our dissatisfaction clear" – **Darren Taylor, Kings Lynn BID Ltd.**

"We expect to see the promised work on Ely North Junction taking place and we also want the single-line sections between there and Kings Lynn **returned to a two-track line**" – **Brian Long, Leader, Kings Lynn Borough Council.** "Cutting back on the frequencies promised last autumn – and slowing things down on top of that is unacceptable. We think **fares should be reduced to compensate**" - **Colin Sampson, FLUA Chairman.** "If our journey times do get longer, we'd be **going backwards,** rather than forwards. I will not stand by and let that happen" – **Sir Henry Bellingham MP.**



Mayor's Consort **Simon Bower**, FLUA Chairman **Colin Sampson**, FLUA's Hon. President **Robert Stripe**, **Carol Bower**, Kings Lynn & West Norfolk Mayor, Borough Council planner **Peter Jermany**, and GN Director **Keith Jipps** launch the new 387 train at Kings Lynn on 22 May 2017.
 Photo: Govia Thameslink Railway

Abolish bottlenecks - double the whole line!

"The Council has considerable concerns regarding the general lengthening of journey times proposed in the 2018 timetable for the Kings Lynn to Kings Cross rail route" says the Borough Council of Kings Lynn & West Norfolk in its Response to the proposed 2018 GN timetable. "Despite the very welcome recent introduction of faster trains (capable of 110 mph south of Hitchin) on our line the proposals are for Kings Lynn - Kings Cross Fen Line services to become slower. **The proposals mean average peak journeys of 113 minutes out and 110 minutes back between Kings Lynn and Kings Cross, an increase of up to 8 minutes,** although most users will experience a greater increase. ... The concerns and request for changes and Government action expressed ... are shared with FLUA and the Kings Lynn Business Improvement District (BID)." The Council adds: "Govia Thameslink Railway (Great Northern) acts for Government as a management contractor. The three bodies are therefore jointly calling on the Government to: ***Explore ways of maintaining and improving existing journey times between Kings Lynn and Kings Cross** (allowing for the additional, welcome, stops at the employment hub around the new Cambridge North station); ***Honour the clear commitment in the Phase 1 consultation for trains "every 30 minutes" between Kings Lynn and Kings Cross during peak times** (arriving 0700-0959 at Kings Cross and departing there 1600-1859). This is something that has now been cut back in the current Phase 2 consultation; ***Introduce trains "every 30 minutes" between Kings Lynn and Cambridge/Cambridge North during peak times** (i.e. arriving 0700-0959 at Cambridge and departing there 1600-1859). The second track between Kings Lynn and Watlington and between Downham Market and Littleport was removed as an economy measure in 1984/5. The anachronistic single line bottlenecks impose severe limits on the scheduling of trains, leading to the longer overall journey times now being proposed. [We are] further calling on Government to: ***Adopt a minimum two-track railway between Kings Lynn and Kings Cross, equipped to accommodate 12-car trains,** as a clear long-term strategic aim; ***Ensure that short-term plans are fully assessed to ensure they do not conflict with this ultimate goal;** ***Instruct the West Anglia Task Force to develop proposals for full re-doubling of the single line sections** to remove the root cause of delays and timetabling constraints north of Ely."

<http://flua.org.uk/documents/BC%20comments%20on%20Proposed%202018%20Gre%20Northern%20Timetable%20Final.pdf>

Now the Phase 2 consultation has closed, GTR says, "We'll be working our way through all the comments and suggestions in order to fine tune the timetable for the next phase. **Come back in the autumn to see and comment on the refined timetables, weekend timetables and late night services. ... We'll list the key themes from the second phase soon. "**



*Plenty of tables, more leg room, individual armrests, air conditioning, plug sockets and free wifi. And First Class seating – eccentrically placed, little seat differentiation – but at least it's provided (and we know many appreciate it). Oh, and 2+2 seating. With 223 seats (including 22 First Class) the new 110 mph Fen Line class 387 train has **fewer seats** than the train type it replaces (the class 365 had 263 seats, including 24 First Class). It certainly has fewer seats than the 100 mph class 377/5 trains which we were meant to get and which squeezed in more seats by dint of having those much-disliked 3+2 seats in the middle two cars. Transport Minister **Chris Grayling** talks of doing away with First Class – we will fight to keep it on the Fen Line!*

Photo: Govia Thameslink Railway



Greater Anglia will have an entirely new fleet soon and the entirety of its old fleet will be ousted. An artist's mock-up of the new class 720 interior shows 3+2 seating (no First Class is planned). Carriages will be slightly longer than what we are used to. 5-car trains will seat 544, and 10-car units will seat 1146. Truly excellent crowd shifters, but not at all suitable for 100 minute journeys! From 2019/20 the 720s will be running on our Liverpool Street services.

