

RAIL USER GROUP REPRESENTATIONS FOR STATIONS INCLUDING LETCHWORTH, ROYSTON, ASHWELL, MELDRETH, SHEPRETH, FOXTON – JUNE 2018

13th June 2018 - Letchworth, Royston and Ashwell Rail Users Groups email from Edward Carder

Requests for Govia timetable. All requests are for weekdays unless otherwise indicated.

Interim timetable (mid-July 2018?)

- Stops at Letchworth on all the xx.12 and xx.42 'Cambridge flyer' departures from Kings Cross after 19.00 hours on weekdays and Saturdays (retaining stops at Royston on all these services, including reinstating the 20.42). These trains are essential for shift workers and members of the emergency services, who complain the much longer journeys are making them unacceptably tired and undermining their ability to perform their job safely.
- A service to Letchworth, Ashwell and Royston leaving London at around 16.15 so that working parents can get back to pick up children by 17.00. This could either be stops on the 16.12 'Cambridge flyer' or a semi-fast service at 16.16 (as ran until 20 May). Without a service at this time, many Letchworth parents are facing increased childcare costs of up to £2000/year; it would also restore an early evening off peak fast train.
- The 07.27 slow and 07.54 Thameslink services from Cambridge and the 07.38 Royston originating service need to run consistently.
- Extra stops at Letchworth on London-bound fast trains between 07.00 and 08.00 such as the 06.40 and 07.10 departures from Cambridge (07.04 and 07.34 from Letchworth), to relieve the extreme lack of capacity in this period, and to compensate for the loss of the 07.09 and 07.57 departures in the May 2018 timetable.
- Extra stops at Letchworth on the 09.10 fast service from Cambridge to Kings Cross, and at Royston and Letchworth on the 09.42 from Cambridge to Kings Cross. These would serve working parents getting to London after school drop-offs, and off-peak users.
- Stops for Ashwell on the 06.36 and 07.38 departures from Royston.
- Better service between Royston and Cambridge and ideally Cambridge North in the morning and evening peak. In the morning, ideally Royston stops on the northbound services departing Kings Cross at 06.42, 07.12, 07.42, 08.12, 08.42 and 09.12 (the 07.12 to call at Ashwell also). In the evening, stops on the southbound fast services departing Cambridge at 16.14, 16.44, 17.14, 17.43 and 18.13.
- Run a reliable at least hourly service through Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton in each direction, prioritising the peak. In particular, there is a gap in the southbound morning peak service with no trains from the Villages toward London between 06.43 and 08.13.
- Consistently run the 06.21 stopper from Kings Cross to Cambridge, which is heavily used by school children and Cambridge commuters from all of our stations.
- Stops at Royston and Letchworth on the 05.44 Saturday departure from Cambridge, for shift workers going to London. Changes to incorporate in the 'May 2018' timetable when it is implemented (September?)
- To retain all the above services
- An extra morning service from Royston, Ashwell and Letchworth, corresponding to the former 07.43 departure from Royston (07.57 departure from Letchworth) to relieve overcrowding on the

current 07.38 from Royston and 07.27 from Cambridge (the 07.50 and 08.00 departures from Letchworth). Changes to incorporate in the 'December 2018' timetable when it is implemented

- To retain all the above services
- To retain also Letchworth's existing stops on the 05.40, 08.10 and 08.40 departures from Cambridge.
- The 08.42 starting service from Baldock to start at Royston and call at Ashwell, providing a service for these stations around 08.20-08.30.
- A 22.54 semi-fast departure from Kings Cross to Letchworth.
- More opportunities for passengers from our stations to change at Finsbury Park in the peaks.
- Consideration of the stopping patterns on the Thameslink Cambridge—Brighton services, in particular whether the 2nd of these trains per hour could stop at Ashwell instead of (or in addition to) Baldock. Alternatively an exchange of stops between Letchworth and Ashwell, to give Ashwell access to the Thameslink Brighton service, and Letchworth stops on some 'Cambridge flyer' services. For instance, Ashwell would value a stop on the 06.54 Thameslink departure from Cambridge; Letchworth would value a stop on the 06.40 departure from Cambridge, but for reasons of capacity needs to retain a stop on the Thameslink departure (possibly Baldock might have to lose some of its Thameslink stops, or the 'Flyer' service could stop at both Letchworth and Ashwell).
- Longer term, consider the timing of train paths on the East Coast Main Line, so the 'Cambridge flyer' leaves Kings Cross at xx.03 and xx.33, to achieve a better spread of services around the clock face, to allow the 'Baldock terminators' to start/end at Royston, and to improve the northbound running time of the Thameslink services.

