



Travel Topics

Issue 104

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The watchdog for
Tonbridge Line Commuters from Tonbridge,
Paddock Wood and Hildenborough

Changing Trains

Govia have now been running our services for six months and appear to be settling into the job. Apart from a handful of unforeseen circumstances (e.g. suicides), delays have not seemed as serious or as regular as in previous summers. The autumn leaf fall season awaits us but timetable adjustments are expected to alleviate the problem. We shall, of course be watching closely. The additional trains being introduced in December should go some way to reducing overcrowding as well as providing a more convenient service at the beginning and end of the day.

There remain several long term spectres. The (unlamented) Strategic Rail Authority delivered a final blow from its deathbed in the form of proposing that the hourly Tonbridge - Gatwick services should be scrapped, necessitating a change of train at Redhill. This under-publicised service is a useful link, not only for air travellers laden with luggage, but also for passengers to the South Coast who have a wide range of through destinations from Gatwick. We shall fight to ensure its retention.

The effects of the new Channel Tunnel Rail Link, due to open in 2007, need attention. We have already warned of over-reliance on services to a destination which hardly anyone wishes to reach. Most of your jobs are nearer to Charing Cross and Cannon Street than to St. Pancras, and we shall continue pressing for keeping and improving the "classic" services to the City and West End through Tonbridge.

An additional recent threat has arisen in the form of a proposal to make drastic cuts in the number of Eurostar trains calling at Ashford, and switch the calls to Ebbsfleet, near Dartford. This is a real kick in the teeth for all those who have had to put up with the disruption caused by Eurostar trains for so many years, and who might have moved to this part of Kent for the convenience of European rail travel. Ebbsfleet has little appeal for South Kent travellers; an expensive car or taxi ride along congested roads is no substitute for the train to Ashford (free for Annual Season Ticket holders). We shall make sure your voice is heard.
JR

We must not be complacent

TLC membership has remained steady at about 450 members for several years. This year numbers are down by 20%, to 360. Despite reminders to those who so far have not renewed for 2006/07, few have responded. Your committee has considered the possible reasons for this downturn. We conclude that commuters and other travellers are reasonably satisfied with the current service (eg quality of the new trains, frequency, punctuality and cleanliness). We believe that a consequence of this is that a proportion of our membership sees little point in continuing to support our rail user/pressure group.

Complacency on the quality of services through Tonbridge may, however, be short lived. The frequency of trains on the Tonbridge line from Ashford

and the Kent coast may reduce as soon as the high speed domestic Channel Tunnel Rail Link service to St. Pancras is introduced in 2009. In addition, we have already been told that with effect from 2007 fares on the Tonbridge line are to increase by 3% above inflation every year for at least five years. This is a condition of the current SouthEastern Trains franchise. We intend to mount major campaigns to mitigate the adverse effects of the domestic CTRL services on our timetable and fares.

We are sending copies of this edition of Travel Topics to recently lapsed members in the hope that renewals will be forthcoming. Remember, when negotiating with the train operators, one of our strengths is in the size of our membership. **TH**

December Timetable Changes

In the last edition of 'Travel Topics' we gave provisional details of a number of extra trains to be introduced from 10 December 2006. We can now confirm these revisions and are pleased to note some major improvements to Sunday services. The main Monday to Friday changes are:

