

The Fenman

Newsletter of the Fen Line Users Association
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Issue 1/2018

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

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"Even as delays soar, a stand-off with Network Rail may force train operators to scale back planned improvements" reports the Sunday Times on 22 April.

The people behind the 'Norwich in 90' campaign have come back swiftly, "pouring cold water" over the story as the Eastern Daily Press reported the next day. "

Our neighbours in the far East probably don't know how lucky they are, having a heavyweight campaign to extract that promise of quicker trips. From May, we're getting the exact opposite - most Kings Cross-Kings Lynn trains will take longer.

But when is a promise not a promise? Could the half-hourly' service to Lynn franchise requirement by May last year offer a clue? Before we blame GTR for not operating it, before we blame NR for not providing the infrastructure for it, could we scrutinise the role of governments - you know, those people with the promise of Thameslink for us, before they backtracked and suggested 125 mph 'IEP' trains instead (then backtracked on that) - could we scrutinise their role? Perhaps what some call their world-class lack of consistency, co-ordination and understanding might have some bearing. Devilish hard, this detail.

The past: a cemetery of promises which have not been kept. As MPs, the Mayor and VIPs assemble at Ely on 4 May, we ask when are you going to sort the Ely area *and* are you going to think this through, **or will it just mean getting to a certain field at Littleport sooner and waiting there longer? Promise not?**



Work on the Great Catchwater Drain viaduct caused the blockade.
Photo: Steve Smithson



Five days without trains! That's what it took to do work on the Great Catchwater Drain viaduct between Littleport and Ely. And lots of other NR maintenance work too. Buses aplenty, longer journeys, but limited to a fairly short period. "I have nothing but praise for the alternative service offered" says regular contributor **Andy Gibbs** and he'd be the first to agree he doesn't pull punches!

What 'certain field at Littleport' do we mean? **Does it have a romantic name**, a Field of the Cloth of Gold perhaps? Sorry to disappoint, all those you'll have time to study are nameless. On leaving Littleport station, many northbound trains will come to a dead stand at signal L22 and wait several minutes for an up train to clear the single line. Edward Thomas' stop was unwanted; for us it's now to be routine. Let's go all 21st Century - **New Adlestrop** then!

"We pay thousands a year to travel as quickly as possible" says *the Lady in the Luggage Rack* on page 4. A seat in the rack? Lucky you! It's the floor for many of us. **This is First Class** - a cleaner type of carpet there? And *still* we're waiting for 8-car platforms.

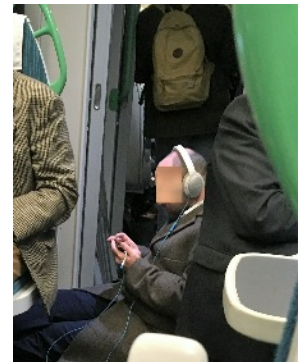


Photo: Mike Lamport

The GTR Management Contract runs to 2021. Contract, not franchise then? That's right - GTR charges a fee to run things and the government makes the big decisions and it calls all the shots. It's the government which sets the fares and takes the revenue.

The AGM will be at Littleport on Saturday 24 November 2018.

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The May 2018 timetable

Of course, any big change creates winners and losers. It creates a myriad of unintended consequences. It also impacts directly on people's lives. And, as changes go, this certainly is a big one! The impacts on the Fen Line of the massive timetable shake-up, which GTR calls: "A transformation that will change not only journeys but the lives of our generation and generations to follow", is previewed here. **Along with many MPs, LEs, local authorities, and business groups, we share the overall view that there has been a significant deterioration. As ever, pros and cons.**

Virtually all GN's Kings Lynn and Ely trains will call at the new Cambridge North - positive.

We think trains should 'stop where the jobs are' so this is good news. Cambridge North stops add considerable value to our 'The Cambridge Express' services. We also want Cambridge South to be built soon and our trains to stop there too – the same reasoning: jobs, 1000s of them.

The afternoon relief train from Cambridge to Downham Market will run through to Kings Lynn - positive.

This will run as the 1620 Cambridge –Kings Lynn, providing an additional journey opportunity from Kings Cross at 1512. This train is one of the two desperately needed-relief trains in the afternoon peak from Cambridge – no sign of an even more-needed relief train to Kings Lynn about an hour later.