26th June 2018 – Email from Edward Carder as Chair of Royston Rail User Group Commenting on Interim Timetable

The RUGs' view is that it is very disappointing that the fast train stops for Letchworth and Royston that had been restored on an interim basis, and we understood GTR to be working on restoring permanently, have been dropped. This is particularly surprising given the obvious utility these stops have had for passengers since their reinstatement and the extensive positive feedback the RUGs have received on the change and shared with GTR (not only for Letchworth and Royston but for Ashwell and the Villages also).

26th June 2018 – Letchworth and Ashwell Rail User Group Feedback email from Leanne Stott

Good morning Stuart and Colin,

We have collated feedback points and questions from our members regarding on-going issues with the emergency timetable in Week 5 (inclusive of this weekend). We have only raised points on services that have consistently had problems, not one offs; as we of course still appreciate there will be issues until the formal timetable is introduced in July and we can enjoy some reliability. However there are a number of crucial points that need addressing to stabilise the service as it still incredibly chaotic into week 6.

Letchworth

The 01:05 KX departure (last viable train) of the night has been cancelled on consecutive days (this serves Royston as well). This has been flagged to us by emergency service and Transport for London workers from both RUGs.

I attach a photo of the situation on Friday evening for the last trains at KX. Workers finishing late or many out for an evening on a Friday night were impacted.

Some consistency in information and intention to run these services would be appreciated, I'll come back to this broader point later; but there is still a huge problem with communication.

The :12 and :42 flyer stops from KX are frequently skipping Letchworth, which under the special stop orders Colin kindly supplied to us we understood are intended to stop "until further notice". The ones which particularly consistently seem to skip are the 19:12, 20:12 the 21:12. The problem here is that they appear on the apps, they appear on the boards and then at the last minute there is an announcement and a mad scramble for unlucky Letchworthians to trudge off the train, back to the concourse and hope its not long until the next viable service (by viable we also mean a journey taking under 50 minutes as we do not consider a station, the busiest on the line between Hitchin and Cambridge according to ORR, that has enjoyed a regular 30 minutes and under service should be expected to just accept such a disproportionate increase).

If there is a consistent problem here please can these be addressed? We have been handed a photo of a drivers instruction sheet for a day last week for the 21:12 which clearly lists only Royston as the intended special stop order and last night were told by harried platform staff the driver had refused the stop , which as I have said was not the information provided to us. We desperately need these flyers to stop at Letchworth as I know you fully appreciate (after our now year long efforts to explain why), but we also need clear information supplying as this is exactly the sort of thing that drives passengers to despair in this emergency timetable situation. Running around Kings Cross in the sweltering heat trying to figure out what service to board and then spending an hour on a train when the journey should take 30 minutes or less to be a comparable level of service.

We have raised this point before, but there are still huge problems with the stopper service, meaning that members who commute to Welwyn Garden City or other intermediate destinations are badly affected. Last week the 07:00 stopper departure from Letchworth ran, with no timetabled services until 08:30. However, on at least two days, the 08:00 train from Letchworth did run (this is the 07:27 departure from Cambridge) but was not on apps or even on the announcement boards. We really welcome the occasional return of the 08:00 stopper service, which as we have said is crucial for children getting to school, for workers going to Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield, and also an important service for the Cambridgeshire villages further up the line can an effort be made to run this 'ghost train'?. However, please can you try to ensure it is in the apps and announcement boards if it is to run, and please prioritise this as an important service. There is also a lack of trains to Finsbury Park, given the almost total cancellation of the Brighton services – commuters from Letchworth to Finsbury Park are therefore struggling.

We very much appreciate the 07:04 and 07:34 stops at Letchworth on the 'Cambridge flyer' to Kings Cross you added in the morning, they provide much needed capacity at a reasonable journey time. However they often don't make it onto the apps, so people don't necessarily know or can use them as much as they could do.

The 15:44 Hitchin to Letchworth train (used by children after school) has consistently been cancelled, leaving a large gap. We'd really rather members children aren't left at stations trying to fathom a way home or forcing parents to panic at their place of work on how to collect them.

