



# Travel Topics

Issue 103

Spring 2006

The watchdog for Commuters from  
Tonbridge, Paddock Wood and  
Hildenborough

## New operator from April 2006

By the time this issue is published, Govia, already operators of our neighbouring area at Southern, will have been operating our train services for some weeks, and we have already been in contact to make your voice heard. Charles Horton, the new General Manager, will have a difficult act to follow and we wish him well. Michael Holden made sure that South Eastern Trains brought in several improvements and his leadership was most impressive. We congratulate him on making our journeys better and wish him good luck for the future.

The future holds several challenges for us. Our MP, Sir John Stanley, is rightly protesting against our fares being used to cross-subsidise the high-speed line between Ashford and London. Trains on the new line will do little to relieve overcrowding in the Tonbridge area, since most

Ashford commuters do not wish to go to St Pancras quickly only to find that they lose time in an awkward Tube journey afterwards. Proposed housing developments at Ashford must also be scrutinised. Meanwhile, more and more people commute via Tonbridge, an increase of some 6-7% in the last 12 months, and there is little sign of this trend abating. Pressure to switch from car to public transport could also have an impact. Globalisation of the economy and other factors have extended the peak hours and we strongly welcome the extra evening trains from London later this year. We will, of course, keep up the pressure to maximise the number of seats which, after all, you pay handsomely for. You in turn can help us by attending our AGM in May and putting your views to the rail representatives. **JR**

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## December timetable changes

Listed below are the Tonbridge line timetable changes that GoVia plan to introduce in December 2006. The main Monday to Friday changes are:

- **Additional** train from Ashford to Cannon Street departing Paddock Wood 0543, Tonbridge 0555 and Hildenborough 0600 – arriving Cannon Street at 0641.
- 0447 Dover Priory (0552 Paddock Wood / 0600 Tonbridge) to Charing Cross will call only at Sevenoaks (departs 2 minutes later than at present from Paddock Wood and Tonbridge)
- **Additional** train from Ashford to Charing Cross calling Paddock Wood 0623 / Tonbridge 0631 - fast from Sevenoaks to Waterloo East arriving Charing Cross 0711
- 1930 Charing Cross to Ashford diverted to Tunbridge Wells
- **Additional** Train 1923 Charing Cross to Ramsgate calling Tonbridge 2000 and Paddock Wood 2009 (fast London Bridge to Tonbridge)
- **Additional** train 1950 Charing Cross to Ramsgate calling Tonbridge 2031 and Paddock Wood 2038 (fast London Bridge to Tonbridge)
- **Additional** Trains 2115, 2215, 2315 Charing Cross to Tunbridge Wells call Tonbridge at 2158, 2258 and 2358; these trains replace the existing shuttle services between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells.
- There will also be an **additional** early train to Ashford reinstated departing Tonbridge 0453 and Paddock Wood 0500.

Please note these timings are currently provisional and are subject to Network Rail and Office of Rail Regulation approval. **LS**

# From our Mailbag

If you have a particular view on any item, you can contact us on our e-mail address:

*Tonbridgelinecommuters@hotmail.com*

Here are our comments on a selection of some of the recent issues raised there.

## First Class Accommodation

Traditionally, the Association remains neutral on the merits or otherwise of retaining first class. We have some members who use it, and others who don't approve of it. However, what is undeniable is that the standard of first class accommodation in Class 375 trains is poor value and does not offer the expected standard from paying a substantial premium. We have therefore suggested to the new franchisee that they either improve it or lose it, since no-one wants to see empty seats on an otherwise crowded commuter train. Govia have so far stated that they intend to retain first class on our trains and to upgrade the accommodation.

## Cycles on peak hour trains

Members will know that SET (and Govia) have introduced a no-cycle rule on peak hour trains to and from London. Folding cycles are allowed, but do not suit all those members who need to use cycles at each end of their journey. Since the only place in trains for cycles is in the open seating area, and given the pressure for space and seats for passengers on peak hour trains, we feel that until overcrowding can be addressed, we should not lobby to overturn this rule. Alas, not a very 'green' response!

## Off Peak Rail Travel

Although the bulk of our members are commuters, we aim to represent all public transport users within our area. And indeed, several of the Committee are ardent off-peak, Railcard-toting travellers keen to get best value for money. Aside from the service issues, we often get asked about off-peak fare structures. These are a minefield, based mostly on national terms and conditions with local rules added. Small wonder that railway staff and internet booking sites don't always get it right. Here's a quick test to see how clued up you are [answer at foot of page].

Q. - if **3 or 4 people** travel together to London off peak, what is the cheapest way of doing it?

Answer to question above; [from the National Rail website]

**GroupSave enables groups of 3 or 4 to travel by train into London and throughout South East England for the price of 2 adults.** (\*Can be: 4 adults, 2 adults and 2 children, 3 adults and 1 child.). your party of 3 or 4 will pay the equivalent of just 2 adult Cheap Day Returns, 2 adult Saver Returns, or 2 adult Network AwayBreak Return tickets. **You don't need to book ahead. Just simply turn up and go.**

Generally [but not the answer to the question above!]:

- **Time** of travel – most people know that if you go later in the morning, it's cheaper than peak fares. However, a few minutes can make a further difference. Catch a train that **arrives in London** after 10am on a weekday and you can buy a cheap day return – typically, half the price of a standard single. But catch a train that leaves **your station** after 10am and it's even cheaper with a "Pricebuster".
- **Direction** of travel – travel away from London and cheap return fares are available at any time of day.
- **Class** of travel – currently, if you travel first class in peak hours, you will pay a premium of 50% of the standard fare. But do this off-peak and you will pay three times the equivalent standard fare.

