

First Capital Connect and Cambridgeshire County Council
14 December 2009, 2:30
Cambridgeshire County Council
Castle Court, Cambridge

AGENDA

Report author: Meldreth County Councillor Susan van de Ven

Attendance:

Cambridgeshire County Council

Graham Hughes
Bob Tuckwell
Cllr Kilian Bourke
Cllr Peter Downes
Cllr Tim Stone
Cllr Susan van de Ven

First Capital Connect

Hugh Clancy
Larry Heyman
David Byrne
David Burns

Purpose of meeting:

To establish areas for constructive cooperation between CCC and FCC, for the purpose of improving access to rail service at Foxton, Shepreth and Meldreth Stations.

Key areas of focus:

Student fares, disabled access, cycle provision, station car parks, ticket machines, station naming

1. Introduction and background

a. Transport Innovation Fund

In October, Cambridgeshire County Council became the first local authority in England to make a democratic decision on the adoption of anti-congestion measures. First stage to focus on redevelopment of Chesterton rail station, which is on King's Cross Line – a very significant show of support to First Capital Connect.

b. Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Stations

Rail is the superior form of public transport option in this well-populated area. However, a number of barriers impede access.

c. Local rail campaign

This took shape in late 2008 in response to student fare crisis, car park charges, introduction of problematic ticket machines, and proposed reduction in booking office opening hours. The 'Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group' is now establishing itself under the Railfuture umbrella.

2. Fares

a. All fares are prohibitively expensive for many people who require public transport. Pensioners with bus passes often cannot afford rail, and bus travel is in any case a poor second in terms of service - inadequate for many people's transport needs.

b. Student discount fares: In September 2008 FCC apparently 'aligned' student discount fares across its patch with the result that fares in this area rose from about £200 to over £500. This has cut out the less well off.

- There is no cooperation between FCC and CCC as local education authority on the student discount fare.
- From CCC's point of view, cooperation is at present impossible because FCC does not publish a guaranteed fare in advance. Stagecoach, the bus operator, does publish its fares in advance and cooperates with CCC on student discount fares.
- For reasons not understood, and only obtainable via complex steps, National Express sells a student discount fare on FCC trains for £352 – compared with £580 from FCC (taking the Meldreth-Cambridge fare). Why can FCC not match this fare at its own booking offices?

3. Disabled Access

Note: The Franchised Station Design Guidance, chapter 4.4 on Disability Access, refers to the Strategic Rail Authority's Code of Practice in its listing of station design requirements, including ramps to access station platforms (text attached).

a. Meldreth Station serves an unusually high proportion of people with limited mobility:

Meldreth is home to a Scope school for severely disabled children, Meldreth Manor, and a transition service for severely disabled young people aged 19-26, Orchard Manor Transition Service. Scope Fostering Service also operates from the site. The principal of Meldreth Manor estimates that about 70 people from Meldreth Manor and Orchard Manor require ramp access to rail platforms, including students and staff, among them about a dozen who commute to work in Meldreth.

Meldreth and Melbourn have three sheltered housing schemes between them, in addition to at least three residential care homes. There are also two primary schools and many young families with pushchairs.

Directions Plus published an Access Survey report for Meldreth in 2006, as a contribution to Meldreth Parish Plan, outlining a range of disabled adaptations required at Meldreth Station (report attached).

b. A long campaign to improve disabled access to rail service at Meldreth, which has seen much positive attention from FCC's Access and Inclusion officer Lee Millard, has recently resulted in a wheelchair ramp to the northbound platform. This is greatly appreciated.

News of this ramp, including a photo which I provided of Scope Transition Service young people, is featured in FCC's leaflet, 'Winter Access Update 2009'. However, the leaflet states that FCC has provided 'ramps' at Meldreth, not 'a ramp' (report attached).

c. The southbound platform remains inaccessible to wheelchair users due to a pedestrian footbridge over the tracks lacking any disabled adaptations. A vehicle bridge takes traffic a long way round to a field with a (paved) permissive footpath leading back to the southbound platform via a short flight of stairs.