In the Cambridge direction this morning there was a gap of 05:48 and 07:39 according to boards and apps; which hopefully will not be the case if you run some special stop orders last minute, but our members commuting in that direction are really struggling as can be seen in some of the Royston member's comments below.

Royston

Royston has been similarly affected by short notice cancellation of late trains back from London, such as the 01:05. The stop on the 16:12 and 20:42, which are supposed to be in the interim timetable for the foreseeable future, have been skipped on a number of occasions with little notice to passengers on the train at Kings Cross. We had been promised that skip-stopping would no longer occur.

We repeat that we need the 08:08 Thameslink service to run as a matter of urgency to relieve overcrowding on the 07:54 and 08:24. There is consistently a gap in the London bound service in the weekday between 09:48 and 11:18. There is also a consistent gap in the stopping service to London between 06:48 and 08:18. Please run services to bridge these gaps as soon as possible. In the other direction, there is consistently no service between Royston and Cambridge between 06:00 and 06:30 in the morning. There is also a lack of semi-fast trains back from London in the afternoon, often with a gap between 15:00 and 16:30, despite the stop orders that should be in the interim timetable. Please rectify this as soon as possible.

As we have highlighted previously, the weekend service, particularly on Sundays, has been utterly abysmal.

A point that echoes the above one made by LGC members is similarly the access to the village stations (Foxton, Shepreth and Meldreth) has not improved. From Cambridge between 16:57 and 18:27 there are no services under the emergency timetable that have been running consistently. Likewise in the mornings there is a gap between the 06:27 and 07:57 stopper departures from Cambridge – please try to run the 07:27 from Cambridge as this would help the needs of so many stations on the line. For instance, without this service there is no departure from Shepreth to London between 06:40 (cancelled at last minute) and 08:10. The first departure to Cambridge now seems to be 07:09. The 15:21 departure from KX has only run twice this week, the 16:21 not at all.

Village stations

Which leads into the feedback collated by the Villages RUG (as part of their collaborative work with Royston RUG on shared issues) which was shared with you by Susan this morning covering Meldreth Foxton and Shepreth. Our RUGs are closely coordinating on service issues from our three stations to Royston and London. We know that 50% of MSF footfall is headed in the direction of London, so the broken connections to Royston are critical, as then are all the London service issues we are raising to provide reliable connections. I have attached a spreadsheet showing the Shepreth performance (also indicative of Foxton and Shepreth).

Weekend LGC

The trains that ran this Saturday towards London were full at LGC with stops at Hitchin and Stevenage still to be made. The first trains of the day are still being cancelled which creates problems for shift workers. This Saturday the 05:30 departure to KX was cancelled and Sunday the first train the 07:29 was cancelled, followed by cancellations of subsequent services such as the

08:29. To illustrate why running these first and last of the day on the weekend is so important is a post from a member whose wife is an NHS nurse who, after consistently being late to relieve her colleagues at the end of their night shift over the last 5 weeks, has proved too much for her and she has handed in her notice to look for local work.

We have consistently been supportive of GTR, but over a month with more to come of this emergency timetable is having a considerable impact on individuals health, career prospects and towns. We are constantly having to talk our members down from direct action protests as they reach the end of their tethers. Many of our members work weekends (not to mention the many leisure users who are now being deterred from using the trains) and for this reason it is very important to recognise that the weekend service is just as crucial as the weekday service to stabilise.

Communication- General

The point that is being made that the timetable is now viewable on apps for the following week on Fridays is greatly misleading. The apps, since you are still manually loading the special stops the night before (?), do not include the essential trains you are running with special stop orders. For example a Royston member who was planning their hospital appointment commented that there was a huge gap between a 09:48 and a 11:09 train, when in fact there is likely to be a 10:38 service. This leads to a great deal of on-the-ground confusion (and irritability!).

One last point I would make, and it may seem like a minor one, but is actually a considerable health and safety one is the 700 class trains as you know have no openable windows; when the air con breaks down it becomes dangerously hot (occurred on 18th and 19th June) – to the extent condensation builds up and the walls drip. This week is due to be sweltering I would urge this to be looked into and if the air con is not functioning that information needs to be supplied so passengers (again currently packed in akin to a rush hour tube) have the option to not take the train.

I raised the dangerous overcrowding reported on Monday (due to the short formation carriages) to Yvonne and appreciated her answer that you have additional staff in place at key locations to monitor and take action. Overcrowding is occurring on a regular basis so we would very much ask this is taken very seriously and intervention is made when required.

