



Travel Topics

Issue 114

Autumn 2011

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

E-mail: enquiry@tonbridgecommuters.org.uk

Fair fares

Back in 2010 you told us in the survey we carried out that your top two issues were (a) better management of services following severe service disruption, and (b) cheaper fares.

Since then we have seen fares increase by an eye-watering 11.8%, so when I was contacted in June by the 'Campaign for Better Transport' to see whether TLC would support their National 'Fair Fares Now' campaign I was keen to learn more. The campaign was calling for:

- Affordable prices, including peak times and turn-up-and-go tickets
- Reliable services that aren't overcrowded
- Straightforward tickets that make train travel simple

To ensure the Government understood the strength of feelings on the issue of train fares a petition was being organised with the key messages:

- Don't price people off the train and out of work
- Listen to the voices of passengers – not just train companies – when you review your policy on fares
- Reconsider your decision to raise fares 3% above inflation now that inflation is far higher than expected
- Keep your promise to make fares fair

Having experienced excessive fare increases, 34.6% for Tonbridge over the last 4 years, I felt strongly that 'this must stop!' Also we urgently need simpler, cheaper, transparent ticketing which

aligned with the other objectives of their 'Fair Fares Now' campaign, so TLC agreed to support them.

Many of you will have seen us gathering signatures for the petition outside Hildenborough Station on 4th August or outside Tonbridge Station on 10th August. Thanks to the efforts of the whole Committee we gathered 147 signatures from Hildenborough Station and 272 from Tonbridge, which was a very pleasing result, and the third highest number of signatures out of the over 40 groups participating in the national campaign.

Our local 'Fair Fares Now' campaign led to interest from BBC Southeast, the 'Courier' and many other media groups. The 'Courier' in particular was keen to run a campaign on the particular fares issue faced by commuters from Tonbridge, Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells who have had to suffer higher fare increases than many other routes on the SouthEastern Franchise.

We have long suspected that we have been cross-subsidising stations in East Kent and nearer London that are covered by Transport for London, but have been unable to prove it. The 'Courier' campaign has shed light on what is driving this, and gathered the support of local MPs and councillors to get a better deal for local commuters. Steve Robinson of our Committee has written a more detailed article overleaf. **KP**

Annual General Meeting

We are pleased to announce that Kathy Pratt was elected Chairman of the Association at this year's AGM held at the Forsyth Hall in Bradford Street on 26th May, following Steve Terry's decision to step down from the position. We are indebted to Steve for his seven years' hard work as Chairman,

and Kathy says it will be a hard act to follow. Members who attended the meeting were able to hear addresses from and ask questions of, Sir John Stanley MP, Mike Gibson of SE Trains, Mike McCulloch of TMBC, and Daniel Washington of KCC. **LS**

Why have fares increased so much?

There has been much confusion over the rules applying to fares increases, and to explain why our ticket price increases always seem to be above the average, and with the help of our colleagues at Sevenoaks RTA, we prepared a guide to the maths, which we submitted to a recent Tonbridge and Malling Council Rail Forum. A summary is given below. Most people believe that season tickets and other “protected fares” are limited to increases of “RPI+3%”. However, this is NOT the case. Firstly, the operator is allowed 5% leeway for individual fares, provided the average is RPI+3%. Secondly, this figure corresponds to the allowable increase in overall ticket revenue from a “basket of

fares”. Therefore if fewer people travel by train, the Department for Transport allows the train operator to increase fares by more than “RPI + 3%” to make up for this revenue shortfall, and to reduce the subsidy it pays. The increase of an individual ticket is actually limited to “RPI+3%+ 5%” – i.e. “RPI+8%”. Up to 2008 passenger traffic was buoyant, but the recent recession has dampened demand. This explains why fares have increased so much above inflation in recent years, and if RPI is assumed to continue to increase at the present rate of 5% p.a., then by 2014 an annual season ticket from Tonbridge to London could cost £4,788!

