



Travel Topics

Issue 106

Autumn 2007

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

Yellow signals ahead

So far, Govia's stewardship of train services in Kent has been relatively free of disruption apart from certain events beyond its control. The lines through London Bridge were closed twice within a few weeks earlier this year as a result of fires beside or underneath the tracks and trains were diverted to and from Victoria. At least we could get in and out of London, though with varying degrees of difficulty. Some commuters used their own routes, for example, from Blackfriars changing at Sevenoaks. That particular route became so crowded that passengers were unable to board even at Elephant & Castle, the first station on the way from London. Staff at Sevenoaks arranged for some fast trains to make an extra stop to enable passengers to continue to Hildenborough, Tonbridge and beyond.

There are some dangers ahead. The company is now permitted to raise fares above the national inflation rate, apparently because of "benefits" to Kent commuters from the high speed Ashford to St. Pancras service (not starting until 2009). Fares on those trains will be

charged at a premium rate and, for City and West End commuters, the journey will involve a Tube ride in London which they would not necessarily make at the moment. We believe that usage of the high speed trains is probably being over-estimated and that many commuters will prefer to use current services via Tonbridge. We must therefore fight to ensure that existing services will be maintained and, if possible, enhanced to meet the rising population's needs.

Just outside our area we are taking up the case of residents near Penshurst station who have complained about the station lights being left on all night.

We welcome Hazel Dawe to our committee and are grateful for her contributions to our activities. We continue to appeal for new committee members, especially ones with some time to go before retirement. Should you feel able to join us, please contact any committee member and ask us any questions that you may have.

JR

December timetable changes

The main feature of the timetable which is to be introduced this December, is the addition of a new train to Tunbridge Wells departing Charing Cross at 1650. This train, which will call at Waterloo East, London Bridge, Sevenoaks, Hildenborough, Tonbridge, High Brooms, arriving Tunbridge Wells at 1743, helpfully fills a large gap on the Hastings line between 1615 and 1716. (The existing 1650 Charing Cross to Margate will depart at 1646 but will cease to call at Sevenoaks, running 6 minutes earlier thereafter.) The 1700 Cannon Street to Hastings will, however, cease to call at Hildenborough, so passengers for there will need to leave earlier and change at London Bridge. We have sought to retain this Hildenborough stop so far without success, but if you use this train regularly to make such a journey, please let us know.

The evening up service to London will be completely revised to give four trains per hour from Tonbridge up to 22.30, the extra trains starting from Tunbridge Wells.

Among some minor changes to evening peak departure times, the 1722 Cannon Street to Ashford will depart at 1720 but is due to arrive at Sevenoaks two minutes later than at present. At the time of writing, we have not received a satisfactory explanation for this four minute delay. The train currently seems to be reliable - we strongly believe that improvements to punctuality statistics should come from better practice and not merely from allowing a few more minutes in the schedule.

There are no significant major changes to the morning peak service.

LS

NEXT YEAR'S AGM WILL BE HELD ON TUESDAY 13th MAY 2008

Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council has adopted a draft plan for the development of the central area of Tonbridge town. Whilst the Association's committee in general supports the draft proposals for regeneration of the central area, it has reservations relating to certain transportation issues. The committee's comments (summarised below) have been passed to the Government's independent Inspector who is to consider the soundness of all aspects of the plan at a formal hearing due to commence on 23 October 2007.

We were sceptical that (a) "Smarter Choices" (increased walking, cycling and use of public transport) would result in a 14% reduction in the use of cars during the plan period to 2016 (we feel this will not happen and traffic levels will increase year by year in line with national predictions), and (b) the TMBC and KCC 2000 Transport Strategy (which has been brought forward into the plan effectively unaltered) will achieve any real improvement in public transport. (we feel little seems to have happened since 2000 so further improvements in the immediate future will be insignificant).

We supported (a) the general concept of the plan, (b) the introduction of a Quality Bus Partnership, but feel that this should be defined and be legally tied into development proposals (in accordance with the

principle of the Council's plan): and (c) the proposal to install two additional pedestrian crossings across Railway Approach, making it easier to access the station from the Vale Road area.

We pointed out that most bus services cease to run from Tonbridge Station at about 1800hours (e.g. routes 7, 205, 208, 211 and 402) before the majority of London commuters arrive there to return home.

