



# Travel Topics

Issue 108

Autumn 2008

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

*E-mail: [enquiry@tonbridgecommuters.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@tonbridgecommuters.org.uk)*

## Are They Really Listening?

Train passengers in this region are about to see the biggest shake-up for decades in the way their services are delivered. Starting in December 2008, and over the next six years, we have major timetable changes, the introduction of High Speed trains from Ashford and the Kent Coast to St. Pancras, and the huge Thameslink project to deal with. In addition, the ongoing infrastructure improvements for the 2012 Olympics and in the slightly longer term, Crossrail, could also have an impact on our services. More locally, there is the potential redevelopment of Tonbridge Station to think about.

Through all of this, it's obvious that the needs of the travelling public should be paramount, but, we at TLC have seen a worrying trend towards decisions being made without reference to the ordinary passenger's wishes. Two prime examples are the withdrawal of most of the Eurostar services from Ashford, and the culling of the Tonbridge–Gatwick route. These have gone ahead despite strong local opposition, the excuses being given that it's a commercial decision, or that the Department for Transport or the Office of Rail Regulation has set the specification and it can't be changed.

However, when the will exists, things *can* be changed. To their credit, SouthEastern have successfully challenged and modified the original service specifications for the Integrated Kent Franchise timetable, which starts in December 2009.

We believe the threatened serious loss of services on our own line has been largely reversed, and the original and quite frankly unworkable timetable has been turned into something that on the face of it looks largely acceptable, though we have yet to see a detailed draft of the peak-hour service.

Turning to interaction at a local level, we have been asking for minor improvements to be made to our stations for some time now (several years in some cases). These improvements are things like better platform signage, more seats in waiting rooms and better-sited cycle racks. They are not costly or difficult to implement, and each time we raise the issue, someone promises to look into it, but rarely does anything actually get done!

At a regional and national level, there are innumerable focus groups and passenger forums, but based on our experience, they don't make a lot of difference. With £26.7bn of taxpayer's money to be spent on the railways over the next five years, there's a real danger that all the focus will be on big strategic infrastructure projects, and that the little things that could improve life for the travelling public will simply be forgotten about, simply because no one is listening to the people on the ground.

Quite simply, our message to the Department for Transport, Office of Rail Regulation and SouthEastern is: Come and talk to us, we might just be able to help!  
**ST**

# Redhill Line timetable changes

As a consequence of the change of ownership of services between Tonbridge and Redhill, there will be a number of service alterations in the Tonbridge area from 14<sup>th</sup> December 2008. We understand that morning trains will leave Tonbridge for Redhill at 0500, 0520, 0614, 0647, 0725, 0759, 0816 and 0836, the last five of which continue to London Bridge. As we announced in our last issue, the off-peak service will be reduced to hourly from 0919 to 1619, but we have now found that these trains will confusingly be extended to Charing Cross. (We have already expressed concern that if this is shown on departure boards at either Tonbridge or Charing Cross without further explanation, passengers may not realise that the journey will take some 20 minutes longer than the direct route via Sevenoaks.)

Since the through service from the Redhill line to Tunbridge Wells has been withdrawn, SouthEastern has had to replace the section between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells with a shuttle service. Between the hours of 10.00 and 15.00 on Mondays to Fridays, and between 10.00 and 18.00 on Saturdays, trains will leave Tonbridge for High Brooms and Tunbridge Wells at 9 and 38 minutes past each hour, and 24 and 53 minutes past each hour from Tunbridge Wells back to Tonbridge.

The 0839 and 0938 trains from Tonbridge to Tunbridge Wells will be withdrawn, while the 1004 train from Tonbridge to Charing Cross will start from Tunbridge Wells at 0957. The 0456 train from Gillingham to Redhill will no longer run beyond Paddock Wood, where it arrives at 0549.

At the time of writing we did not know the precise times of evening trains from Redhill, but the service is roughly half-hourly until 1900.

We also reported in our last issue that the through trains to Gatwick are to be withdrawn in December 2008. The off-peak service between Tonbridge and Redhill, which represents a reduction from two trains to one per hour, will make the service considerably less attractive, as Gatwick travellers encumbered by heavy luggage will be reluctant to change at Redhill (with the possibility of waiting for up to an hour), while connections at Gatwick for the West Sussex Coast will also be harder. The many school children commuting to and from Tonbridge will also be inconvenienced, and their parents may be tempted to drive them along the tortuous roads thereby causing even more congestion. We now hear the off-peak service is described as being provided for "a trial period". Whatever this means, the expression has a particularly sinister ring about it. The Department for Transport claims that the line is under-utilised, but we believe that this is partly because it has historically been under-publicised. BAA have also complained to the DfT, reminding them that 3,000,000 passengers per year from Kent use Gatwick Airport and that the through Tonbridge link provides a useful connection for stations further east. The line can also be a useful link for travellers to Wales, Midlands and the West Country who wish to avoid London.

We are greatly indebted to **Sir John Stanley** for raising the Southern Franchise issue in a House of Commons Adjournment Debate on 21st October. He made all our points most persuasively, but the Minister's reply seemed less than satisfactory.

We shall continue to press these points at every opportunity. Meanwhile, we urge air passengers to use the line whenever possible, and to vote with their feet for its retention and improvement.

