

**Meeting: First Capital Connect and Cambridgeshire County Council
6 November 2009, 10AM
Castle Court, Cambridge**

AGENDA

Attendance: Graham Hughes and Bob Tuckwell, CCC; Jim Morgan, FCC, Cllrs Susan van de Ven, Tim Stone, and Siep Wijsenbeek

Purpose: To establish areas for cooperation between CCC and FCC, with the aim of improving access to rail service at Foxton, Shepreth and Meldreth Stations.

Areas of focus: Fares, physical access, station car parks, ticket machines, station naming

1. Introduction

Transport Innovation Fund update:

Last month, 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.

Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton area:

Rail is the vastly superior public transport option in this well-populated area (half-hourly peak time compared with one bus per day in many villages). However, a number of barriers impede access.

Local rail campaign:

This took shape a year ago in response to student fare crisis, car park charges, introduction of new ticket machines, and proposed reduction in booking office opening hours, and a 'Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group' is now establishing itself under the Railfuture umbrella. The campaign and user group are coordinated by Melbourn County Councillor and its purpose is to protect and promote rail service at the three stations.

2. Fares

All fares prohibitively expensive for many people who require public transport. Pensioners with bus passes often cannot afford rail.

Student discount fares: post-16 fares now £580.80 from Meldreth to Cambridge for annual pass, which is 1/3 the adult fare. 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. Some students choose to access a 'Goldrider' bus pass via the County Council's Education Transport Department at £555 per year (a savings of £25 per year) for which the County Council has a subsidy arrangement with Stagecoach. This is a once-per-day bus service.

Problems with anomalies in student fares: It has recently come to attention that Education Transport currently issues rail passes for travel from Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton to Cambridge, on a £352 fare acquired via National Express. Why is this fare not available direct from FCC?

3. Physical access: wheelchairs, pushchairs, mobility scooters and bicycles

Disabled access: Meldreth is an important regional centre for education and care for severely disabled children and young people (Meldreth Manor School, Scope Transition Service, Scope Fostering Service). A long campaign to improve disabled access to rail service at Meldreth, including work with FCC's Access and Inclusion officer Lee Millard, has resulted in nearly complete wheelchair ramp to the northbound platform. This is very welcome.

Unfortunately, the southbound platform remains inaccessible to wheelchair users due to a pedestrian footbridge over the tracks which lacks any disabled adaptations. FCC have indicated that chances of adaptations to this bridge (i.e. ramp or lift) are very low. However FCC (David Byrne, Lee Millard) have 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 partnership working with the County and Parish Councils to improve safety on the pedestrian route the long way round to the southbound platform.

Wheelchair-friendly adaptations could also benefit pushchairs and mobility scooters.

Cycle wheeling channel: Three years ago, FCC and CCC cooperated on the installation of a cycle wheeling channel at Meldreth Station pedestrian bridge – paid for by CCC, installed by FCC. This cooperation was welcome and encouraging. However, the awkward positioning of the channel is such that it is very difficult to use. The alternative is the vehicle bridge, where visibility is low and a perceived danger acts as an impediment to greater access to rail by bike.

Cycle lockers at Meldreth Station, paid for by CCC and removed by FCC when car park resurfaced last year – where are they and can they be put back?

Possible alternative to pedestrian and vehicle bridge adaptations: Pedestrian crossing over the tracks with electronic/automatically closing gates such as those at the pedestrian crossings at Shepreth and Foxton. This would facilitate access for wheelchairs, pushchairs, mobility scooters and bicycles.

Sustrans interest in access to Meldreth Station: With the help of County Cycling Officer for South Cambs Patrick Joyce, Sustrans has expressed an interest in exploring possibilities for facilitating access to Meldreth Station by bicycle and a site meeting between Sustrans and myself is being arranged. There is some possible funding to be tapped which would depend on partnership working; FCC's work on the recent wheelchair ramp could qualify as a portion of that partnership requirement. Further exploration on this with Patrick Joyce.

3. Station car parks

Station car parks exist at Shepreth and Meldreth, while there is none at Foxton. Until October 2008 these were free of charge and well-used; then a charge of £2.50 was introduced, with payment by coin or a mobile phone call-in system. Both car parks were resurfaced with new line painting, including a strange 'pedestrian walking line' through Meldreth car park. Shepreth car park is now usually completely empty (occasionally one car is parked) while Meldreth appears to be one-fourth to one-third full. FCC offered and implemented a three-month trial period at Meldreth (April-June 2009) at £1 per day, but this brought no noticeable increase in car park usage. Residents have complained that the cost of parking has added significantly to their travel costs. Some have taken to walking or cycling, others are dropped off by car adding increased traffic to roads, and others have found parking spaces in residential areas near the stations, causing new traffic safety problems. 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.

FCC suggested when car park charges introduced that CCTV and car park patrolling 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.

Results of car park charging:

- Higher overall cost of rail travel;
- New local traffic safety problems for overstretched Highways department;
- Loss of valuable village amenities;
- No obvious benefit to FCC – on the contrary, assumed added cost of payment machines and CCTV cameras

Foxton Station: CCC owns land on the A10 near Foxton Station, which is potentially suitable for station car parking, for a substantial number of vehicles. To explore further.

4. Ticket machines

New ticket machines have been installed at all three stations in the past year. These are difficult to read, take only credit/debit cards, which cuts out students and others, and results in queuing at destination.

Consistent complaints about ticket machines at all three stations, which are either out of service or difficult to use. Shepreth ticket machine is frequently vandalised perhaps because the station is both unmanned and unsupervised (Foxton has a signal box, Meldreth is manned). Passengers therefore must purchase tickets at point of destination (Cambridge, Royston, London, etc), or unwittingly ride for free to other stopping stations. Neighbourhood Police Panel has put Shepreth Station on its priority action list.

Questions:

Are these ticket machines cost effective, taking into account costs of vandalism?
How much do these ticket machines cost, new and for repairs to date?
Would reinstating booking offices at Shepreth and Foxton be a cost-effective alternative?

Local view:

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. A negative response from FCC was received by Meldreth PC. Can this be reconsidered?

6. Any Other Business

Author:

Susan van de Ven

Melbourn County Councillor and Meldreth District Councillor

As Roger states below, FCC are acting in line with the DDA in regards to “reasonable adjustments”. They provide free taxi transport from the nearest accessible station to assist completion of a journey, which are one of the few companies that do. I have approached the TFL and they have no plans to do this for the underground, so FCC are at least one up on them! Of course, these taxis require a 24hour booking notice to guarantee pickup, which is not desirable and does not allow for spontaneity! So this is my understanding of it all.