- **Additional train from Ashford to Cannon Street** calling at Headcorn 0527, Staplehurst 0533, Marden 0537, **Paddock Wood 0543, Tonbridge 0555, Hildenborough 0600**, Sevenoaks 0607, Orpington 0617 – arriving Cannon Street at 0641.
- 0445 Dover Priory to Charing Cross is revised to depart at 0451 **and will cease to call at Hildenborough** and Orpington (served by the above train). New times are Pluckley 0532, Headcorn 0538, Staplehurst 0543, Marden 0547, **Paddock Wood 0554, Tonbridge 0602**, Sevenoaks 0612, then fast to London Bridge, Waterloo East and Charing Cross, arriving at 0648.
- **Additional train from Ashford to Charing Cross** at 0558, calling at Headcorn 0609, Staplehurst 0614, **Paddock Wood 0623, Tonbridge, 0631**, Sevenoaks 0642, then fast to Waterloo East and Charing Cross, arriving at 0711. *This train gives a 48-minute journey time from Paddock Wood to Charing Cross, compared with a best time of 59 minutes at present.*
- **1930 Charing Cross to Ashford** will be diverted to Tunbridge Wells, arriving at 2026.
- **Additional train 1923 Charing Cross to Ramsgate** via Dover calling at Waterloo East 1926, London Bridge 1932, then fast to **Tonbridge 2000, Paddock Wood 2009**, Staplehurst, Headcorn and Ashford. *This train will be a useful new connection for travellers currently using the 1907 departure from Cannon Street, but who wish to travel to stations on the Ashford line.*
- **Additional train 1950 Charing Cross to Ramsgate** via Canterbury West, calling at Waterloo East 1953, London Bridge 1958, then fast to **Tonbridge 2031, Paddock Wood 2038** Staplehurst, Headcorn and Ashford.

- The 2000 Charing Cross to Ramsgate will call additionally at Marden and Pluckley.
- The 2200 and 2300 Charing Cross to Kent Coast trains will cease to call at Chelsfield.
- **Additional Trains 2115, 2215, 2315 Charing Cross to Tunbridge Wells** calling at Waterloo East, London Bridge, Orpington, Chelsfield (not 2115) Sevenoaks, **Tonbridge**, High Brooms and Tunbridge Wells. These trains will replace the existing shuttle services between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. *These changes now give a regular 15-minute service to Tonbridge throughout the evening.*
- The return journeys currently at 2209 and 2310 from Tunbridge Wells to Tonbridge will leave at 2206 and 2304 respectively.
- There will also be an **additional** early train from Tonbridge to Ashford (continuing to Ramsgate via Folkestone) departing 0453 and calling at all stations to Ashford.

What we had not had details of before are the improvements to be made on Sundays. Basically there will be a new hourly service between Charing Cross and Hastings, commencing with the 0940, and continuing through to 1840. These trains will call at Waterloo East, London Bridge, Orpington, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, High Brooms, Tunbridge Wells, Wadhurst, Battle, St Leonards Warrior Square and Hastings. Some early morning trains which were withdrawn have also been reinstated.

These extra Sunday trains provide two main benefits for travellers from Tonbridge; firstly, a regular four trains an hour service during the main part of day and, less obviously, a guaranteed two trains an hour service to London which would operate via Redhill, in the (frequent) cases of engineering work between Tonbridge and Orpington.

We have also been told that the basic 3-car Class 508 units used on the Medway Valley line are to be gradually replaced by 2-car Networker trains. **LS**

Annual General Meeting

A rather disappointing turnout of members came to the Forsyth Hall in Tonbridge on 23rd May to hear an introductory address by Charles Horton, MD of SouthEastern. After a brief outline of the new operator's aspirations, which included widespread fitment of CCTV, an attack on graffiti, and a major programme of station refurbishment, Mr Horton

answered questions from the audience. Among the issues raised were the poor state of station ticket machines, recent train cancellations, the restrictions on the carriage of cycles on trains, the lack of car parking spaces and poor train connections at Paddock Wood, and the future of first class accommodation on Class 375s. **LS**

Local Issues

We keep regular contact with Tonbridge station area management and have lately managed to secure several improvements at the station. Weekend engineering closures are now shown in the booking hall so that you can decide before buying a ticket whether or not to go by train. The indicators now show East Croydon instead of London Bridge as the final destination of trains via Redhill (to avoid London Bridge passengers thinking that is the quickest route). As non-air conditioned trains arrive in hot weather, announcements will be made on the platforms reminding passengers that the windows can be opened. Other issues we have recently taken up are the provision of extra seats on Platform 3, better queuing arrangements in the ticket hall, early closing of the ticket office, a taxi shelter outside the station, and the annoying discrepancy between the various station clocks. If you have any other suggestions for improving the station, please let us know. **JR**

In separate discussions we have sought Hildenborough's early inclusion in the station repainting programme, as its current condition is causing us some concern. We also understand that there are plans afoot to provide access to the down platform for disabled passengers, but these are at an early stage. **LS**

At Paddock Wood an informal meeting took place on 15th August with the then station manager, Pat Walsh, to discuss a number of local issues. We expressed concern that the opening hours of the ticket office are no longer displayed on a sign next to the door, but on a poster instead, but were assured that, Mondays to Fridays, two windows are open from 0600 until 1000. Although the second window is currently manned by a conductor/guard or revenue protection inspector, using

a portable machine, we understand that a second permanent ticket machine is eventually to be installed.

