

# **Richard Marchant**

## **First Capital Connect Station Services Manager**

2nd June 2010, 95 North End, Meldreth

*We had a very open and useful discussion about making the best use of the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group's efforts.*

### **1. GETTING STARTED AS A USER GROUP**

#### **Supporting the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group**

RM will support the MSFRUG and hopes to attend June 16th meeting. Future meeting dates to be coordinated with RM. He suggests an AGM in addition to our three scheduled meetings rotating between the three stations; the AGM could be held in a neutral location. I would suggest Melbourn in recognition of Melbourn's interest in local rail service.

#### **Useful organizations**

RM suggests familiarizing ourselves with Fen Line Users Association (FLUA), a thriving user group chaired by Colin Sampson, former deputy mayor of West Norfolk. FLUA has its own website, quarterly newsletter, and Passenger Champion. FLUA invites Council reps, British Transport Police, Network Rail and First Capital Connect to its AGMS. Following a presentation on a specific issue, there is a session for questions and discussion.

Also recommends contact with Passenger Focus. Other main players: Dept for Transport, Association of Train Operating Companies.

Recommends visiting Downham Market Station: bar, coffee shop, reading room all associated with the station. Miniature model railway circling overhead. Very atmospheric.

#### **Notice Boards**

FCC will provide Rail User Group Notice Boards for Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Stations to be used as we like.

Current notice boards at every station indicate Punctuality Performance Measures. These figures are updated every fourth week and relate to trains that complete their journey within three minutes of the scheduled time.

### **2. STUDENT DISCOUNT FARES**

It was unknown to FCC that National Express was severely undercutting them on student discount season passes for travel from Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton. I know that this has been facilitated in part by County Council. Huge confusion at Meldreth Station on what exactly the arrangements are, especially when a replacement ticket needs to be issued. SV to chase CCC for clear information and better communication.

### **3. PARKING**

#### **Parking Charges, and parking in residential areas around stations**

Meldreth and Shepreth car park charges have been lowered (last week) to £2.00 per day, down by 50P. Weekend charges have gone up from £1.50 to £2.00. For comparison: St. Neot's Station parking charges are £6; service is a bit better but not proportionally so. King's Lynn and Downham Market charge £4.30. RM does not feel that focussing on further lowering parking charges at Meldreth and Shepreth will be fruitful.

Parking in residential areas around stations is common. Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton are the smallest stations on the Fen Line and our difficulty is that, as small villages, we have few non-residential area parking facilities. FCC does not have a responsibility for the Highway – once parking takes place outside the station car park, it is not FCC responsibility. We must balance our campaigning efforts with the knowledge that having three village stations in such proximity is in fact something of a luxury. Our parking charges are the lowest by far on the Fen Line.

There are no more free rail station car parks on the Fen Line; FCC is aware that Shepreth is empty and Meldreth about 1/3 full.

#### **Civil Parking Enforcement**

This is worth exploring. FCC's offer was to deploy its NCP attendants to monitor parking offences on the highway.

### **4. TICKET MACHINES**

#### **Ticket Machines - vandalism**

90% of problems experienced are down to human error, and primarily vandalism. Foxton ticket machine has the highest number of incidents of low-level but paralyzing vandalism on the Fen Line, tied with Wattlington. Bottle tops, sticks and elastic bands are inserted into the coin slots. Vandals have been observed by CCTV and Foxton Signal Box operator. At Foxton, new metal gates leading onto platforms have also been wrecked by vandals using bicycles to ram them. The gates exist in part to keep bicycles off the platform, as recreational cycling on the platform is dangerous. At Foxton, the waiting room was vandalised recently. A large sum of money has been spent rectifying vandalism damage at Foxton, and also Shepreth and Meldreth. British Transport Police are aware.

It is worth noting that this information does not come to the Neighbourhood Police Panels under 'ASB' and there is a faulty perception that ASB is not such a serious problem in Foxton.