There will be an additional arrival in Kings Lynn at 0803 and an additional departure from there at 1716 - positive.

These new services could be of considerable use to those passengers who work in Kings Lynn.

Watlington will benefit from the 0610 Kings Lynn-Kings Cross and the 1812 Kings Cross-Kings Lynn calling there - positive.

These trains will use 'selective door opening' at Watlington's short platforms. Until platform lengthening work at Littleport and Waterbeach is done, these 8-car trains will not stop at these stations.

Southbound evening services will be faster - positive.

Good news for visitors to Fen Line stations from the south.

Consultation documents (September 2016) proposed peak arrivals at Kings Cross from both Kings Lynn and Ely 'every 30 minutes.' This will not be the case - negative.

The government's 'peak' definition for arrivals is 0700-0959. The otherwise first arrival which is 'missing' will still run from Cambridge, but of no use to Fen Line passengers any more. The Kings Lynn train currently departing at 0517, run by Greater Anglia, has provided the necessary connection since 2005, though changed timetables have forced people to "furiously run" since December 2016. Yes, we know uncaring computers will say it isn't an official connection any longer. The Kings Lynn train will arrive at Cambridge at 0610, precisely the same time as the Kings Cross one will depart.

Consultation documents (September 2016) proposed departures from Kings Cross to both Kings Lynn and Ely 'every 30 minutes.' This will not be the case - negative.

The government's 'peak' definition for departures is 1600-1859. The 1612 and 1712 will run as far as Ely only, not stopping at Waterbeach. For users of the 1712, there will be a Greater Anglia connection from Cambridge to Fen Line stations.

The 1642 Kings Cross-Kings Lynn, leaving Cambridge at 1739, will still run with 4 cars only - negative.

This grossly overloaded train is the reason why we call endlessly for a relief train to all Fen Line stations leaving Cambridge about 1720 (the Greater Anglia 1558 Liverpool Street-Ely, which leaves Cambridge at 1721, serves Cambridge North, Waterbeach and Ely, but not stations north of Ely). 4 cars will follow the main GN train from Cambridge at 1744, serving Waterbeach and Ely. This is a good innovation, but obviously reliant on passengers from Cambridge to those stations holding back and catching this slightly later service.

Many journeys will take longer - negative.

The overall statistics don't look too bad as the effect of faster south-bound evening journeys and the dropping of a few trains between Ely and Kings Cross which stop here, there and everywhere, evens out the effect of longer journeys. Let's restrict our words here to the 0642, 0712, 0842, 0942, 1042, 1142, 1242, 1342 and 1442 from Kings Cross, which will take 12 minutes longer, and just point out many trains between Kings Lynn/Ely and Kings Cross and between Kings Lynn and Cambridge are to be slowed significantly. Many of those to Kings Lynn will be required to pull away from Littleport station and then pause at 'New Adlestrop' (see page 1). We haven't analysed Ely to Cambridge as there are many alternative services between these two points.

Not quite pre-electrification timings, but the 2 hour peak journey returns - negative.

The 0742 Kings Lynn-Kings Cross will be taking 2 hours 1 minute to reach its destination. All in all, perhaps this sums much of it up.

Not everyone will necessarily rate these changes the way we do (it depends greatly on the precise journeys you make). This preview covers Mondays to Fridays only (not weekends) and is unlikely to be comprehensive – write and tell us of issues you discover. There are lots of small changes as well: always check times before travelling. More analysis at:

<http://www.flua.org.uk/documents/CONSOLIDATED%20TIMETABLE%20DOCUMENT.pdf>

We have not covered implications for fares and discounts.

Why this big change?

A big part is that making trains cross at Littleport is inherently more reliable than at Downham, where the southbound train can often be held for a late runner in the opposite direction. Delaying London-bound trains is not a good idea - they foul up paths on the East Coast Main Line. So we do not argue with that. **It's the curse of the singled sections causing the 'New Adlestrop' pause.**



And much of it is, of course, to do with introducing new cross-London Thameslink services, like Cambridge-Brighton. GTR says: "Passenger numbers have doubled since 2000, a growth that far outstrips any other area of the UK rail network. Our area is the busiest and most congested part of an ageing network. **It's time to create a modern railway that meets the needs of passengers today.**"

So, isn't the Fen Line part of this GTR success story of passenger numbers doubling?