We suggested that (a) despite Network Rail's wish to develop the two commuter car parks to provide 550 dwellings, the current car capacity of Vale Road and Priory Road commuter car parks be retained (now subsequently agreed as part of the TCAAP by TMBC) or increased: and (b) there should be regular day time bus services and a cycle route to Hildenborough Station, thus reducing car and other trips to Tonbridge Station. (TMBC is to progress these suggestions)

Our Conclusion: As the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan is so dependent on improved public transport and other "Smarter Choices" modes of transportation, we felt that the formal Public Examination should test the soundness of this and the Transport Strategy, and if this was not satisfied, the plan should be modified accordingly. **TH**

Paddock Wood News

The struggle goes on to improve signage and information at Paddock Wood station. For example, just before the departure of Medway Valley Line trains for Maidstone and Strood, there is no indication as to where passengers alighting from trains from London should go; the screen for Platform 3 merely announces the arrival of the next train FROM Strood, and requests passengers not to board this train. This is not at all helpful, particularly for passengers who are unfamiliar with local services.

The bus stops for railway replacement bus services are situated on both sides of the station. However, while replacement services towards Tonbridge and London leave from the stop outside the main entrance adjacent to platform 1, buses for Maidstone and Ashford leave, seemingly at random, from either side. This causes considerable confusion and inconvenience, especially when the station is un-staffed e.g. on Sunday evenings.

Another problem associated with engineering work is that the posters showing revised times give only partial information. We had been told that the previously

locally produced notices would be produced centrally, to improve the quality of the information; unfortunately this has not proved to be the case.

Although several SouthEastern stations have been refreshed with a coat of paint, the roof and higher parts at Paddock Wood have not been included, spoiling the otherwise good effect. While there are valid health and safety concerns regarding access to these parts, which make it difficult for complete redecoration to be undertaken, it leaves an overall impression of only partial commitment. Pigeons and their mess are increasing, so we would welcome appropriate measures to eliminate the problem. One should not blame the station staff, as pigeon droppings are a health hazard and their removal must be undertaken only by those trained and wearing suitable protective clothing.

Finally, members will have noticed a hole where the station clock has been removed. As last, the, possibly unique, clock is to be given a complete overhaul and restored to full working order, thanks we believe, to the Railway Heritage Trust. **AH**

...and Parking at Paddock Wood

As regular commuters from Paddock Wood will be aware, the car parking situation has been steadily deteriorating over the last few years, and has recently got much worse before it (maybe) gets better. Usage of the station car park is split between daily paid parking and season ticket holder parking. The daily paid parking area is usually full by 08.00 each morning, and people arriving after this time up until recently have been parking in the public car parks a short distance away, at £4 per day, some 50p per day more expensive than the station car park.

Despite there being a waiting list for season tickets, the season ticket holders only area is never full before 09.30, after which anyone can use it. One reason for this is because some selfish season ticket holders persist in parking in the daily parking area, thus taking up a space that could otherwise be used. We also suspect that there are fewer season ticket holders than spaces. We have asked SouthEastern about both these points, but no action has been taken to date.

Unfortunately for commuters, over the summer, a group of vested business interests in Paddock Wood persuaded Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to approve an increase in the public car park daily parking charge from £4 per day to £8 per day, thus effectively pricing commuters out. This is despite a poll in the *Courier* showing no public support for the increase, and our own campaign to oppose the proposal. The stated reason for the increase is because the car parks are full of commuters, and shoppers cannot park. However, TWBC's own figures for July show that of 124 spaces, an average of only 47 were used by people parking for

the whole day. In addition, the local Waitrose supermarket in the town Centre has about another 100 spaces where people can park for up to 2 hours for nothing. So Paddock Wood commuters who can't park in the station are now forced to leave their cars in the streets all day. Although there are some 'residents only' parking zones near the station, much of the town is unrestricted. This inconveniences both local residents and commuters alike, and must have caused a drop in income to the Council, as all town centre parking for up to 2 hours (i.e. for most visits) remains free.

All of this is against a backdrop of there being a substantial amount of unused Network Rail owned land, adjacent to the station, which is allocated in the Borough plan for parking, but is currently lying idle. We have attempted to persuade TWBC to put some pressure on SouthEastern to use this land, but we have seen little evidence of the Council taking any action. However, there is potentially some relief in sight. SouthEastern have stated to TLC that it is now actively considering leasing and using some of the unused land to provide an additional 80 spaces for the station car park. If the proposal goes ahead, then this is expected to be operational by March 2008, and will, at least for a while, mean that most commuters who want to, will be able to park at the station.

