

Aspirations for the Thameslink Franchise

Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group

Winner of Railfuture's 2012 Rail User Group Awards:

'Most Effective Rail User Group'

'Best Website'

'Best Campaigner'

The Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group (MSFRUG) exists to improve access to rail service at three rural South Cambridgeshire stations where rail is the principal form of public transport.

Since 2003 commercial bus services have declined dramatically in this area and in 2011 Cambridgeshire County Council announced its intention to remove all bus subsidies by 2014.

It is vital that local rail services be protected and strengthened for this rural area and that wherever possible, development of other forms of public and sustainable transport, including cycling and transport, be made in association with the rail corridor.

Cambridgeshire County Council's 'Draft Transport Strategy for Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire' highlights the critical importance of enhancing access to rail along the A10 corridor, where modal shift away from car use is critical for economic and environmental reasons.

Footfall at Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton stations has risen, and the MSFRUG has achieved a number of service improvements which should be carried over to the next franchise:

1. **50% off adult fare discount for 16-19 year-olds in education and training.**
This has brought rail travel to a more affordable standard for those on lower incomes and has resulted in a significant modal shift from bus to train for this age group. Last year, all students attending Hills Road Sixth Form College in Cambridge and travelling by public transport chose to travel by rail.
2. **Free parking at Shepreth Station** – seeing a resumption of full car park usage following a period of zero activity with parking charges.
3. **Reduced parking charges at Meldreth Station** – a slight increase in car park patronage has been achieved, following a sustained period of very low usage with higher parking charges.

4. **Establishment of community-supported station gardens** at all three stations with a range of practical input from the TOC including water supply and off-platform garden space. This project has greatly enhanced community awareness of local rail service and has been supported financially by local businesses. All local primary and secondary schools are involved, together with young people out of education, employment and training (NEET) and Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award students.
5. **Establishment of a Community Rail Partnership** with the Train Operating Company (First Capital Connect), Network Rail, Cambridgeshire County Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council, and supported by local businesses, primary and secondary schools, and parish councils. The partnership has evolved organically and rests upon an outstanding relationship with the TOC, who attend all Rail User Group meetings and participate fully in the life of the local community.
6. **Restrictions for bicycles on trains which are not unnecessarily restrictive** (8:10 AM Meldreth-Cambridge only).

The MSFRUG's aspirations for the Thameslink franchise period:

RETENTION OF 1-6 above, and:

7. **Retaining the same first and last service times and initially the same service frequency** (half hourly at busy time, hourly off-peak), **but with an aspiration to increase the service to half hourly** once the Thameslink upgrade is complete in 2018.
8. **Retention of staffed booking office at Meldreth** on at least current terms.
9. **Retention of the recently introduced 25% weekend discount** to bring rail travel into affordable range for those on lower incomes.
10. **Introduction of parking provision at Foxton.** Currently Foxton has no station parking, although Network Rail and Cambridgeshire County Council own substantial parcels of land very near to the station. Network Rail is now engaged in a feasibility study of the closure of Foxton level crossing, which considers options for vehicle and pedestrian bridges and underpasses. In association with any prospective closure of the level crossing, the MSFRUG would seek to promote a new transport interchange for Foxton Station including car parking, high standard cycle access (cycle paths from north and south, and cycle parking), and safe passenger drop-off and pick-up points. The TOC will have a partnership role to play in supporting this enhanced station function.

11. **Full disabled access at Meldreth Station.** Currently the London-bound platform is totally inaccessible for wheelchair and push-chair users. As a village, Meldreth is home to Meldreth Manor School, an important Scope School for Disabled Children. Meldreth should be a flagship station for disabled access rather than one of the least accessible on the network.
12. **Improved cycle parking at all stations,** including the Melbourn side of Meldreth Station.
13. **Covered waiting shelter at Meldreth's Cambridge-bound platform.**
14. **Ticket vending machines on both platforms at all three stations** for safety and access reasons, and selling a full range of tickets including Plusbus and Groupsave.
15. **Reverting the official name of Meldreth Station to 'Meldreth and Melbourn'** to attract usage from internet-plotted journeys to Melbourn Science Park, as a local employment centre.
16. **Extend the service from Cambridge to Cambridge Science Park** when this new station opens.
17. **Publish service performance data for the three village stations,** and develop a plan to provide a service to these stations in time of severe service disruption.
18. Management of the three stations as a single cluster.
19. **Develop local station travel plans** to encourage non-car access to the station in conjunction with local authorities

9 October 2013

Susan van de Ven
Chairman
Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group

<http://melbourn.org.uk/railusergroup/>
railusergroup@gmail.com
susanvanden@yahoo.co.uk