You know you're not dreaming that our trains are packed, but, what do ORR's numbers show? Call 2000/01-2016/17 official statistics to the witness stand. Kings Lynn up 92%, a growth multiple of 1.9. Not quite double there, but pretty close. Watlington up 173%, a growth multiple of 2.7. Almost tripled. Downham Market up 140%, that's 2.4 times what it was. Littleport, up 254%, more than tripled – a multiple of 3.5. Ely up 183%, 2.8 times. Waterbeach up 157%, another station that's more than tripled, with a growth multiple of 3.3.

Could it be we're dealing with very small numbers then?

Don't laugh! We do need to deal with that; easy! The six Fen Line stations together: 1.77 million passengers in 2000/01, 4.56 million in 2016/17. Up by 157%, 2.6 times. Hardly small!

Now there's four-and-a-half million Fen Line passengers per year (about 2 million of them from stations north of Ely).

Yet, except for Ely, no 'half-hourly' service and still four-car trains. Over to all those VIPs meeting in Ely on 4 May.

Journey times matter to us

Of course they do, and that's why we said it in our submission to the East Coast Main Line Route Study draft. Not just us: the Borough Council of Kings Lynn & West Norfolk and Kings Lynn BID Ltd and ourselves worked together on this, as we find ourselves doing more and more. Of course, not just from Kings Lynn either, but from all our Fen Line stations. We do not expect the combined voice of local elected representatives, local businesses and local passengers to go unheeded, and we'll tell you what happens.

Norwich in 90? 115 miles in 90 minutes. Kings Lynn-Kings Cross is 99 miles, so that ought to mean 77 minutes. Ok, more station stops. But with a fast, cab signalled East Coast Line, maybe not total pie in the sky. **After all, it wasn't far-fetched back in 2008 for the government to suggest 125 mph trains for the Fen Line!**

Single line throttles growth



A third of it is in Cambridgeshire, the other two-thirds in Norfolk. When they opened the line from Downham and Littleport (and on to Ely) in 1847, the East Anglian Railways Co built a single track. But by the very next year they had doubled it as far south as Hilgay Fen (there was a station where the level crossing is now) before, like the fen itself, the money began to dry up.

Indeed, it wasn't until 1884 that the line was doubled throughout. Exactly 100 years later, the 'cut costs at any cost' mood of the early 1980s meant it was singled once more. Sure, to mark the incredible explosion of knowledge-based commerce in the university city, the term 'Cambridge Phenomenon' had been coined some four years beforehand, but back then nobody was far-sighted enough to foresee today's **strong link between rail and economic growth.**



8-car platforms, two footbridges, the planning application for a new Waterbeach station is in. We have asked for a condition to ensure the long up platform canopy is definitely built and for a better (higher) barrier on the exposed eastern side. Picture: RLW



Yes, you've understood it correctly. This train of loaded silica sand wagons is travelling in the opposite direction to that in our diagram, but it cuts both ways. Arriving at Downham Market a few minutes behind a southbound Kings Lynn-Kings Cross train, this one now has to wait for the passenger train to clear the single line when arriving at Littleport. True they're both going in the same direction but, no matter, it's just one at a time over that single line section - so it has to sit and wait. And there can be **no** northbound moves!

It takes about 9 minutes for a passenger train to make a one-way transit and about 12 minutes for a freight train. Not only does this mean it places a huge constraint on the number of trains that can run, it plays havoc with the timetables when they're running late. Ever wondered why you often have to wait at Littleport coming home - 'train on the single line' - then, after a wait, your train mysteriously moves off again, but nothing's come past going the other way? We've given you all the clues you need!! Kings Lynn-Watlington was singled too, but it's shorter, and there are more signals It's a lesser problem, but **another throttle.**

Track Redoubling

- Need identified through timetable consultations/ECML response
- Ely Area improvements won't remove all of our constraints
- Minimum two-track railway KL- KX to accom. 12 car trains as long term goal
- SOBC needed
- Outcome based - may be other solutions



Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk

Sometimes you see something and think "I wish I wrote that!" That's how we feel about the recent presentation by BCKLWN Strategic Planner **Peter Jermamy** to that Council's Kings Lynn Area Consultative Committee (chaired by **Cllr. Andy Tyler**). Here are a couple of slides (above and below) from it, copied with permission.

