

Oxford Rail Protest Meeting

12th January 2007

Attendees: Susan Westlake, Alison Mathias, Paul Mylrea, Zahra Akkerhuys, Edward Knighton, Chris Bates (FGW Customer Panel representative), Carol Sweetenham and Simon Eaton.

1. Welcome, introduction and congratulations

To summarise the changes that are being made from Monday 15th January:

- The current 05.52 Oxford to London Paddington service will be faster with fewer stops, departing later at 05.55, calling Radley at 06.02, Didcot Parkway at 06.11, Reading at 06.25 and London Paddington at 07.00. This service will no longer call at Cholsey, Goring & Streatley, Pangbourne and Tilehurst. The 06.02 from Oxford will continue to serve these stations. According to the information we have, this will be a 5-car Adelante service.

- An additional early morning high speed service will be introduced from Oxford and Didcot Parkway to London Paddington every weekday. The service leaves Oxford at 07.33, calls Didcot Parkway at 07.48, Reading at 08.04 and arrives London Paddington at 08.30. This will be an Adelante service.

- An additional Oxford to London Paddington fast train service will be introduced at 06.45. This service runs non-stop to Twyford, calling there at 07.26; Maidenhead at 07.35; and arriving London Paddington at 07.58. The current 06.45 Oxford to London Paddington stopping service will therefore depart earlier at 06.33 and run as advertised from Didcot Parkway. This will be a 6-car turbo.

In addition, the 7.05 will change from an Adelante to a 3-car turbo train and will no longer call at Didcot Parkway.

All were agreed that this is a great improvement, but it does still not reflect the level of service that we had before 10th December. According to Paul's calculations (see below) we have gone from losing 80% of seats in the morning peak to losing only 20%. However, changing services to turbos (particularly the 7.05) is not welcomed, nor is the fact that Didcot Parkway is losing a service.

Seat analysis with new timetable changes:

Old (6 Services)

0600 – 3 coach turbo; 275 seats; all empty on arrival at Oxford.
0631 – Adelante; 282 seats; approx 150 empty on arrival at Oxford
0645 – HST; 472 seats; all empty on arrival at Oxford
0658 – 3 coach turbo; 275 seats; approx 10 empty on arrival at Oxford
0725 – Adelante; 282 seats; all empty on arrival at Oxford
0745 – HST; 472; approx 100 empty on arrival at Oxford

Total of 1379 were available from Oxford between 6am and 8.30am

New timetable (3 services)

0638 – Adelante; 282 seats; approx 150 empty on arrival at Oxford
0705 – Adelante; 282 seats; approx 20 empty on arrival at Oxford
0744 – HST; 472 seats; approx 100 empty on arrival at Oxford

Total of 270 seats available from Oxford between 6am and 8.30am.

Revised timetable (3 services)

0638 – Adelante; 282 seats; approx 150 empty on arrival at Oxford

0645 – 6 car Turbo; 550 seats; starts in Oxford

0705 – 3 car Turbo; 275 seats; approx 13 empty on arrival at Oxford

0733 – Adelante; 282 seats; starts in Oxford

0744 – HST; 472 seats; approx 100 empty on arrival at Oxford

Total of 1015 seats available from Oxford between 6am and 8.30am.

2. Where does Ox Rail Action go from here?

All agreed that Ox Rail Action should continue as an Oxford rail users group. The aim of this group is to ensure that Oxford has an adequate supply of services and seats in the peak rush hours. This is particularly important in view of the fact that FGW are changing timetables again in December 2007. Oxford passengers need a voice and a forum to make sure that their views are represented to FGW and the Department of Transport.

One aspect of our campaign should be to ask for better consultation and better passenger representation. We want FGW to learn the lessons of their recent mistakes, and to not repeat such disastrous timetable changes in the future. Also we want them to thoroughly evaluate the impact of the additional services they have now announced, including the numbers of passengers who have to stand. Most importantly, we want FGW to listen to passenger feedback and be ready to put on further additional seats and services should that prove necessary to meet passenger needs.

3. Other campaign groups

Several angry e-mails and various conversations have brought to the group's attention an issue resulting from our campaign's success. We have won (or at least, to outsiders, it appears we have won), whilst other groups have not. As a group, we need to be constructive and encourage other groups in their own campaigns. We cannot be seen to gloat!

Unfortunately, as much as we don't want to, this means that we may have to tone down at least the public side of our campaign. If other groups see that we have won, and we are still complaining, it may cause unnecessary negative feelings on other parts of FGW's network.