A few tips from personal experience:

- If you have an annual season ticket:
  - up to 3 other adults travelling with you off-peak get a 1/3 discount; children cost even less
  - you [and fellow travellers] will also get that discount on tickets for other journeys in SE England to as far away as Exeter, Worcester and Kings Lynn.
  - you can buy a Network card for your spouse etc for only £1 – and that other person does not have to be related.
- Tickets bought with Network cards are less valuable than a card such as a Student card. They have a minimum cost of £10 and can only be used after 10 am. So currently, there's no saving on a cheap day return from Tonbridge to London. But it will save money if you need a one-day Travelcard.
- If you are travelling beyond London, look at splitting your tickets – through tickets often miss out on huge discounts available.

In an article like this, it isn't possible to give you all the combinations or a foolproof guide. If you have internet access and the time, a good starting point is a website like [www.thetrainline.com](http://www.thetrainline.com) which will show you the discount cards available and the range of fares. You'll be amazed at the permutations and variations, but beware of the small print! **MS**

# Free local bus travel for the over 60s

Besides railway travellers, we look after the interests of taxi and bus users. We also have a number of members over 60 years old, some still commuting, and some retired but still using public transport. So we feel this reminder will be of interest to a proportion of our membership. From 1st April 2006 residents of Kent who are 60 years old or over, with an appropriate pass, are eligible for free use of local buses after 9.00 am Monday to Friday, and all day on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays. We understand that "local" means any journey on a non-express bus starting or

finishing in Kent. Each local authority in Kent is responsible for administering the free bus travel scheme for residents in its area. Full details of the scheme are now available from your District or Borough Council, and these authorities are also processing applications for passes. A similar scheme has been introduced in East Sussex. Finally, those who follow the Budget will know that in April 2008 over 60s will be able to travel anywhere in England free (after 9.00 on Mon-Fri).  
**TH**

**THE ASSOCIATION'S 47<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
will be held on TUESDAY 23<sup>rd</sup> MAY AT 7.30 pm at the  
FORSYTH HALL in BRADFORD STREET, TONBRIDGE**

Please note the change of venue. Bradford Street is on the left off the High Street about 200 metres from the station. The adjacent public car park is free after 1800 hours, and we will be serving tea and coffee before the meeting. The hall is hired until 2300 to allow time for informal discussion.

We hope you will be able to join us on 23<sup>rd</sup> May. This year's AGM is likely to be particularly interesting, as the managers of the new Integrated Kent Franchise rail operators and our MP, Sir John Stanley, have all been invited to attend.  
**TH**

## Shelter outside Tonbridge station

Following a meeting at the Tonbridge & Malling Council's "Bus and Taxi" Forum meeting on 13 February, we are supporting the Taxi Association's suggestion that a bus type shelter be provided outside Tonbridge station to protect passengers waiting at the rank for taxis at this exposed

location. Since writing to the Council asking for a shelter to be provided, we have received a positive response from the Council's Chief Engineer, but with a warning that as the site is on Network Rail land, the approval process is likely to be lengthy. We are not holding our breath.  
**TH**

## Tonbridge Line Commuters – Your Committee

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**Hon. Treasurer: Terry Hines**  
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**Martin Steibelt**  
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Apart from Martin Steibelt, who is retiring, and for whose hard work and support in the past we are very grateful, the above have signified their willingness to stand for election to the 2006/7 Committee and look forward to members' support at the AGM.

# Tonbridge station improvements

We have finally convinced SET that Notices of Weekend Engineering Disruptions should be placed where you can see them before deciding whether or not to buy non-refundable tickets. There are now two posters, one outside the station, and the other in the ticket hall.

At the time of writing, we are pressing for the 'Fastest Train to London Bridge' indicator in the ticket hall to be changed to read 'Fastest train to East Croydon' since the quickest trains to London Bridge almost invariably run via

Sevenoaks and continue to Charing Cross or Cannon Street. An occasional passenger might not realise this without being told.

More covered cycle stands have been provided on the platforms, which should provide better security for cycles while they remain at the station for the day

We keep in regular contact with the station and area management. If you have any suggestions, please let us know so that we can try to help.  
**JR**

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## Mind the Gap

Your Committee has recently been looking into the difficulties some people experience with the large gaps between train and platform at certain stations. Generally, this occurs where there is a significant curve on the platform, for example at Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks and Waterloo East.

While this may not be a problem for the average commuter between Tonbridge and Charing Cross, those of us with shorter legs, luggage, heavy or bulky shopping, children etc. can encounter real difficulty boarding and alighting from trains. For those of a nervous disposition, a wide gap can be truly frightening. SET suggested that the solution is to book assistance before travelling. However, this is both impractical and misses the point:

assistance is standard for disabled persons, but those who have problems with wide gaps are not necessarily classed as disabled, nor are they always aware that there is a problem until arrival at the station. It is difficult to assess the number of accidents (if any), or near-accidents, caused by wide gaps. If you have any relevant information the Committee would be pleased to hear from you.

*PS A traveller got into a flap  
when he realised the size of the gap  
from platform to train  
was too much of a strain  
there was nearly a nasty mishap.*  
**AH**

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## TONBRIDGE LINE COMMUTERS

The subscription (for the year ending March 31<sup>st</sup>) is £3.00. This includes UK-wide travel insurance.

If any of the details on the label below are incorrect, please amend them. If you would like to receive e-mails from the Association, please give your e-mail address here:

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Please renew my Association membership for:

One year (£3.00) .....

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Cheques payable to Tonbridge Line Commuters.  
Send your payments to the Treasurer, Terry Hines,  
at 89 Hadlow Road, Tonbridge, Kent, TN9 1QD