We also discussed inadequate signage, especially the fact that there is little or no indication on platforms 2 and 3 regarding the Medway Valley Line. For example, passengers from London alighting at the station (for the MVL) usually find that the screen on platform 3 refers to the arrival time of the next train **from** Strood. That is no help at all for passengers unfamiliar with local services. Pat agreed there is inadequate information and said he would try and remedy this.

We discussed at some length the problems which had arisen following dedicated use of one part of the car park by season ticket holders. Spaces were available, but there was a waiting list of car park season tickets. We argued that more tickets should be issued, and in the longer term the land currently spare should be used for extending the car park and not sold off.

Finally, we discussed the notices regarding weekend engineering works. These are sometimes wrong or incomprehensible; on one recent occasion the poster displayed was the one that related to Headcorn. Apparently, all these notices will, in future, be centrally produced., which should improve quality control.

Unfortunately, soon after this meeting SouthEastern decided to move and re-designate many of their managers and revert to a previous system of duty managers, so we may have to begin again. However, we have sought appointments with the new station manager (based at Ashford), Mark Ellerby, who is assisted by duty managers Paul Harris and Paul Glancy. **AH**

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Redevelopment of Tonbridge Station

In 2005 Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council commissioned Milton Keynes consultant David Lock Associates to produce “preferred options” proposals for the future development of Tonbridge Town Centre. The initial ideas were the subject of a public exhibition in October 2005. Taking account of feedback from the public, and TMBC officer and member input, a Town Centre Master Plan was drafted. In September and October 2006, the Plan was the subject of a six week public consultation period. Comments and representations received will be considered during a formal “examination in public” by a government inspector in 2007. Your committee has considered the Master Plan in relation to proposals for the future of Tonbridge station and nearby railway land. On behalf of the Association we have submitted comments and objections to certain proposals contained in the Plan. Extracts from the Plan are shown in italics, followed by our comments.

1 *Tonbridge Station requires new and improved passenger facilities, including better access. The redevelopment of the station must take into account the adjacent public realm improvements....* We welcome proposals to improve the Station; we wonder whether funding will become available from TMBC. Otherwise Network Rail and/or a developer are the obvious sources of funding.... but see 2 below.

2 *These sites (the station car parks) are owned by Network Rail and their redevelopment could help fund improvements to the station.....To the south of the railway (D11) the site is underused, and its*

redevelopment should have regard to the existing residence opposite – residential development, including townhouses..... We challenge the wrong conclusion that the site is under-used. It is a single level very well used rail commuters/travellers car park. Any redevelopment should ensure this parking provision is maintained or, more importantly, increased significantly.

3 *To the north of the railway, the current commuter car park could be redeveloped for single aspect apartments.....The redevelopment.....will be dependent on a number of factors including the replacement on site of all commuter parking* This is reassuring but we would hope that commuter parking provision could be greatly increased in the interests of encouraging the use of public transport from the excellent Tonbridge station rail hub. It is the town’s most promising access to “alternative modes of travel”.

4 In a diagram in the May 2006 Town centre Master Plan showing proposals to improve Tonbridge station, two additional pedestrian crossings on Railway Approach are shown. One is at the north end, more or less opposite The Honeymoon Restaurant (always a difficult place to cross) and the other is opposite the entrance to the ticket hall. If accompanied by a relocation of the southbound bus stop (or the addition of another stop) on the bridge (which we consider is a safe possibility), this would provide an excellent improvement to the interchange arrangements. **TH**

TONBRIDGE LINE COMMUTERS

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