SR

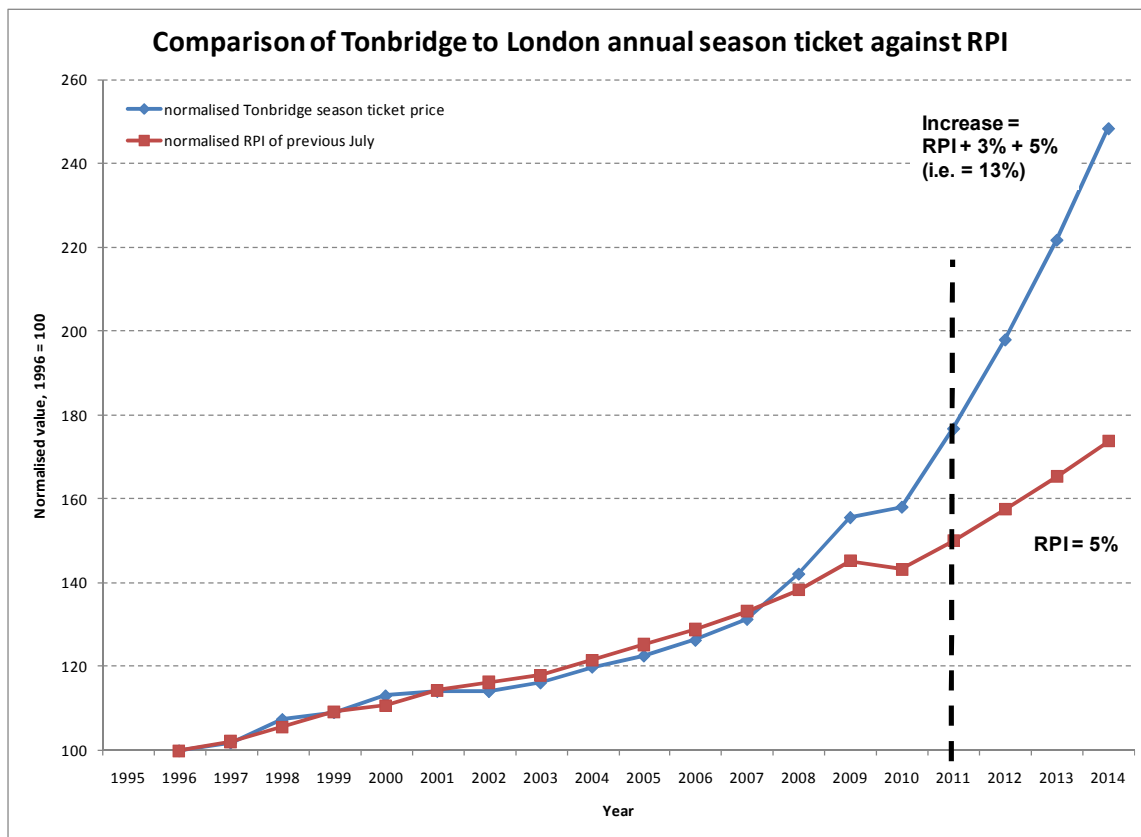


Figure 1 – Graph showing how season ticket prices have risen far higher than RPI since 2007

How much is that fare?

Passengers using the machines at Tonbridge Station to buy tickets may have noticed that for some South-East London stations two types of ticket are available. The example below is for Bromley South:

The first option is "Any Permitted Route" costing £57.40 for an Anytime Return and £30.70 for an Offpeak Day Return. This would allow you, if you wished, to travel down to Ashford, take the High Speed train (HS1) to St. Pancras and then by Thameslink and SouthEastern to Bromley, the journey taking some 2½ hours.

The second option is "Not via HS1" costing £16.20 Anytime Return and £9.20 Off-peak Day Return. This would involve your resisting the temptation to travel via Ashford and St. Pancras, but instead using the more traditional route changing just once at Sevenoaks or Orpington, taking about 45 minutes. True, you would miss the joy of seeing the Medway Bridge at Rochester and the delights of travelling underneath London, but the journey would save you nearly two hours and up to £40, an economy worth bearing in mind during these difficult times!

JR

Prospects for Winter

As those who travel regularly will remember, services last December were badly disrupted as a result of snow and ice and both SET and Network Rail came under a great deal of justified criticism over the level of service provided and, in particular, the failure to keep passengers informed.

