



# Travel Topics

Issue 112

Autumn 2010

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

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

## Mixed news for Commuters in Spending Review

Since our last edition, we have of course had a change of government, a subsequent pledge to reduce the deficit over the next 5 years, and a major spending review. In general, transport spending cuts have been concentrated on roads rather than rail, with most of the bigger investment in rail being protected. Not all of the detail is available yet, and we will be working hard to bring you more news as we hear it. However, given the plethora of speculation, announcements and reviews surrounding the future of spending on the railways at the moment, we thought it might be worth summarising what we believe to be along the line in the next few years, along with our opinion.

**Fares:** The current RPI + 3% formula for regulated fares currently “enjoyed” by commuters in the area is to be extended until 2015 and applied across the whole country. This could mean fare rises in excess of 30% over the next 5 years, which needless to say, we are not at all happy about.

**Southeastern Franchise:** It seems likely that the current Southeastern franchise will be extended from 2012 until 2014, with a full tender after then. We do not support this as we believe SouthEastern have given travellers in this area a poor deal, much of their effort having been given to development of the high speed service from Ashford.

**Thameslink and London Bridge:** We don't have the details yet, but it has been reported that the Thameslink programme is to be continued more or less as originally planned. However, we would not be surprised to see the planned redevelopment of London Bridge scaled back or delayed a little. We are disappointed at the likely delay, but as long as there are no major cutbacks, we think people can live with the situation for another year or so longer than the original schedule.

**Crossrail:** The project is to continue, but with longer timescales and a phased introduction of services. We welcome the decision to continue, but the delay in the opening to 2018 and beyond means that improvement to onward connections for West Kent travellers is now rather a long way off.

**Tonbridge Station Redevelopment:** Like most people, we had assumed that this was now firmly off the agenda, but have recently received word that it is due to start “early in the new year”. The redevelopment is actually more of a major refurbishment, but it's long overdue and very welcome nonetheless. It remains to be seen exactly when “early in the new year” is, but we hope that by the next issue of *Travel Topics* we will have visible progress to report!  
ST

---

## ‘Travel Topics’ is going electronic!

From the Spring 2011 edition of *Travel Topics* we intend to give members the option of receiving the newsletter in electronic format, up to two weeks earlier than the paper version. For next time, we will send out an email copy to everyone that we have a valid email address for, but continue to send out the paper edition to everyone in addition to the electronic copy. After that, you will have the option to go paperless by sending us an email. Although this will help us keep down costs, we are certainly not intending to force anyone to go electronic if they don't want to.

If you do want to receive the emailed version, please let us have your current email address by sending an email to [membership@tonbridgecommuters.org.uk](mailto:membership@tonbridgecommuters.org.uk).

Rest assured that we will never sell or rent your email address to anyone outside TLC. If you get mail claiming to be from us trying to sell or promote goods or services, or attempting to get you to sign up to something, then it's not us, and we recommend that you delete the email immediately.

In this issue we also have a questionnaire that we hope you will be able to complete and return.  
ST

# Annual General Meeting 2010

This year's AGM was held on 18<sup>th</sup> May in the Forsyth Hall, Bradford Street, Tonbridge, and we were pleased to receive as our main guest Sir John Stanley, who had just been returned as MP for Tonbridge and Malling at the General Election earlier in the month.

**Mike Gibson** of South Eastern trains said that he hoped the Conservative government would stand by its manifesto which proposed to extend rail franchises, make Network Rail more accountable, and deter DfT from micro-managing the timetable. He acknowledged that the major issue locally following the December 2009 timetable revisions was the withdrawal of City trains from the Maidstone East line. He pointed out that there was no requirement for such trains in the agreed Service Specification, and if introduced they would displace services from other sources. He said that performance, while excellent between May and December 2009, in January and February 2010 it had been dire. The key problems were the 3<sup>rd</sup> rail system, particularly on the Hastings line, and the actions taken by Network Rail in foisting an emergency timetable on them. NR had proposed an infrastructure upgrade for next winter. Nearer home, work on the Tonbridge station upgrade was due to start next year. He concluded by reporting on some of the issues raised by TLC in recent discussions with local officials.

**Mike McCulloch** of TMBC said the Council had been instrumental in lobbying the Government on behalf of city workers from West Malling who had lost their trains in December, but so far the DfT response had been unsatisfactory. The consequent drift of rail-users towards the Tonbridge line had been emphasised in the

Council's comments on the Kent RUS, and many such commuters were rail-heading to Hildenborough, thereby exacerbating the parking problems already inherent at the station. As to the future, the Tonbridge Station Improvement Programme appeared to be going ahead, while information was awaited regarding management of the Thameslink works.