**LS/JR**

---

## Eurostar services from Ashford to Brussels

We welcomed the announcement of the reinstatement of one through train daily between Ashford and Brussels from this December, even though the timings were not very convenient and we felt entitled to even more trains. However, our celebrations were sadly premature as, following the tunnel fire, the overall service has been temporarily reduced, and, guess what, the Ashford

to Brussels train is among those withdrawn. "In addition, the stop at Lille on the evening train from Brussels has been withdrawn". This strikes us as almost vindictive, especially given that 15,000 travellers (including MPs and councillors) signed a petition for restoration. We shall continue the campaign until a satisfactory service is re-introduced for the people of Kent. **JR**

# Report on 2008 AGM

Those members who attended the Association's AGM on 13th May were treated to a most interesting address by **Murray Motley** on the subject of the Thameslink project, which will have a massive impact on local train services in the years beyond 2012, as the tracks into London Bridge station and through to the City are completely redesigned. Work is due to begin on rebuilding Blackfriars Station in the New Year.

Mike Gibson of SouthEastern, and Tunde Olatunje from Passenger Focus, were also present to speak and answer members' questions.

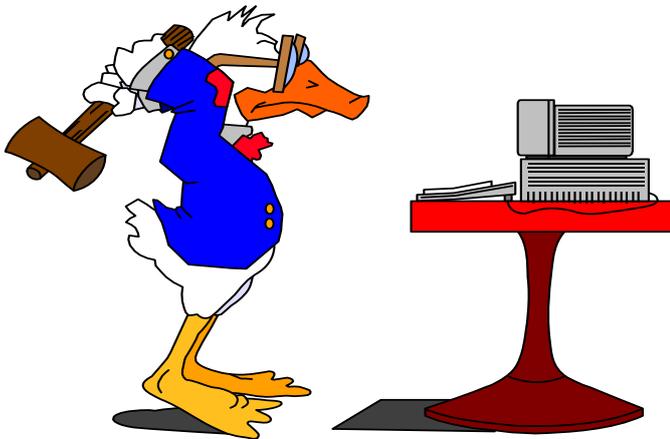
The meeting endorsed the appointment of **Steve Terry** as Chairman, and thanked his predecessor **John Reynolds** for his many years of dedication to the Association. We are pleased that John has agreed to remain on the Committee. **LS**

*Members are asked to note that next year's AGM will be held on Tuesday 19th May 2009.*

## We need more committee members!

As I'm sure you are aware, TLC is run entirely by volunteers, and we are always looking for extra people to join the committee. You don't need to be a commuter, or have any special knowledge of the railway, we're simply looking for ordinary people who use the railways, and who would be willing to help out. We hold about eight committee meetings a year, together with the

AGM (all on weekday evenings), and we fully recognise that pressure of work and other activities means that sometimes it's impossible to come along to each and every one. Nevertheless, you are very welcome to attend a meeting to see if you like the idea of joining. Without new committee members to continue the work, eventually TLC will be forced to wind down our activities, which given we have already survived for 50 years, would be a great shame.



We are particularly interested in hearing from someone who could volunteer to help us build and maintain a simple web-site, so even if you don't want to join the committee but would be willing to help us in this way, please let us know. If you are interested, please send us an email to [chair@tonbridgecommuters.org.uk](mailto:chair@tonbridgecommuters.org.uk), or give Steve Terry, the current chair, a call on 01892 723862.

**ST/HD**

## Tonbridge Line Commuters – Your Committee

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

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

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

**John Reynolds**  
14 Cumberland Court  
Tonbridge Tel. 01732 355871

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

*e-mail:*  
[enquiry@tonbridgecommuters.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@tonbridgecommuters.org.uk)

**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 1NF Tel. 01732 355185

# Clear as mud!

*“The return portion of affected ticket types is restricted if you join a northbound train within area B and travel to area D. Also restricted are journeys from area C with a return ticket valid for a journey from area B to area D as shown on the route map on page 13. Travel is unrestricted if you join a northbound train in area C or D and are not travelling on the return portion of a ticket*

*valid from a station in area B to a station in area D. If your entire journey begins and ends within areas B and C on the map then the restrictions do not apply. Tickets from stations in area A to any destination are not affected by these restrictions.”*

Got that? (excerpt from ‘First Capital Connect: Thameslink Train Times’) **AH**

## 50 years on

The Tonbridge & District Railway Travellers' Association was inaugurated on 26th February 1959 under the chairmanship of the then Councillor Noel Parkin, and the first edition of "Travel Topics" was published in July 1959. Overcrowding was a serious issue then as now. Between 0730 and 0930, only two Tonbridge trains arrived at Charing Cross and two at Cannon Street. Returning from town, there were only two Tonbridge departures from Charing Cross between 1630 and 1830, and six from Cannon Street. Some of these were steam-hauled, the others being the newly introduced "Hastings" diesels. There was continuing speculation about the likely completion of the Kent Coast Phase II Electrification. Eventually, electric trains began to serve Tonbridge in 1961 and the new timetable was introduced in June 1962. Since then all the lines serving Tonbridge have been electrified but overcrowding remains topical. In 1959, fares were also expensive. However, arrivals in London

before 0800 entitled passengers to a discount, the day return fare from Tonbridge being 4/5d!

Since then, the service on the Tonbridge main line has improved out of all proportion, prompted in truth by the phenomenal increase in demand, but pressure continues, and over the next 50 years we (and, hopefully, our successors) will continue to fight for your interests.

**Meanwhile, to celebrate this major milestone we are pleased to announce an offer of an extra year’s membership ENTIRELY FREE.**

**All you need to do to qualify is to be a paid-up member by the end of this year, and if this is the case, the date on your address label already allows for this. However, if the address label shows that you have not yet paid for this year, send us £3 and we will automatically credit you with two years’ membership.** **JR**

## TONBRIDGE LINE COMMUTERS

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

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