Finally we've included spreadsheets for Letchworth and Shepreth logging the recent service performance.

We hope this information can be useful, we are continuing in the spirit of co-operation with GTR as we have done as RUGs since last year in the good faith you will address the emergency timetable issues we have raised and the crucial issues we have raised regarding the timetables to follow with your timetabling department.

Leanne Stott

On behalf on LRUG, RRUG and the villages RUG

25th June 2018 – Email from Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group from Councillor Susan van de Ven

Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group: Feedback from Users, 26 June 2018

About this Document

The questions in this document were gathered from Rail Users at Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton via the User Group Facebook Page (meldrethsheprethfoxttonrail), and via direct emails to the Rail User Group email address (railusergroup@gmail.com). This document will be sent to Govia Thameslink Railway and Network Rail in advance of the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group Meeting on 27th June.

The document is divided into three sections:

- A. Service Failures
- B. Compensation
- C. Record of Impact on Users

Where several users have raised the same issue, the problem has been summarised.

A. Service failures

Peak time – key services to reinstate in restoration of May 20 timetable

- Villages → Cambridge morning peak. **Ensure the 7.44 now runs consistently and that there is an earlier train reinstated for those that need it.**

The advertised 06:38 (from Shepreth) has not run at all for the last week. The 7.09 (from Shepreth) has run intermittently, the record for the 7.44 is worse.

- Villages → Kings X morning peak. **Ensure the 7.38 reinstated as first priority.**

“There is currently an unacceptable gap between 6.40 and 8.10 – commuters have to get the 6.40 to reach London before 9am. Last week there were no arrivals into London between 8 and just before 9.30, obviously a massive issue.”

- Cambridge → Villages Evening peak. **Ensure reinstatement.**

“We would like to know when the evening rush hour trains from Cambridge to the Villages will be returning to the timetable? The services from 16:00 – 19:00 in the evening peak are frequently cancelled on the day. For example, last week the 16.57 was cancelled Monday and Tuesday; the 17.27 only ran on Thursday and Friday; the 17.57 only ran on Friday; the 18.27 was cancelled Monday and Tuesday; the 18.57 never ran; the 19.27 didn’t run on Monday or Tuesday. The worst day was Monday 18th: the 16.27 ran, the 17.27 ran 23 minutes late, and the next train was not until 19.27 – one train in 3 hours.”

“This is a disaster for school & college kids.” “Anyone local to the city leaving work/college/university at peak times is unable to get home by train. For me personally, this means I now drive in.”

- Weekend services have been sporadic at best since 20th May. **Ensure reinstatement.**

“Weekends remain a joke.”

“For example on the 24th June from Shepreth to Cambridge the only trains were 14.15, 17.15, 20.18 and 21.15. It is very clear that the village trains continue to be routinely cancelled when there are driver shortages at the weekend. Saturday 23rd wasn’t that much better only eight trains.”

Stop-Skipping: Completely missing out the villages

- Trains are regularly skipping Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton if they are running late so that they can make up lost time.
- "The contract for the franchise needs to prohibit or severely penalise this. It is equivalent to a partial decommissioning of a service and has undergone no public consultation or due process. This happened again this evening."
- Trains have been stopping at the village stations which have not been advertised on the app. This means that very few passengers are using these services. "Evening trains to villages especially prone to NOT show on the apps".
- "The lack of stopping trains on return from Cambridge is spawning the conspiracy theory that GTR would like to scrap the village stations altogether."

Cambridge to Brighton Service

- Can you confirm that the service Cambridge to Brighton through St Pancras has been completely suspended? If so, do you have any idea when it will be reinstated?

B. Compensation

- Am I able to claim compensation because my preferred service, 07:11, is semi-permanently cancelled?
- Can I be compensated for taxis I've had to arrange independently when stuck with no one at the station?
- I'm having to factor in parking charges at Royston station, which adds up considerably. Can I be compensated?
- We've had a large lunchtime booking cancelled because the guests who were going to travel by train couldn't get here. How can we be compensated?
- GTR/GN should actively promote the service when it settles down again. I think they should offer something over and above the normal pay/delay to their season ticket holder regulars, say a week's free travel when the ticket is renewed. To encourage people back to the service and new comers, at the weekends offer nominal fares of say a £1 return to Cambridge from MSF and on other weekends travel anywhere on the GTR network for £5 return. They should do this anyway to promote the service but it is imperative they do something positive now.

