

## Response to Thameslink Franchise Consultation

*From the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group*

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.

The MSFRUG's Constitution says that

*The aim of the association shall be the retention, improvement and greater usage of the Cambridge-King's Cross line between Royston and Cambridge, and with local bus services which should be integrated with it. (February 2010)*

Since 2003 commercial bus services have declined dramatically in this part of Cambridgeshire. In 2011 Cambridgeshire County Council announced its intention to remove all bus subsidies, and in 2014 the last subsidized bus services will be withdrawn.

It is vital that local rail services be protected and strengthened, and that wherever possible, any development of other forms of public transport, including cycling and community transport, be made in association with access to this local rail corridor

Meanwhile, footfall at Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton stations has risen. The MSFRUG has achieved a number of campaign successes which it hopes will contribute to a continuing rise in footfall. These achievements should be carried over to the next franchise:

1. 50% off adult fare discount for 16-19 year-olds in education and training
2. Free parking at Shepreth Station
3. Reduced parking charges at Meldreth Station
4. Negotiated minimal restrictions for bicycles on trains (barred from just the 8:10 AM Meldreth-Cambridge)
5. Establishment of community-supported station gardens as all three stations with a range of practical input from the TOC including water supply and off-platform garden space at Meldreth and Shepreth and water supply. This project has enhanced community awareness of local rail service.

The MSFRUG's aspirations for the next franchise period:

1. **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, 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 Great Northern network.

2. **Formal establishment of a Community Rail Partnership.** This aspiration has been included in Cambridgeshire County Council Local Transport Plan 3.
3. **Free parking at Meldreth Station.** In spite of the reduced parking charges, roughly two-thirds of parking spaces remain unused. 'Overflow' parking in residential areas by rail users seeking free parking has created dangerous traffic dynamics which are very difficult to resolve.
4. **Introduction of parking provision at Foxton.** Currently Foxton has no designated station parking, although Network Rail and Cambridgeshire County Council own substantial parcels of land very near to the station. Parking in residential areas by rail users has created dangerous traffic dynamics which are very difficult to resolve. (Note: On June 14, 2012, Network Rail committed to a fully funded Feasibility Study for closure of Foxton level crossing, which will consider 'all options' including 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 free car parking, high standard cycle access [cycle paths from north and south, and cycle parking], and safe passenger drop-off and pick-up points). Substantial planned growth of the Cambridge Southern Fringe supports the development of access to rail service at Foxton Station, which is the nearest rail station south of Cambridge on the Great Northern Route.
5. **Covered waiting shelter at Meldreth's Cambridge-bound platform.**
6. **Retention of staffed booking office at Meldreth** on at least current terms.
7. **More cycle parking at Foxton and Meldreth,** including Melbourn side of Meldreth Station.
8. **Reverting the official name of Meldreth Station to 'Meldreth and Melbourn'**, to increase the footfall at Meldreth Station via journeys plotted by the internet. Meldreth Station is situated on the edge of both Meldreth and Melbourn villages, and Melbourn is an important employment centre with much scope for rail commuting.
9. **Ticket vending machines on both platforms at all three stations,** and selling a full range of tickets including Plusbus and Groupsave. This would enhance safety at Foxton and Shepreth stations by reducing the number of times that rail passengers need to traverse the level crossing. It would also enhance accessibility at Meldreth where the London-bound platform is isolated and can be reached only by a steeply stepped footbridge.
10. **Regular promotion of the rail service timetable via local mail drop and other publicity channels.**
11. **Develop local station travel plans** to encourage non-car access to the station in conjunction with local authorities.

12. **Retaining the current first and last service times and initially the current service frequency, but with an aspiration to increase the service to half hourly all day once the Thameslink enhancements are in place.**
13. **Publish service performance data for the three village stations, and have in place a plan to provide a service to these stations in times of severe service disruption.**
14. **North-bound trains to terminate at Cambridge Science Park rather than Cambridge Station.**
15. **Train ticket sales from village shops and businesses to be explored.**
16. **Ensure the retention of the faster stopping trains**, particularly the 18:14 King's Cross Service which divides in Royston and makes direct commuting to the villages much easier. The 08:06 (Shepreth) to London (semi-fast from the villages) should be retained, and another semi-fast train at 07:06 would be welcome for early work commuters.