To keep the tracks clear of snow and ice Network Rail have invested in additional multi purpose trains and conductor rail heating. SET have purchased snow clearing equipment for use on station platforms and forecourts, and are working closely with Kent County Council to ensure that station approach roads are gritted.

In the event of severe weather this winter, SET claim they will be much more realistic as to the level of service they can actually operate. They say they intend to give an honest assessment of the service they can run and let passengers take a decision to travel or not, before they leave home.

On communications, a great deal of work and investment has gone in to try to get accurate train running information to passengers including:-

PA at stations linked to the main railway control room; Blackberry mobiles issued to front line employees, more robust systems to feed platform information screens; improved access for staff to service change information; and a new Twitter feed and e-mail alerts.

However, should we get a repeat of the severe weather, SET say they cannot guarantee a normal service.

There are a couple of important timetable changes taking place from 11th December. Please note that the 1759 and 1803 departures from Charing Cross have been swapped. This means that if you want to travel to Sevenoaks, Tonbridge or Paddock Wood you will need to catch the 1803, which is being extended from Ashford to Folkestone, since the 1759 will run fast to High Brooms. For night-owls the last train to Tonbridge on Monday to Saturday nights will depart 5 minutes later at 0015 and run fast from London Bridge to Orpington, (but via New Beckenham!) and then call additionally at Dunton Green. **LS**

Tonbridge Station Redevelopment

As we went to press Network Rail had just begun a six-month project to improve facilities at Tonbridge station at a projected cost of £1.4m. We are told this work is to include the following:

- Extension of booking hall together with another door at the front of the station
- A new waiting room on platforms 1/2
- Replacement of the metal staircase from the road down to the car park
- Improvements to the Barden Road entrance

- Installation of flat screens for train information, including provision for real time bus information
- Refurbishment of toilets
- Installation of more cycle parking

The entire front of the station will be re-clad to give a modern and attractive appearance.

We have been assured that our main complaints viz. lack of waiting room seating, poor information screens etc. have been addressed, but will keep a wary eye. **LS**

Tonbridge Line Commuters – Your Committee

The following were elected at this year's AGM:

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

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

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

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

Membership Secretary: Steve Terry:
6 Poppy Meadow, Paddock Wood
TN12 6BN Tel: 01892 833880
e-mail:
enquiry@tonbridgecommuters.org.uk

Steve Robinson

John Morton
39 Rose Street, Tonbridge
TN9 2BN Tel: 01732 359308

Arlene Hansell
16 Allington Road, Paddock Wood
TN12 6AN

Gatwick

KCC's Rail Action Plan for Kent is demanding reinstatement of the hourly through Tonbridge - Gatwick link, with trains extended to and from Ashford.

We fully support this, will work closely with other local authorities and the local MPs to bring this about and will demand that any reinstated link should this time be properly publicised. **JR**

Eurostar

As members may know, we have been trying to get Eurostar to stop more trains at Ashford. So far, our attempts to find out under the Freedom of Information Act the relative numbers of passengers using Ashford and Ebbsfleet have been unsuccessful, though our MP, Sir John Stanley has taken up the challenge with the UK Border Agency, who we believe should have the relevant figures. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, despite having fewer trains, Ashford is the more popular of the two stations, partly because it can easily be reached by rail from many parts of Kent and Sussex. We will keep on pressing for official data. Meanwhile, Kent County Council's *Rail Action Plan for Kent* calls for the number of daily Ashford - Brussels trains to be increased from one

to three in each direction. We fully support this initiative.

According to the Thomas Cook European Rail Timetable, there will some changes to train times in December but the number of trains will remain the same: three daily Ashford to Paris and back (only two to Paris on Sundays), one daily to Brussels and back, and one most days to and from EuroDisney.

Elsewhere we understand the Anglo-French Safety Commission is considering Deutsche Bahn's application to use Electro-multiple units through the tunnel, and the German initiative may offer the best long-term prospect of restoring international Ashford calls. **JR**

Paddock Wood

For some time we have been trying to arrange a meeting with local managers to correct some small but irritating problems at the station. We now understand that the station is to be given its own

improvement project in the near future, so we shall keep up the pressure to ensure that these problems are resolved. **LS**

TONBRIDGE LINE COMMUTERS

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TN10 3PU.