C. Record of Impact on Users

Week 5

Please ask the people running the trains to reinstate the 07:08 ish train from Shepreth to Royston as I cannot keep cycling 16 odd miles from Barrington to Royston every day.

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Since the timetable changes I have, most days, changed from catching the 08:10ish to 06:36ish. This is because I can't otherwise rely on the trains to get me to work on time at the moment. My office doesn't open until 08:00ish so I often find myself sitting outside the office, sometimes for an hour.

On the return journey I don't bother looking at the timetables anymore since they have been so unreliable and unpredictable (yesterday I took a train which was unscheduled and not on the departure boards!). I leave the office as early as possible and don't expect to get home for any particular time.

On a positive note I have recently noticed there have been northern reps at CBG station. Although they don't usually know what's happening either, it does at least show that Thameslink are making an effort to hear what the issues are on the ground.

The app said there were buses running through Meldreth, but I didn't see any go past my house [near the station] that day. I have seen buses go into the station today, but didn't notice any mention of bus replacement on the app.

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I would like to know why there are currently no trains running from Cambridge station to the South Cambs villages between 16:57 and 18:27 on week nights. This means that anyone local to the city leaving work/college/university at peak times is unable to get home by train. For me personally, this means I now drive in. Surely trains should be available to encourage people to leave their cars at home rather than add to city congestion?

I would be very grateful if you could let me know if/when rush hour trains from Cambridge to the villages will be returning to the timetable, and the reasoning behind removing them in the first place.

I would also like to add that the first time I arrived at Cambridge station from university to find my usual train had vanished, your staff were incredibly polite and efficient, and ensured I could get home by securing me a pre-paid taxi. They had a number of frustrated commuters venting their anger at them, yet handled the situation impeccably, so many thanks for the wonderful customer service.

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In week 4 it is just as bad if not worse:

Timetables have been stripped back so GTR can manage better. This is now not based on the May timetable at all.

You can only check the timetable from 10pm the night before, but the trains vanish/are cancelled last minute.

Take this morning as an example. Checked the trains last night and it listed 6.10, 6.40, 7.25 (bus), and 8.10. Arrived at the station and 6.30 and train was cancelled at 6.40. The 7.25 bus is very unreliable (arriving earlier/later or not at all).

Most people I speak to are now taking the 06.40 as it's the only option.

If you change at Royston it's barely possible to board a fast train. (And these are also often cancelled). In fact the trains are so overloaded they cannot be safe.

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As you may hear from others, this morning's 6:43 failed to appear, and the same occurred on Thursday and Friday

Even Bern didn't have a clue about what was going on, but at 6:51 a direct service went through Meldreth, much to the consternation of 17 of us waiting

A bus was provided and eventually some of us caught a train from Royston, although even the stopping points of this were unclear at departure.

The lack of information just compounds the fundamental issue of the lack of any reliable service. There was no information on Meldreth station about this morning's 6:43 being delayed until well after it was due to arrive - and then it just came up "delayed" on the signage. Even Bern thought that it had left Cambridge!

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We are heavily reliant on train services to both Cambridge and London and like many others, we have suffered greatly from the breakdown in train services to and from each destination over several weeks now. I commute to and from London for work and 2 of our children travel to Cambridge for school. As you will no doubt be aware, for my London journeys, the morning train service has been virtually non-existent during the main peak travel times with my usual 7.11 train not having run for many weeks now (the options typically being 6.43 or 8.13). I now have to arrange separate transport to Royston to catch a train there. This compared with 2 x regular half hourly trains previously. For our children's journey, they used to take the 7.41 train to Cambridge but this has been withdrawn over recent weeks, meaning that they are left with 1 train per hour, having to catch the 7.06 train for school which starts almost an hour and a half later at 8.30 which is far from ideal. This compared with 2 x trains per hour, again half hourly previously. The return journeys have also been impacted.

The current situation is causing us a huge amount of inconvenience and there does not appear to be any end in sight. As you no doubt will agree, this is a significant issue for those of us who live in South Cambs and have settled here mainly as a result of the good train links previously. I would be grateful if you could continue to apply as much pressure as possible to secure a resolution to the current problems and keep us posted with any developments in particular with regard to firm reassurances from Thameslink that our lives will return to normal as soon as possible.

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The situation is simply desperate. Impact for me is as follows:

- 1) less time at work
- 2) less time with family
- 3) need to save up to buy a second family car so I can start driving in to either Royston or Stevenage to catch the train