#### **Ticket Machines – readability**

Littleport, Wattlington and Waterbeach have registered enough formal complaints about illegible ticket machine screens, via the formal Complaints Form which is available in every FCC ticket office, to warrant a trial of new ticket machines with a different type of screen. RM suggests that if this is felt to be a serious issue at M, S and F, then the formal complaints procedure should be acted upon.

#### **Selling rail tickets at village shops**

This sounds nice but would mean a massive investment in additional machines and a ten-day training course for shop employees to use the machines. All tickets must be encoded with magnetic strips to pass barriers. Not possible to have a stack of Cambridge Day Returns behind the shop counter in this day and age.

### **Additional ticket machines on station platforms at M, S and F**

Electric hook-up is situated on one platform only.

## **5. PHYSICAL ACCESS**

### **Disabled ramp to Cambridge-bound platform, Meldreth Station**

The contractor used the wrong type of yellow paint on the ramp, which should have been non-slip paint. The yellow painted sections will have to be dug out and the work redone and properly painted. FCC will undertake this work.

### **Disabled ramp to London-bound platform, Meldreth Station**

FCC Franchise ends in 2012. Little or no money is available for infrastructure development now. However, it is worth keeping the campaign for the second disabled ramp alive on the back burner, and to be ready to campaign hard with the advent of the next franchise.

### **Designated walkway in Meldreth Station Car Park**

I confessed to mocking this walkway, which seems an unnecessary accessory. The walkway is legally required. In the event of snow or icy weather, the NCP car park attendant, together with Meldreth Station Master, would be required to grit/salt only the designated walkway. It is designed to be close to cars so that drivers and passengers have a minimum distance to walk to reach the treated walkway. If the car park becomes more fully used, then a second walkway on the other side of the car park will be added, with an 'H' link path adjoining the two.

### **Station Road Bridge, Meldreth, vegetation**

Cutting back the vegetation on the approach to Melbourn has been unresolved for years. This is a serious impediment to visibility, especially with regard to cyclists. We visited the bridge and RM felt sure that this must be a Highways issue. SV to contact CCC (for the third or fourth time).

### **Cycle racks at Foxton Station**

No progress to date.

RM to chase.

### **Cycle wheeling channel at Meldreth Station**

Nice to have. We observed

## **6. TIMETABLES**

### **New 9:43 service from Meldreth to Cambridge.**

This additional service is much appreciated. It stops also at Shepreth (9:45) and Foxton (9:48).

### **MSFRUG timetabling suggestion**

Well thought-out and clearly presented. Unfortunately the extra numbers of minutes which the suggestion seeks to do away with are there in order to tally up with the much wider network of timetables at more distant stations, so changes are not necessarily possible. (Lee Millard, Customer Relations Manager at FCC, is also looking at the timetabling suggestion.)

## **7. FOR INFORMATION**

### **Disruptive delays can be caused by:**

Someone jamming their foot in the sliding door to hold a place for another passenger, Accidents on the line (sadly, these are quite frequent), Disruptive passengers on the train.

**Accident rate/incidents of abuse** highest at Waterbeach: full-barrier at level crossing but much higher volume of rail traffic than at Foxton; therefore more delays and greater frustration.

### **Replacement of Meldreth Station Platform signs**

This is due to vandalism caused by an air gun fired repeatedly at signs. A number of dead pigeons have been found on the platforms.

### **Information Boards**

Frequent errors have been caused by a virus affecting the whole route from King's Cross-Huntingdon-King's Lynn. Major software upgrade to be completed in September – millions of £ - should solve the problem.

### **Station appearance**

Meldreth/Shepreth/Foxton in Bloom? – sponsorship by local garden centres for hanging baskets could be explored.

## **SAFETY MESSAGE**

As a Shepreth Station rail user myself I took this to heart:

Always allow extra time necessary to purchase your ticket, especially at Shepreth where a half-barrier level crossing can be tempting to someone in a hurry. Accidents do happen; taking an extra 30 seconds can make all the difference.

*Cllr Susan van de Ven*