



# Travel Topics

Issue 115

Spring 2012

The watchdog for  
all Rail Travellers from Tonbridge,  
Paddock Wood and Hildenborough

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## Travel during the Olympics

Hopefully by now you'll be well aware that travel into and around London during the Olympic Games will be much busier, slower and much more difficult than usual. For a good overview see: [www.getaheadofthegames.com](http://www.getaheadofthegames.com) and for details of expected delays hour by hour, at key stations: <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/gettingaround/london2012/21787.aspx>.

However, it's worth summarising the main points of the message, particularly as they apply to rail travellers from the Tonbridge area.

- It's not just the main games that are likely to cause disruption. Travel is expected to be busier than usual from mid- July to mid-September with the biggest disruption from the **end of July to mid-August**.
- **Allow much more time** for travel into and around London. On peak days the number of journeys being taken will be double the usual number, so it's going to be very crowded and slow so expect some delays.
- **Rush hour conditions will last all day**, and long into the evening. The morning peak is expected to be particularly bad because commuters will be competing with spectators for the morning events for public transport.
- **Buses and taxis** will be badly affected as well, because many of the roads will be closed or restricted for non-Olympic traffic.
- **Rail station** and Tube specific hotspots / coldspots are expected to be as follows:
  - **London Bridge** is going to be a major transport hotspot both morning and

evening, as is **Bank**. Avoid these stations if at all possible.

- **Charing Cross** and **Embankment** are going to be much less busy than London Bridge in the morning but will be hotspots at lunchtime, evening and very late at night.
- **Canary Wharf** already very busy at peak times will be a lot busier in the evening, so if you can avoid it do!
- **Waterloo / Waterloo East** will only be a little busier than normal and **Cannon Street** is expected to be the same as normal, so consider using these stations as alternatives.
- Avoid using the **Jubilee line** if you possibly can, particularly the stretch from Green Park to Canary Wharf, this rules out all our natural interchanges onto the Jubilee line.
- The **DLR** will be much busier than normal because it serves four Olympic venues and Canary Wharf.

If you can take holiday, or work from home for at least some of the time, it would be wise to do so!

Finally, if you haven't started thinking and planning what you are going to do then you need to start **now**. You will probably need to think through several alternatives as the situation will change day by day and hour by hour, so you need to be flexible, and keep an eye on the travel news before you set out on any journeys. Let's just hope that the web sites can cope! **ST / KP**

## Annual General Meeting – Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> May at 19.30

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

All members are welcome to come and hear representatives from the railway and local authorities speak and answer questions on current issues.

Refreshments will be available for those wishing to follow up their pet concerns, or who are willing to help us fight for them. **LS**

## The Boys and the White Stuff

Southeastern and Network Rail were spared a real test last winter since the weather was exceptionally mild, and when snow did arrive it obligingly came on a Saturday night. However, two TLC committee members were brave (or foolhardy) enough to attempt to travel on the weekend of 4/5 February when the bad weather hit, and so we can report from on the front line on how well prepared the railway actually was.

On Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> (writes John Morton) I travelled from Tonbridge to London for a concert. There were no problems on the journey going up, and at first all seemed well, and when I arrived at Waterloo the 21:28 duly arrived and I boarded. Alas, it didn't move. I was in the front carriage and so could clearly hear the driver talking on the phone/intercom. Clearly speaking to the guard he said, "well, you'd better tell the general public then". The guard then announced that there would be a short delay because of "a broken-down train between St Johns and Lewisham" but that it was nothing to do with the snow! This was puzzling because a broken-down train in that location would at least mean that the other running line was open, so it shouldn't have brought everything to a halt. The train proceeded (perhaps the wrong word!) to sit in the platform for the next hour, with very intermittent holding announcements by the guard. Meanwhile the driver (as I could hear) spent a lot of time on the phone, apparently with friends and family, updating them (but not the passengers) on how dire the situation was and how we weren't likely to be going anywhere.