FCC indicated on a site visit in April 2009 that chances of adaptations to the pedestrian bridge (i.e. ramp or lift) are very low. However FCC (David Byrne, Lee Millard) expressed willingness to provide and pay for a ramp on to the southbound platform, connecting to the permissive footpath below. They have indicated that this would be conditional on some form of partnership working with the County and local Parish Councils to improve safety on the pedestrian route the long way round to the southbound platform.

d. Sustrans, in November 2009, expressed an interest in improving access to Meldreth Station and have funding available this financial year, which could be provided on a matched basis. A site visit facilitated by CCC Cycling Officer has taken place and it was felt that a wheelchair ramp from the permissive footpath to the southbound platform was viable. Sustrans would like to explore such a project with CCC and FCC.

4. Cycles

In 2006, CCC paid for and FCC installed a cycle wheeling channel over the pedestrian bridge at Meldreth. Unfortunately the channel is awkwardly positioned and little used, though the gesture from both sides to try and improve access for cyclists from one platform to the other was much appreciated.

a. CCC Cycling officer is looking at improvements to the wheeling channel.

b. It has been noted by CCC Cycling officer that three cycle lockers at Meldreth Station, paid for by CCC, were removed by FCC when the car park was line painted last year. Please can they be put back?

c. Foxton Station lacks car parking facilities and cycle parking provision. CCC have offered to provide and install cycle racks and FCC (Lee Millard) have been on site to determine possible positioning; a second visit is due December 21.

3. Station car parks

- a. In October 2008, a charging system was introduced at station car parks at Shepreth and Meldreth. Before this time, the car parks were free of charge and well-used.
- b. Shepreth is now usually completely empty and Meldreth is about one-fourth to one-third full during peak times. Residents have complained that the cost of parking has added significantly to their travel costs.
- c. As a goodwill gesture FCC offered a three-month trial period at Meldreth (April-June 2009) at £1 per day, but this brought no noticeable increase in car park usage – new patterns already having been established, including parking for free in residential areas.
- d. Vehicle collisions have occurred at peak times at the entrance to Meldreth Station car park where commuters are dropped off and picked up, avoiding car park charges. Parking in a residential area near the station entrance has added to a situation of vehicle conflict.
- e. FCC suggested that official car park patrolling under the charging system would increase public safety. However, it is doubtful if such a result has been achieved: Shepreth ticket machine has been vandalised many times in the past year (eight times according to one FCC employee) and if the car parks are being patrolled, local people are not aware of it.
- f. Overall results of car park charging:
 - Higher overall cost of rail travel
 - New local traffic safety problems
 - Loss of valuable village amenities
 - No obvious benefit to FCC – on the contrary, assumed added cost of payment machines and CCTV cameras
- g. Recommendation: The car park charges have been in place for over one year. A review is requested.

4. Ticket machines

- a. New ticket machines have been installed at all three stations in the past year.
- b. Persistent complaints about ticket machines at all three stations, which are either out of service or difficult to use.
- c. Shepreth ticket machine is frequently vandalised. As a result, the Neighbourhood Police Panel has notified British Transport Police and placed activity around Shepreth Station on its priority action list.
- d. How much do these ticket machines cost, new and for repairs to date? Are these ticket machines cost effective, taking into account costs of vandalism?

e. Reinstating booking office services at Foxton and Shepreth would be welcomed locally. This could be a deterrent to vandalism and reduce pressure on overstretched police resources, provide employment, generate increased revenue on ticket sales, and reduce pressure at Cambridge and other points of destination.

5. Station naming

Meldreth and Melbourn Parish Councils have both written to FCC to request that the original name of Meldreth Station, which was 'Meldreth/Melbourn' be reinstated. The station sits between these two villages and it is felt that renaming could increase station usage via Internet-plotted route searches. Melbourn Parish Council has indicated its willingness to contribute to small costs of local directional signage from the village to the station. A negative response from FCC was received by Meldreth PC. Can this be reconsidered?

6. Recommendations

Some small areas of cooperation between CCC and FCC are in place and this has served to facilitate access to rail.

1. FCC and CCC should discuss ways of cooperating on a student discount fare
2. FCC and CCC should approach Sustrans for cooperation on the Meldreth southbound platform disabled ramp project
3. Car park charging policy at Meldreth and Shepreth should be reviewed
4. Cycle lockers at Meldreth to be replaced
5. Renaming request at Meldreth Station should be reconsidered