**Sir John Stanley** stressed his reliance on local rail travellers' organisations in enabling him to assist constituents, and suggested that if the Maidstone East line had had such a group earlier they may not have faced the recent withdrawal of key trains; he was pleased that a Users Association for the line had now been formed. He went on to announce that he would oppose the extension of SET's franchise without a better service on the Maidstone East line, and deplored the company's failure to disclose the basis of the quoted cost of £637,000 on the grounds of commercial confidentiality.

Among the issues raised in questions were the poor location of the automatic ticket machine at Hildenborough, the increase in price of the Network Card, bus stopping arrangements, incorrect indicators on platform 1 and staffing at Tonbridge station, 3/2 seating and quiet coaches on trains. Mike Gibson also confirmed that he would be able to authorise decisions made as a consequence of meetings to discuss our Issues Log. Earlier, the meeting approved the Association's accounts and re-elected the officers and members of the Committee. We are most grateful for your continuing support.

LS

---

## Eurostar

Although the new timetable from December shows reductions in services to and from Ebbsfleet and Calais, there are some generally positive changes to services calling at Ashford. A new 0653 departure (Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays only) will run non-stop to Paris, arriving there at 0954. The 1055 to Paris will run an hour earlier. Although the midday gap will therefore be longer, the 1727 (weekdays only) to Paris will run at 1655 with the same timings as its weekend counterpart. While these re-timings may inconvenience some, they will allow a little longer in Paris. In the return direction the 1507 (weekends) and 1513 (weekdays) from Paris will run daily as the 1513.

The 1659 (not Saturdays) from Brussels will leave at 1649 on Sundays but will be completely replaced during the week by a new 1759 (including Saturdays). It will therefore be possible to return from Brussels and Lille on a Saturday.

However, we remain convinced that Eurostar are underestimating demand for Ashford with its large potential for rail connections to and from Kent and Sussex. We are currently trying to ascertain comprehensive figures for passengers using both Ashford and Ebbsfleet and will continue pressing for at least four daily evenly spaced services between Ashford, Lille, Paris and Brussels.

JR

---

## Buses only - Why?

On Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September, owing to engineering works, there were no trains from Paddock Wood and Tunbridge Wells to Sevenoaks and Redhill, in fact no trains in Tonbridge at all. This is not the first time this has occurred. Bus replacement services are always much slower than the rail services they replaced; Tonbridge to London took 50 minutes longer than the

direct rail service. Usually when the direct line from Tonbridge is closed, trains run fast to London using the alternative route via Redhill, taking only ten minutes or so extra, as had been the arrangement on the previous day. When SouthEastern staff were asked why both rail routes to London were blocked on the Sunday, we were told "nothing to do with us, or Southern Railway:

it was down to Network Rail who booked closures a long way in advance". On the other hand, the following weekend, 2/3<sup>rd</sup> October, both routes to London were open. We have asked SouthEastern, Southern and Network Rail why there is no coordination or consideration for rail passengers when planning engineering works such as those which applied on 26<sup>th</sup> September. If we do not get satisfactory answers we

will ask the Rail Regulator and the local MPs to become involved.

We are reminded that there is an intention to return to a 24/7 railway on main lines (which includes London via Sevenoaks). There is a long way to go if the appalling Sunday Tonbridge service outlined in this report occurs again.

**TH**

---

## **You cannot be serious!** *A report by Kathy Pratt*

I travel quite a bit for work and my plans can be fluid so I sometimes need to buy a ticket when the Ticket Office at Hildenborough is closed. As there is no permit to travel option, I have to buy a ticket from the ticket machine, because I could be liable to a penalty fare if I board the train without a valid ticket, and I can not be sure I will be able to walk through the train to find the guard. My normal peak return from Hildenborough to London is £21.10 so you can imagine my surprise when the Ticket machine tried to charge me £51.50 for a standard anytime day return to Putney. It got even more unbelievable when I asked it the price of an unrestricted Standard Return to Manchester Airport: £298! I know rail travel in Britain is expensive, but you can fly to the States and back for less than that.

The explanation for the first anomaly is that to avoid paying these fares you would have to elect to purchase not the ANY PERMITTED ticket (over all permitted routes), but the NOT VIA HS1 ticket. This will give you a price of £24.70 i.e. less than half the original price. Do you know what 'HS1' is? I doubt it. The answer is that unless you choose otherwise the ticket machine is programmed to route you via the High Speed Rail link which operates in North Kent on the infrastructure owned by HS1 Ltd. It is currently under-utilised and said to be making a significant loss. The fact that from this part of Kent you would never elect to travel via this route because it involves many more changes, goes a roundabout way, takes a lot longer and costs twice as much seems to have escaped the programmers.