At long last a platform announcement (barely audible at our end of the train) was made saying that all services had been suspended at Waterloo East and that our train tickets would be accepted on the Underground to transfer to Victoria. Along with most (but not all) other passengers I got off the train got a tube to Victoria. Predictably, all was not well at Victoria, with major delays and disruption. Abandoning any attempt to get back to Tonbridge, I eventually managed to get a train to Otford, where my parents live. In contrast to the previous train, the driver was a friendly sort and very helpful at keeping the passengers informed as we encountered various delays. I finally arrived at Otford at about half past midnight, over two hours late and at the wrong station!

Fellow committee member Arlene Hansell had no such luck when she attempted to travel from Paddock Wood to Woking on Sunday the 5<sup>th</sup>. Sensibly, she listened to Radio Kent and called

National Rail Enquiries before setting out, and both told her that Southeastern was running normally. However, on arriving at Paddock Wood at 09:15 the indicator boards showed that the 08:01 was still awaited! At 09:30, with no train having yet appeared, she pressed the assistance button at the station Help Point. Alas, the assistance button takes you through not to SET, but to National Rail Enquiries, and therefore an overseas call centre. In Arlene's case the woman who answered couldn't really help with her enquiry about trains from Paddock Wood, and promptly hung up when Arlene asked about trains on from Waterloo to Woking! Meanwhile, the station indicator boards were showing that the 09:01 was expected to arrive at 09:48, which soon changed to "Delayed" (never a helpful indication). At 09:46, however, there was announcement that the 09:01 would "arrive in 4 minutes". Sadly, it never did. Arlene went home at 10:15, a full hour after she arrived and without ever having started her journey. During that hour she received an array of contradictory and unhelpful information, an experience shared by fellow passengers at the station who tried to get real time information on their smart phones. When Arlene queried the position with Radio Kent, they replied that they relied on the information from the train operating companies. (Their next travel bulletin (at 10:45) stated that 'trains to Charing Cross were running but with delays of 40 minutes...' - if only that had been true.)

What lessons can we learn from these two stories? First, that Southeastern and Network Rail have not really sorted out their problems with snow and ice. The 'third rail' system will always be vulnerable to winter weather, but Network Rail had assured us that there had been substantial investment to keep services running. The past winter did not provide a definitive test, but the evidence we saw suggested that major infrastructure issues remain.

Second, and less forgivably, there is still a major problem with communication. Both Arlene and I experienced contradictory and fragmentary information when we tried to travel, making it hard to know what services, if any, were running. Southeastern have told us that this time round there was no failure of the industry systems they rely on to keep staff and passengers up to date. The company must therefore shoulder responsibility for failing to get the right information to passengers. We will be keeping a watchful eye on this aspect of its performance. **JM**

## How we helped you save £72!

For the past few years Southeastern have been allowed to apply an extra 2% fare increase not permitted across the rest of the UK. In addition our local fares were loaded to keep fares down elsewhere in Kent, and in January 2011 Tonbridge suffered an 11.8% increase. As of July 2011 the basket of 2012 regulated peak fares was capped at RPI + 3%, which with RPI at 5% meant 8%. On top of this individual fares within the 'basket' could vary from this by up to 5%, i.e. up to 13%. No Way! We decided to take part in the National Fair Fares Now Campaign, gathering signatures in Tonbridge and Hildenborough during August. Media coverage of the issue, the Courier petition launched in August, and their campaign running over several months put fares for Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells in the spotlight. We engaged support from local councillors and

had the full backing of our local MPs, one of whom raised the matter in the House of Commons. On 29<sup>th</sup> Nov 2011 the Chancellor used his Autumn statement to limit the 2012 fare increase to RPI + 1%. Consequently when the 2012 fares were finally announced just a few weeks before Christmas, Kent increases were limited to 6% rather than 2011's punitive increases of 11%, a saving of £72 p.a. for the average Tonbridge commuter.

