

NEWS UPDATE

MAY 2008

From the National Consumer Federation

Three letter acronyms

Let us refer to these as TLAs. In the flying world of professional travel operatives (PTOs) they are very common. Baggage tags are a good example. Should your luggage be tagged with the letters HKG or SFO it is fairly obvious that you are going to Hong Kong or San Francisco and, hopefully, so is your luggage.

What about the traveller who is departing from LHR terminal 5 as many bags have been ending up in MXP, no matter where the passenger was going? MXP is not short for Mix-up but is the acronym for Milan Malpensa where British Airways has been sending mixed-up luggage to be reunited with owners. As I am flying to Milan shortly from terminal 5 I think I stand a better chance than most that my baggage will also get there, but whether it will be on the same aeroplane as me remains to be seen. I have been told that baggage handling is back to normal now. I shall soon find out!

A good indicator of the regard that some airlines have of their paying customers is the acronym SLC. This stands for 'Self Loading Cargo'. As an extension of this I understand that British Airways will allow passengers to carry onto the aeroplane and put in the overhead lockers an item of luggage not larger than 56cm x 45cm x 25cm. There is no weight limit for this but you must be able to lift it up and put it into the rack yourself. Self loading cargo indeed.

BT Call Charges

Tom Miller writes: "A few weeks ago, I spotted in the latest 'Changes to BT pricing' leaflet - tucked away on page 2 - the fact that evening calls will change from 4.5p for calls up to an hour to 1.5p per minute with a 6p set-up fee, from April 1st.

On page 4 of Which? magazine for April they put it as "BT call cost up 2000%!"

"My reason for passing this to you is that I thought, via your Update, you may wish to alert members. The fact is that, rather like the loss of Sunday mail collections which we had grown up with and assumed would always be the case (i.e. BT calls are cheaper in the evening) will not be the case in future. See you at the AGM".

An Interesting Website www.info4local.gov.uk

This is a government website and email alert service that gives local authorities a quick and easy way to find out about relevant information on central government websites and those of agencies and public bodies. Seven departments run it, one of which, the Communities and Local Government Department, oversees the service. The others are the Departments for Schools, Children and Families, DEFRA, DoH, Home Office, Transport and Works and Pensions. More than 65 other departments, agencies and public bodies contribute to the site.

A related link is to the Office of Public Sector Information, about which I am sure you were all aware although I was not. This provides links to all new UK legislation that has been made available in the last two weeks. The update of 29th April showed that the following Statutory Instruments have been added:

- No. 793 The Childcare (Voluntary Registration) (Amendment) Regulations 2008
- No. 1146 The Value Added Tax (Buildings and Land) Order 2008
- No. 1158 (C51) The Tribunals, Courts, and Enforcement Act 2007 (Commencement No. 4) Order 2008
- No. 1161 The Medicines for Human Use (Prescribing) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Order 2008
- No. 1162 The Medicines (Sales or Supply) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2008
- No. 1164 The National savings Bank (Amendment) (No.3) Regulations 2008.

Network Rail Designs For A Rural Station – Are You Next?

The local community wondered what was planned when large hoardings appeared at Effingham Junction Station in Surrey, taking many parking spaces in the car park that is often filled to

capacity. Behind the hoardings there appeared to be site offices and much equipment. It appeared that Network Rail was about to rebuild the station and not before time! The Victorian buildings, footbridge and shelters have been poorly maintained for many years and in great need of replacement. Also there is currently no disabled access to the station.

There followed a planning application from Network Rail to the local borough council (Guildford) to replace the ticket office, footbridge and shelters – great news, or was it? Close inspection of the plans raised many concerns:

- Disabled access would be by a ramp going from the car park up to the top level of a replacement footbridge. This would result in disabled people having to use lifts to reach the platforms and booking office. The station is unmanned except in the mornings and concerns were raised that lifts may fail and there was a suitable alternative design of ramps down to each platform:
- The design was inappropriate for the rural setting of this station - setting a precedent for other rural stations. Personally, I am not against modern structures but they need to be sympathetic to the rural setting.
- Open canopies (open on all sides) were to be provided that would not give sufficient protection for passengers
- The plans dealt with the Network Rail station only. It missed an opportunity of working with the Borough Council to improve narrow pavements adjacent to the station and improved set-down/pick-up for passengers
- There would also be a permanent loss of parking spaces when the car park was already at capacity.
- With many letters raising concerns Guildford Borough Council rejected the plans, citing various policies, on the grounds that:
- The proposed development, by virtue of the scale, design and siting of the proposed replacement station buildings and replacement footbridge and lift towers, would cause unacceptable harm to the visual amenity and rural context and character of the area and to the amenities enjoyed by residents
- The proposed development, by virtue of the scale, design and siting of the proposed replacement station buildings and replacement footbridge and lift towers would have an unacceptable impact on the openness of the Green Belt in this transitional

area between the settlement and countryside.

We believe that Network Rail has refused to negotiate with the Borough Council stating that these are the plans for local stations, presumably throughout the network and they are not prepared to compromise.

The hoardings, offices and equipment have been removed – but where to? Is your station next in line to set precedents for station buildings in the 21st Century? We are expecting an appeal against the Council but is Network Rail hoping to set precedents elsewhere? No doubt this would strengthen their appeal.

Be alert to planning applications from Network Rail and consider them openly taking account of your local situation.

ARNOLD PINDAR.

M&S to charge for bags

Marks & Spencer has begun charging 5p for plastic carrier bags at its 600 food stores. It wants to encourage the use of bags for life instead, and will be donating the money raised from bag sales to environmental charities.

The store says that trials of the charge in Northern Ireland and parts of the South West resulted in a 70% drop in the number of customers choosing to use plastic bags. Chief Executive Sir Stuart Rose said that if the figure was replicated across the country it could reduce the number of bags used by 280 million each year

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