4. Liaison with the city council

The following is a motion which has been proposed to the full City Council meeting on January 22nd:

'Council expresses full support for the campaign launched by Ox Rail Action in December to reverse the reductions by First Great Western in the number of fast trains to London in the crucial early morning commuting period between 6 and 8am, and the reduced capacity of those trains still scheduled within that period. The reduction of 80% in the passenger capacity of these services has meant that many people are unable to have a seat for the journey to London and that the overcrowding has been severe.

Many Oxford residents rely on these services to reach their place of work, and good public transport links are vital for the Oxford economy. Commuters deserve to be offered satisfactory travelling conditions in return for the very high prices charged by the rail operators.

Council pledges its support for the campaign to return the carrying capacity of fast commuter services from Oxford to London to levels that are close to the position that existed before the recent timetable changes.'

Action: all please ask your councillors to support this motion.

Action: ZA to continue contact with Bob Price.

5. Saying thank you

It was agreed that the following letters/ e-mails be sent:

* A letter to FGW acknowledging the changes they have made and thanking them for listening to us. We should tell them that we are *still* 20% down on morning seats compared with before 10th Dec, but we are pleased that they have responded in the short-term. The letter should inform FGW that we plan to be a permanent, constructive and useful rail users group, and that we expect to be consulted about further timetable changes later in 2007. We want better consultation and communication between FGW and passengers in the future.

Action: SW to write letter to FGW.

* Letters to our local Oxford and Didcot MPs to say thank you for their support for the campaign. This letter should contain the information given to FGW in their letter. The Didcot one may need slightly different wording in view of the fact that the recent changes haven't helped Didcot passengers hugely.

Action: CW to write letter to Evan Harris

Action: PM to write letter to Andrew Smith

Action: SE to write letter to Ed Vaizey

* A letter to Oxford station staff and their manager to say thank you for their efforts over the past month, saying how we understand how difficult it has been for them, and informing them of the now permanent Ox Rail Action group. This letter will ask for a passenger noticeboard where we (and others) can communicate directly with rail users.

Action: ZA to write letter and buy box of chocolates, both to be presented to the staff at the Meet the Managers session on the 17th January.

* Inform Chris Grayling, Shadow Transport Secretary of the above.

Action: SE to contact Chris Grayling's office.

6. How are we going to monitor the situation?

All agreed that the new trains need to be monitored. After next week (15th to 19th Jan), viewed as a 'bedding in' week for the new services, we will run a monitoring system on the Oxford morning trains for the next two weeks.

During this period, 22nd-2nd Feb, we will ask volunteers to monitor the Oxford services. An e-mail sent out to the distribution list will ask people to check their particular carriage on their train in the following way:

1. For those trains that start in Oxford – how many standing passengers without seats after leaving Oxford.
2. For through trains – how many free seats were in the carriage when boarding at Oxford, and how many standing passengers without seats after leaving Oxford.

We need to make sure that each carriage of each train is covered for two weeks, to ensure accurate figures with which we can continue to campaign if necessary. If these volunteers could e-mail to say which train they usually get and on which carriage, by Wednesday of next week, we can make sure all the trains are covered adequately. After the data has been collected, we can put together a brief report.

Action: SW to send e-mail to distribution list with general update and request for volunteers.

7. Continuing contact with our contacts

All agreed that it was important to keep in contact with the various individuals and groups that have supported our campaign so far. The following organisers have agreed to carry on communication with these respective people:

Action: PM to keep in contact with Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Action: SW to keep in contact with our distribution list of interested travellers.

Action: SH to keep website up-to-date, and make sure items do not slip into archives.

Action: ZA to keep in contact with the Oxford Mail

Action: PM to keep in contact with Andrew Smith MP

Action: CS to keep in contact with Evan Harris MP

Action: SE to keep in contact with Chris Grayling MP

Action: SW to keep in contact with BBC South Today – also will write to thank them for an excellent grilling of Richard Rowland last Thursday.

8. Funds

All chipped into an Ox Rail Action kitty. SW has this kitty and it totals at present £75. If anyone incurs any costs please ask SW to reimburse.

9. Meet the Managers session

For those who don't know, there is a Meet the Managers session from 4-7pm next Wednesday, 17th Jan. Managers of Oxford station and we think Richard Rowland (Regional Director) will be there from 4-7pm. Most people won't be back before 7pm, so it was agreed that people should be there earlier to keep them there til after 7pm.

Action: CS agreed to do an 'early shift'

SW will be there from 6.45ish onwards.

ZA to bring letter and chocs for Oxford station staff to this event.

Everyone – to turn up and express situation now that the changes have taken place and give any of the info above.

SW
13th January 2007