Photo: Greater Anglia



Waterbeach new station is likely to be placed hereabouts, if the new town proposals for 10,000 new houses go ahead. The framework plans submitted by developers to South Cambs District Council show the proposed station in the vicinity of milepost 62 (the yellow object just in front of the Fen Line train – quite visible if you enlarge the picture on a computer. If you are unable to do this, the wood in the background is at 'The Willows' and Midload Farm is to the right. The station would replace the existing Waterbeach station.

Photo: Steve Smithson

Lady in the Luggage Rack

by Mawrenna Gleid

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. Not a tale of two cities, but of two ladies and the toilets at Cambridge.

The first was an older lady; slightly anxious. She arrived with plenty of time, walked past the 'cleaning in progress' sign, and joined the queue (this was the ladies: *of course* there was a queue). Last to emerge, she pushed at the door to the platform.

It wouldn't open.

A group of women queued outside, calling reassurance as she banged at the door. She was claustrophobic, and her train was in twenty minutes. She couldn't understand how she'd been locked in.

As station staff passed, they were accosted by the growing crowd. Each shrugged helplessly: they couldn't say who had the key.

After fifteen minutes, a cleaner returned, key in hand. He shrugged as he let the visibly shaken lady out: the toilets were closed for cleaning. "This lady was locked inside!" said someone. He shrugged again, relocked the door, and walked off, as a swarm of outraged women made for Customer Services.

The second was a younger lady; seven months pregnant. She was off to London, and neither of the toilets on the train, brand new as it was (with much more spacious luggage racks!), were working.

"Don't you worry," one of the station staff said compassionately. "Walk down to platform four, and we'll hold the train for you. No, it's no trouble at all – it's the least we can do."

The train waited, and the thankful smile on the lady's face was mirrored by approving looks up and down the platform.

Two ladies, two encounters, two very different outcomes. Signal problems, cancellation, and wires going down are regular hazards of commuting, soon forgotten. But customer service lingers in the mind.

Let's hope we all have the experience of the second lady.

Practical Support

Level crossings are the single greatest safety risk to rail passengers. We support NR's campaign to close or modify crossings on the Fen Line and have said this in our formal representations to the Government in respect of NR's current proposals for relevant crossings in Cambridgeshire.

Ten years ago

We said "If peak trains were as fast as off-peak ones, all our stations (except Kings Lynn's 95 mins) would fall within London commuters' long-established need for a journey of no more than ninety minutes."

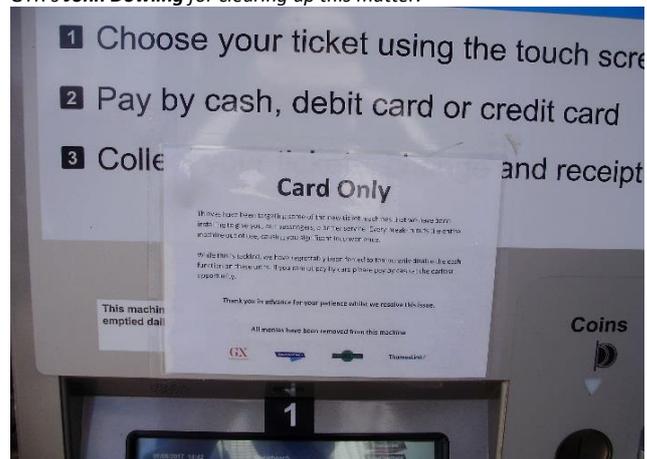
Saturday 18 November 2017 – AGM, Waterbeach. Any motions and/or Committee nominations to the **Secretary, Andy Tyler, by 1 October** please.



Thanks for the advertising, but you've missed the last letter folks! In reality, this sign, at Cambridge, tells drivers of new class 700 12-car units - 'Full Length Units' - where to stop.



First our Secretary, **Andy Tyler**, then our Treasurer, **Ken Hubbard**, had problems getting 'CIV' tickets for journeys to destinations abroad. 'CIV' includes essential 'insurance' to cover you if you miss your Eurostar because of a very late arrival at Kings Cross. T&Cs apply, of course, but staffed stations **do** sell 'LONDON INTL (CIV)' tickets. Many thanks to GTR's **John Dowling** for clearing up this matter.



Machine out of use at Waterbeach? Actually the two there are still functioning, but for card transactions only because of thieves. Sometimes you really can sympathise with what the railway has to deal with!

An alternative GN timetable, based on existing journey times and prepared by FLUA member Ben Colson MBE, FCILT shows the sort of timetable we would like to see. It can be found at: <http://flua.org.uk/documents/2017%20July%20alt%20TT%20proposal%20Dec%202018.pdf>

"This summer also marks the 25th anniversary of victory in another key travel battle the completion of electrification. It may have been a slow journey, but the final destination was eventually reached. **The lesson for us is to keep fighting on now**" – **Allister Webb**, Lynn News.