



# Travel Topics

Issue 113

Spring 2011

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

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## Southeastern must now make real improvements

Although it was expected, the announcement on March 18<sup>th</sup> that Southeastern were to have their franchise extended until March 2014 did come as somewhat of a disappointment. While the firm has certainly made improvements to the train service since the dire days of Connex, there are still aspects that leave much to be desired, particularly during bad weather. In addition, the improvements that have been made should be measured against the background of huge fare increases, which will continue until at least 2015. We are not convinced that the improvements to date represent value for money for rail passengers.

So, as we are stuck with the incumbent operator for at least another three years, what will TLC be putting pressure on Southeastern (and others) to accomplish? The two most important issues are reliability and fares.

First, we need to see a massive improvement in the reliability of services when there's ice and snow. This must be accompanied by accurate and timely information as to what the *real* situation is, not just a hypothetical "emergency" timetable that bears no relationship to what's actually happening. Words are not good enough. At the end of last November some of the committee attended a stakeholder meeting with Southeastern and Network Rail at which they

were proclaiming that "this winter will be different". Well, that promise lasted almost 24 hours before winter arrived and things were just as bad as in the winter of 2009-10!

We also want an end to the practice of differential fare rises. In January 2011 the average fare rise was supposed to be in the order of 7.6%. However most of the fares in our area increased by 11-13%, and we have struggled to find anywhere outside Greater London where fares rose less than the average. We believe that a formula of RPI+3% should mean just that – if inflation is 4% then the fare rise will be 7% *on every regulated fare from every station*. Southeastern are very quick to blame the government when explaining fare rises, but under the current rules they are the ones who decide how the fare rises are spread out across the network, and we just don't believe that they are treating us fairly.

There are many more issues that on behalf of our membership we would like Southeastern to address, and needless to say we will be attempting to tackle them over the coming months. When the time comes, we'll also be putting our views forward as to what we'd like to see from 2014, when Southeastern's extended franchise ends and a new round of bidding starts. ST

## Annual General Meeting – Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> May at 19.30

will be held at the Forsyth Hall, Bradford Street, Tonbridge

This is your opportunity to quiz the railway bosses as to your own particular concerns; come and hear what SET have to say about how they are coping and planning for the future. Tonbridge station is being redeveloped, a new franchise is due to start in 2014, and over the next few years the Thameslink project is likely to have a significant disruptive effect on daily travel. While the present

Committee are willing to carry on the mission into next year, we are all 'getting long in the tooth', and are earnestly searching for younger others to carry the torch forward. Are you willing to assist? Come along and help us to look after your interests in this increasingly complex environment. Sir John Stanley, our MP, is hoping to be present, and light refreshments will be available. LS

## TLC Survey 2010: Results Summary

In our last 'Travel Topics' we included a survey form asking you to identify those parts of the train services from the Tonbridge Area that you would most like to see improved (total 100 points).

We had a very good return to this survey – a big thank you to all the 67 who responded. The table below shows how many “need to improve points” each category received in order of importance.

Rank	Question no	Type	Factor	Total Score
1	14	disruptions	Better management of services following severe service disruption (e.g. fire on line, snow, etc)	1065
2	1	service	Cheaper fares	1060
3	6	service	Improved services to... < add town (e.g. Maidstone, London Victoria, Reading, Eurostar services at Ashford, etc)	775
4	7	disruptions	Train information provision (real time and printed)	610
5	2	service	Reduce likelihood of having to stand for parts of the journey (i.e. providing more capacity)	535
6	12	carriage	Replace carriages which have 5 seats per row to carriages with 4 seats per row	430
7	22	Other	Other *** please enter station name in comments ***	395
8	16	station	Cheaper car parks	385
9	9	carriage	Cleaner carriages and toilets	255
10	3	service	Shorter journey times	235
11	11	carriage	Quiet carriages	180
12	4	service	24 hour services	155
13	13	disruptions	Better management of Engineering works	115
14	17	station	Increased provision of sheltered and heated waiting area at station	110
15	21	station	Better bus / train interchange at station	105
16	19	station	More car parking facilities	80
17	20	station	Longer ticket office opening hours	60
18	15	station	Better station facilities. *** please enter station name in comments ***	50
19	5	service	Improved Christmas Period services	40
19	10	carriage	Internet and Electricity Point provision in carriages	40
21	18	station	More bicycle facilities at station	20
22	8	carriage	Carriage with Buffet car	0
			<b>Total</b>	<b>6700</b>

Since the survey took place in the first weeks of December 2010, when snow brought the train network to a standstill, it is not surprising that the management of service and poor information provision during disruptions scored highest.

The other main issue of concern was of course ticket and car park costs. This issue is compounded by the 12% season ticket prices announced for 2011.

There was also strong demand for an improved route network and schedule, with 10 respondents

strongly wanting a service to Gatwick. It is possible this could be re-introduced in the next franchise round as there is strong support from KCC for this. However, better services to a total of 14 other towns were requested. There was also strong support for later running trains – particularly on a Friday and Saturday night.