Next Steps

- Keep pressure on for 8 Car Trains
- Complete Ely Area improvements study/Road study Ph. 2 - monitor through Ely Area Task Force
- Lobby for implementation as soon as possible in CP6
- Make case for further capacity improvements - track redoubling/other measures



Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk

"If we want to see faster, more consistent journey times we may need to aim for a minimum two-track railway between KL and Kings Cross to accommodate 12 car trains as our long term goal. DfT have informed us that this would require a Strategic Outline Business Case." The Council is exploring this with Norfolk CC and consultants.

Lady in the Luggage Rack

by Mawrenna Gleid

I bet you're used to the new trains by now, aren't you?

While autumn faded into winter, then melted into spring, they've stopped being worth any special notice. They've gone from new and full of quirks to the familiar; reliable workhorses that shuttle us to work or school every day. Just wait till there's a day of disruption, and you end up unexpectedly on one of the old kind. It's a strange feeling, to look back and think yes, this used to be the everyday, but no longer.

To most of us, the hardware isn't important. The regular commuter is nothing if not adaptable. They could replace our carriages with bus seats strapped onto wooden trucks, and within a month most of the complaints would be that first class deserves a better quality of knothole.

What *does* matter is the timetable. There's an implicit contract in being a regular commuter: we pay thousands a year to travel as quickly as possible. No one expects Eurostar-like speeds on the Fen Line, not when those are almost as long as the gap between our stations. But people don't commute to enjoy the ride.

So why are they slowing down journey times between Lynn and Cambridge from May? Not just because of Cambridge North. Trains will be sitting and waiting up and down the line, throwing out everyone's carefully planned schedule.

It's going to take even longer to get to work or school, and home again. You'll have to get up earlier, or cut down your morning routine. You will now spend even longer per day with your neighbour's elbow getting intimate with your kidneys.

Progress? I don't think so. We deserve better.

Kings Lynn resident Mawrenna is a regular on the Cambridge Run.

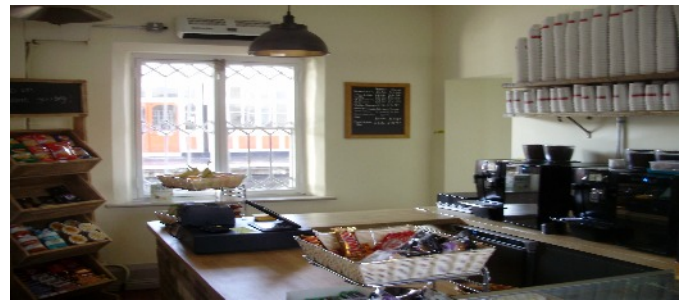
Much has happened since the last issue, and much continues to happen, and we simply do not have the space to write about it all. We try to keep our website www.flua.org.uk up to date and we strongly urge Members to make full use of it, especially during this time of enormous change.



The Thameslink class 700s will run Cambridge-Brighton services hourly from May; more Thameslink services will run from Cambridge eventually, including to Maidstone. Meanwhile, some, like this one at Cambridge North, have been used on Ely runs. Photo: Ben Walsh



Just as the longstanding inclusion of the Fen Line in the proposed Thameslink network was ditched by the government, along they came with Intercity Express Programme 'IEP' plans. Then they gave those the chop too. Finally, Cambridge's screens show 'Brighton'.



Station eats: Platform One cafe is now open at Downham Market; the Ely Food Station is up and running. Your turn to buy the coffee!



Downham Market will no longer be a main place for trains to cross, Littleport taking over that function. The snow looks cold.

Ten years ago

"... government is testing the costs of serving 11 'IEP' [125/140 mph Intercity Express Programme] Kings Cross-Kings Lynn diagrams (daily work schedules). A 5-car Fen Line 'IEP' would be long, equalling 6.5 class 365 [or 387] coaches. 400 seats! So, will they or won't they?" That's what we wrote in *The Fenman* 2008 No 1. Photo: IEP's business end.



Peter Jermamy's presentation (page 3) can be viewed in full at:

<http://www.flua.org.uk/documents/BCKLWN%20Rail%20Service%20Update%2026%20%20March%202018.pptx>

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Before you go - far too many trains with **both** toilets out of use; longer journeys coming too! **See it** - we have, all too often. **Say it** - we just have. **Sorted** - over to you, Great Northern!