TLC will continue to pressure SouthEastern to increase car parking provision, and we can only hope that TWBC and the traders of Paddock Wood are satisfied that they have inconvenienced so many people, most of whom at one time or another, are probably their customers or Council Tax payers. **ST**

Tonbridge Line Commuters – Your Committee

Chairman: John Reynolds
14 Cumberland Court, Tonbridge
TN10 3AL Tel. 01732 355871

Vice-Chairman: Kathy Pratt
96 Leigh Road, Hildenborough
TN11 9AG Tel. 01732 838620

Membership Sec: Steve Terry
5 The Manwarings, Horsmonden
TN12 8NQ Tel. 01892 723862

**Hon. Secretary and Acting
Treasurer:** Lionel Shields
13 Streamside, Tonbridge
TN10 3PU Tel. 01732 355919

Terry Hines
89 Hadlow Road, Tonbridge
TN9 1QD Tel. 01732 351383

Arlene Hansell
16 Allington Road, Paddock Wood
TN12 6AN

Michael Whitson
13 Laxton Gardens, Paddock Wood
TN12 6BB Tel. 01892 832566

Hazel Dawe
27 Audley Avenue Tonbridge
TN9 1XF Tel. 01732 355185

The above members were re-elected at our Annual General Meeting in May, and we thank those present for their support. We also thank various other members of our Association for their delivery etc of 'Travel Topics'. Remember our e-mail domain: tonbridgecommuters.org.uk through which you can contact us for help, queries etc. The addresses are: enquiry@..., hildenborough@..., tonbridge@..., membership@..., and paddockwood@...

Mixed news from Eurostar

In the last issue, we deplored the decision to reduce savagely the number of Eurostar stops at Ashford, forcing Kent and East Sussex customers to travel by car in the wrong direction towards Ebbsfleet. (For information, the surviving trains leave at 05.57, 10.57 and 16.54 to Paris, and 09.26 to Lille.) There is some good news. From the start of the St. Pancras services,

Govia will reintroduce free travel to and from the respective Eurostar station on production of the relative Eurostar tickets. This applies to all Eurostar passengers (not just season ticket holders) and is a most welcome sign of cooperation between the two train companies. Meanwhile, the fight goes on to get those Ashford stops reinstated... **JR**

Travellers' Questionnaire 2007

Some of our members may recall that in 2001, in the dark days following the Hatfield crash, and the floods of autumn 2000, we ran a passenger survey, entitled "What's wrong with the railway?" The results were very interesting, and formed the basis of our lobbying to the then incumbent operator Connex, regarding improvements that were desperately needed. Nearly seven years and two changes of operator later, we thought it would be worthwhile repeating the exercise with a new survey, "What's *still* wrong with the railway?" A survey form is enclosed. So that we can

validly compare the results, we have asked the same questions as before, even though some of these may seem irrelevant now. Again we will collate your comments (anonymously) and make them available to SouthEastern. We will publish the results in the next edition of *Travel Topics*, along with a comparison of them against the 2001 results, and recent national passenger surveys. We would really appreciate as many members as possible returning the survey forms. Your input will help us focus on the things that matter to our membership. **ST**

Membership Renewals

Please have a look at the bottom of the address label stuck to the back of your copy of *Travel Topics*. Your renewal date is printed here, and if it says 1 April 2007, then this is the last copy that you will receive, before we assume that you no longer wish to be a member and we remove you from our database.

To renew, please send your renewal payment and the form in this newsletter below, to our Acting Treasurer, Lionel Shields, at his address given on the previous

page. If you believe that you have already paid for the membership year 2007-2008, then please let us know by calling Steve Terry, Membership Secretary on 01892 723862 or via email at membership@tonbridgecommuters.org.uk

Finally, if your membership expires in 2008 or later, then there's absolutely no need to send in the form or pay anything now. We will remind you nearer the time. **ST**

TONBRIDGE LINE COMMUTERS

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

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

.....

Please renew my Association membership for:

- One year (£3.00)
- Two years (£6.00)
- ... years (£)

Cheques payable to Tonbridge Line Commuters. Send your payment to the Acting Treasurer, Lionel Shields, at 13 Streamside, Tonbridge, Kent, TN10 3PU