Perhaps the biggest surprise was how unpopular 3x2 carriages are (those with 3 seats on one side and 2 on the other), with 21 people scoring points for this. At first sight this appears to contradict

people's desire not to have to stand on trains, (although 8 people voted for both categories!). However, with better carriage design and longer trains, more capacity could be provided without the need for 3x2 seating.

There also appears to be increasing demand for quiet carriages, although people were concerned that quiet carriages might encourage people to be noisier in other carriages. Perhaps a "noisy carriage" could be the solution to this!

A 25-page report has been written with the complete results and list of all comments. This is available to members by following the links on the website (password 'Survey2010'). We will also be pushing for the future franchisee to address all concerns raised by you. To further this aim TLC have drawn up a document entitled "Tonbridge Line Commuters' requirements for the new Integrated Kent Franchise" which has also been sent to key stakeholders. **SR**

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## Eurostar

We remain convinced that Eurostar are underestimating the potential usage of Ashford International station. For example, some passengers might wish to leave London after work, spend a weekend on the Continent, and get off at Ashford on the way back.

Since July, we have been trying to ascertain the numbers of Eurostar passengers at respectively Ashford and Ebbsfleet (including a question in the House of Commons from our MP, Sir John Stanley) but are continually told by the Home Office that these figures are "commercially confidential". Given that immigration is a controversial political issue, we find this response extraordinary, and have now written to the

Information Commissioner in the hope that he will support us. The fight goes on. **JR**

Members may also wish to know that Eurostar tickets to Brussels are no longer available (as they are at present) to other Belgian stations. This means that those travelling on to, for example, Cologne, will have to pay considerably more. The cheapest fare is for Deutsche Bahn's ICE service and costs £36 return, but tickets are limited and may be sold out within a few minutes of becoming available. The next cheapest, at just over £50 is again limited, but may still be cheaper than travelling by standard Belgian trains to Aachen and thence to Cologne. **AH**

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## Gatwick

Despite representations from ourselves, KCC and even the BAA, Southern Railway are still reluctant to reinstate through services to and from Gatwick. Kent therefore remains the only county in South-East England to be denied this facility. Our counterparts in Edenbridge Travellers Association agree with us that a through service is needed at least as far as Tonbridge and Ashford with possible extensions to Dover and/or Canterbury. This would relieve congestion on Kent motorways and also provide us with a reinstated fast link to

East Kent which was withdrawn in 2009.

Additional peak hour services between Edenbridge and Tonbridge are also needed to reduce traffic on the tortuous roads between the two towns. In the longer term, we believe that the Redhill line should be given back to the South-Eastern franchisees who are usually more keen to run the through services. We would also push for much better publicity than in the past, rather than the traditional reliance on word of mouth. **JR**

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# Tonbridge Line Commuters – Your Committee

The following are standing for election at this year's AGM and look forward to your support:

**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**  
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## Rail Action Plan for Kent

From being a relatively passive observer on the rail policy front, Kent County Council have recently assumed a more active role in the face of mounting concerns about future travel patterns in the county, and have held a couple of summits to enable stakeholders to have their say. A third forum in April will be presented with a final plan called *Rail Action Plan for Kent* flowing from the results of a public consultation, in which the central focus is the next Kent Franchise due to start in April 2014. In this regard KCC have listened to their critics and have set out a list of requirements which they say are an essential basis of the new franchise.

We have responded to the proposals by supporting the main principles enthusiastically, but have also put forward a number of other suggestions for inclusion, based on the responses to our survey questionnaire referred to elsewhere in this bulletin.

The main points of interest for local travellers are:

- Each principal route into London should have a regular peak service to both a designated West End and a City station, and a regular off-peak service to a West End station. In particular, peak services from Cannon Street to both the Tunbridge Wells and Ashford lines should be retained, and not replaced by a Thameslink service.
- The Maidstone East line should be provided with a regular all-day service to Blackfriars. This should encourage West Malling residents to use this line rather than travel to Tonbridge or Hildenborough stations.
- There should be a through hourly Ashford-Tonbridge-Gatwick service, to be operated in partnership with Gatwick Airport Limited and the operator of the new Southern franchise which is due to commence in 2015. LS

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## ‘Delay pays’ Compensation scheme

Along with the announcement from Southeastern about their franchise extension came the news that they are moving in line with the majority of the rest of the rail industry to a “delay pays” compensation scheme, over the summer of 2011. We have yet to see the full details but assuming that it is similar to the one recently put in place by Southern, then this pays out 50% of the fare for a delayed (one way) journey of 30 minutes, and 100% for a delay of over an hour.

Refunds for season ticket holders are based on a proportion of the number of days the ticket covers. Whilst this appears to be a much fairer system in that there’s no threshold (and interpretations thereof!) to fall below, it does mean that potentially larger numbers of trains can be late without triggering any compensation at all. Once we have the details we will be reporting on our analysis on our website, and in a future edition of ‘Travel Topics’. ST

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