I am optimistic that Government and Opposition now know that commuters won't quietly tolerate inflation busting fare increases. The Government are focussing on how to deliver the services at a sustainable price, and as we go to press we were invited to take part in a consultation on fares and ticketing. If you are interested in taking part, log on to our website to find out more! **KP**

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## More on Fares

It will not be a surprise to members to learn that train fares in this country are possibly the most expensive in Europe. Listed below are some examples, based on information in the Thomas Cook European Rail Timetable, and from my own experience:

|                  |        |              |
|------------------|--------|--------------|
| Paris-Toulouse   | 713km  | £66 (off-pk) |
| Vienna-Innsbruck | 501km  | £50          |
| Oslo-Bodo        | 1282km | £144         |
| Oslo-Trondheim   | 553km  | £106         |
| Helsinki-Oulu    | 680km  | £67          |
| London-Edinburgh | 641km  | £146         |

Obviously, the prices, for "walk up and go" 2011 fares, and converted to pounds, can only be approximate, but they do give a general idea.

There are many inconsistencies in fares in England. For example, fares from Worcester to Stourbridge are about half the price from Paddock Wood to Sevenoaks, even though the distance is longer. A more curious local anomaly is that the day return fare to London Bridge or Waterloo East is higher than that to Charing Cross. Better to ask for 'London' and you will then be given a ticket to 'London Terminals'. **AH**

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## Editor's Note

Sharp-eyed members may have noted an improvement to our logo in this issue of 'Travel Topics'. This has been achieved with the help of a grant kindly awarded by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. We will use this match-funded money primarily to help with recruiting and retaining members. **LS**

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## Tonbridge Line Commuters – Your Committee

The following look forward to your support at this year's AGM on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2012:

**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

Steve Robinson

**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

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

**John Morton**  
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TN9 2BN Tel: 01732 359308

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Arlene Hansell, who has been a member of the Committee for several years, has decided to retire this year. We are very grateful for her many lively contributions to our meetings, and we offer her our

good wishes for the future. We welcome John Morton, who was co-opted following last year's AGM, and has since had articles published in 'Private Eye' and 'Modern Railways'. **LS**

## Boxing Day Train Services

Passengers at Tonbridge and Paddock Wood may recall that up until Christmas 2009 Southeastern provided an hourly Boxing Day service between Charing Cross and Ashford. However, for the last two years this service has been withdrawn, despite appearing to have been well used in the past. So why has the service disappeared?

We can reveal that a little-known beast called the Revenue Support mechanism is primarily to blame. It comes into play when a train company's revenue falls significantly below the targets specified in company's franchise agreement with the Government. This happened to Southeastern in April 2010, with the mechanism providing additional public subsidy to the company from that date. The effect is to discourage Southeastern from generating fare revenue: in fact, in the words of Managing Director Charles Horton, the Revenue Support system "creates a situation whereby any revenue generating scheme needs to achieve a rate of return in excess of 5:1 to be viable financially". In other words, it places the company in a similar position to someone who finds it more lucrative to be on benefits than to find a job.

Unlike most of its services, Boxing Day trains are not required to be run as part of Southeastern's franchise agreement. They were always run as a commercial operation, over and above the franchise agreement. As such, they have become

artificially unprofitable since Christmas 2010, when Revenue Support became part of the equation. This creates a rather unpalatable situation for would-be passengers. Although the services are profitable or at the very least break-even, because of Revenue Support it is better for the company not to run them, and keep its hands on the taxpayer's money. It is a 'lose-lose' situation for both the passenger and the taxpayer.

The long term solution is for the new franchise, due to commence in April 2014, to contain a requirement to run Boxing Day services, and we are committed to ensuring that this happens, with consultation due fairly soon. Meanwhile, we have suggested that for Christmas 2012 and 2103 the DfT should allow Southeastern to run the Boxing Day service directly under contract, taking the perverse influence of Revenue Support out of the financial equation. So far we have been unable to persuade the relevant parties to take up this suggestion, despite having exposed the stupidity of the situation in the media (most notably a satirical piece in 'Private Eye' in December, which you can view on our website). However, Norman Baker MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, has promised that the DfT is 'looking at alternatives to Revenue Support as part of our refranchising programme'. We hope that the interests of the passenger will, for once, be foremost in their minds. **JM**

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