

# On the WAGN

Newsletter of Cambridge Heath and London Fields Rail Users Group

January 1999

## Passenger figures up again

The number of people using London Fields station during the morning and evening peaks has increased again this year for the third year running.

There are now 309 people using the station during those times, 164 in the morning and 145 in the evening.

This compares with a total of 181 people who were using the trains in May 1996 when we first started counting passengers.

So far this year we have not been able to count the number of people using the off-peak trains during the day but it appears there has been a reasonable take-up.

The off-peak service was reinstated in May 1998 following requests from this group.

There has been little publicity for the trains so most people do not know there is now an all-day service as well as a more frequent service during the peak hours.

One new supporter said: "I have been using the station for three years but I don't think London Fields/Mapledene "village" residents are aware of the existing service or its potential.

"I am prepared to leaflet a few streets round Albion Drive."

Another new supporter said: "I really appreciate your efforts on behalf of travellers on this line. The transport system really needs a good kick up the \*\*\* in London."

She added: "On my first day at a new job, two trains did not turn up. The second was over 10 minutes late. As there was no

communication I could not take alternative transport and I was late."

Like many other people, she is not happy about security at the stations. She said: "My partner was

especially concerned for my safety at this station and we have now bought mobile phones (expensive) so he can come and pick me up at night.

"It is appalling to feel this insecure so close to home."

Another rail user who travels from Heybridge, Essex, to London Fields each day said: "An announcements system is a must!"

Yet another who travels from Colchester, Essex, explained how his journey home was needlessly extended when trains failed to run.

"With only a half-hour frequency, it is very important that the trains run reliably."

We believe that both stations should have a train every 15 minutes throughout the day.

But we will be asking WAGN as a first step to at least provide a 15-minute service in both directions during peak periods.

We are currently seeking a meeting with WAGN management to discuss improvements to both stations and the service.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR TO  
ALL RAIL USERS

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### Ups and downs

#### PLUS

Greater London Council subsidises Jazz train service including weekends (every 15 minutes) 1970s

#### MINUS

Both stations closed after fires. 1981

#### PLUS

Stations reopened. 1986

#### MINUS

Off-peak services withdrawn. 1992

#### PLUS

Peak services increased from 38 to 44 trains daily. September 1996

#### PLUS

Peak services increased to 45 daily. June 1997

#### PLUS

Off-peak services (but not evening or weekend) restored. Total number of trains 64. May 1998

### Cambridge Heath slows down

Sadly the number of people using Cambridge Heath station during the peak has gone down marginally over the last six months.

Schoolchildren who use the station during the morning have told us they are not prepared to go there in the evening, preferring to extend their journey by half an hour by switching to buses at Hackney Downs. Even so, peak-hour usage is still up to 266, compared to 207 on May 1996 when we started counting. Last December however 299 people were using the station each day.

# What we want from WAGN

People using London Fields station are keen for the services provided by WAGN to be improved so that more people can be encouraged to use the station.

One user said she wanted more trains to stop at the station but she also called for WAGN to stop the practice of missing out Cambridge Heath and London Fields stations when trains were running late.

She said: "This is probably done in order to make WAGN's lateness record look better," she said. "But it is no use to passengers waiting at London Fields, Cambridge Heath or Bethnal Green and no use to passengers on the train wishing to disembark at those stations."

## New local fares in January

On a national level, the campaign group Save Our Railways protested about train operators increasing the price of many "turn up and go" discounted tickets by an excessive amount.

The group said Supersavers, Savers and cheap day returns were to be banned from Virgin's most popular West Coast main line services. Worst affected are Manchester and Liverpool but also hit are Preston, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Carlisle, Stoke, Stockport, Watford and Milton Keynes.

"If rail is to compete effectively with the private car," said campaign director Jonathan Bray. "It needs to be convenient and flexible. The latest move by Virgin will make rail travel more complicated and expensive for passengers who need flexible discount tickets.

"This is one more reason why we need a powerful strategic rail authority able to bring some common sense back to rail fares."

## Information systems are essential

One of the improvements most needed at both Cambridge Heath and London Fields is proper information systems. Elsewhere on the railway system, great progress is being made to bring up-to-the-minute information to people waiting for trains. Even one of Britain's tiniest stations - Berney Arms in Norfolk - which is in the "middle of nowhere" is one of 66 stations in East Anglia which is to benefit from a fully integrated customer information system. Major stations will be equipped with display screens, public address systems and push-button telephone help points which have one line allocated for emergencies and another for train-running information.

At smaller stations, help points will link customers to the information call centre in Ipswich which is always staffed.

The £1.6 million cost of the system is coming from the Government via Capital Challenge which is designed to fund transport and regenerations projects.

Meanwhile Connex Rail which runs train in Kent, Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire has placed an £8.5 million order for a similar system.

Something similar is desperately needed at our stations.

## The cost of providing a proper service

Consultants working on improving rail services in other areas have estimated that the cost of serving extra stations at £1 a stop. Railtrack is also likely to demand £1 per stop as part of its station access charges. That seems a small price for WAGN to pay for a proper weekend and evening service at our stations. Even if there are extra commercial costs - which in WAGN's case there should not be as there are no staff and there would be no loss of other custom - the total cost should not be more than £12 per stop. The consultants estimate that even at that price for every additional stop, the operator would need to attract only three extra local passengers per train.

## WAGN share price

Shares in Prism Rail which owns WAGN and three other train operating companies have fluctuated between £3.05 and £5.15 during 1998.