Now for the logic they have used to charge £298 for a Standard return ticket to Manchester Airport. Provided you plan to leave Euston Northbound on or after the 8.40am departure (6.55am from Hildenborough) and plan to arrive back in Euston after 9.30am, a ticket office will be able to sell you a time-restricted ticket at a cost of a mere £73.10, i.e. 25% of the price. The problem is that an automatic ticket machine only tells you that some tickets are 'subject to time restrictions', while others are not. It does not tell you **what** the time restrictions are, so you have no way of knowing which ticket you actually need. But you are required to have a valid ticket when you board the train! Motto. Do not trust the ticket machines. If in any doubt, buy your ticket from a Ticket Office.

It has been evident for a long time that even smaller station offices have a wider range of tickets available than the ticket machines (e.g. special offers) and they don't try to route you via HS1! However, they are not always open! Ticket machines provide only some of the tickets that are available from a Ticket Office and provide no information on the time restrictions applicable to these tickets. The final straw is that you have no option of buying a permit to travel from a ticket machine if it doesn't sell the ticket you need. We believe a rail company should not be allowed to operate a penalty fare scheme in such circumstances; as we go to press we are raising the gross overcharging and lack of suitable ticket facilities (which are not peculiar to Hildenborough), directly with SET and Sir John Stanley.

**KP**

---

## **Tonbridge Line Commuters – Your Committee**

The following were re-elected at this year's AGM:

**Chairman and Membership Sec:**  
Steve Terry  
5 The Manwarings, Horsmonden  
TN12 8NQ Tel. 01892 723562

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

Steve Robinson

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

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

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

**Arlene Hansell**  
16 Allington Road, Paddock Wood  
TN12 6AN

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

# Kent Local Transport Plan: 2011 to 2016

Kent County Council (KCC) has released a draft copy of the new Local Transport Plan for Kent (LTP). This document sets out the major transport policies and objectives that KCC will follow from 2011 to 2016. The policies are categorised under 5 general themes – the primary one being “Growth Without Gridlock”. KCC’s growth areas are Ashford and the Thames Gateway, and these are the areas where KCC intend to focus their spending and projects. However new houses are planned throughout Kent up until 2026 as follows: Ashford - 16,700, Canterbury - 10,000, Maidstone - 10,000, Tunbridge Wells - 6,000, Tonbridge & Malling – 6,300 (many of these are at Kings Hill). These houses will increase and alter travel demand significantly in all these areas.

The LTP is generally disappointing for residents of West Kent. No mention is made of schemes to improve local congestion hot spots - such as at North Farm’s shopping estate where better roads, public transport, and cycle routes are desperately needed. However

KCC are actively lobbying the rail industry for a new direct service from Gatwick Airport to Ashford via Tonbridge, as well as a return of the Maidstone to Cannon Street trains. KCC should also be commended for setting up a bi-annual Kent Rail Users Forum which brings together KCC, South Eastern, Network Rail and DfT. The LTP does highlight the fact that KCC have limited power in effecting transport changes in Kent, the major decisions on whether and when the A21 bypass is built, and how the railways are run in the county falling to the Highways Agency and DfT. This is a pity since KCC appear far better placed and far more in touch with the local populace to make strategic decisions about transport in Kent than civil servants based in London ever will be.

The LTP is open for consultation until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010 and can be found on the KCC website or by following a link on the TLC website at [www.tonbridgecommuters.org.uk](http://www.tonbridgecommuters.org.uk). **SR**

---

## Skip-Stops

On a number of occasions Committee members have arrived at Paddock Wood station to find that the train they have planned to catch has been announced as cancelled, only to see it later hurtle through without stopping. This we understand is a normal occurrence when a train is late: omit stops at smaller stations to allow the train to recover its scheduled time. However, we felt that passengers were being unduly inconvenienced, and wrote to the Consumer watchdog Passenger Focus to question the practice. Passenger Focus admitted this was a vexed question, and argued that the operator had to balance the inconvenience of

perhaps a few who were forced to wait longer with that of possibly many who might be delayed on the subsequent departure of the delayed train. We were assured that a train that skip-stopped counted as a part-cancellation in the monthly statistics, and that operators were required to ensure reasonable alternative arrangements were in place to cater for any passenger grossly inconvenienced. Also, it should not be allowed to become in any way a regular occurrence. We would ask members to report any such instances so that we can ensure this does not happen. **LS**

---

# TONBRIDGE LINE COMMUTERS

The subscription for the year ending March 31<sup>st</sup> 2011 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. The date shown is the expiry date of your subscription. 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.