



# Travel Topics

Issue 116

Autumn 2012

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

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## Whither franchising?

Members will have seen that the Government's Rail Franchise process has been found seriously flawed, de-railing the award of the new franchise for the West Coast Main Line. The new Secretary of State Patrick McLaughlin set up two independent reviews. The first review into what happened and why, led by Sam Laidlaw of Centrica, was due at end of October, and an interim report found major failings in many different aspects of the exercise; a final version being expected at the end of November. The second review due to report end 2012, led by Richard Brown of Eurostar, was set up to identify what we can learn from this for the wider Rail franchising exercise.

So where does that leave us here in Kent? John Morton, Steve Robinson and the rest of the committee have produced an excellent response to the Consultation for the new Kent franchise which was required by 13<sup>th</sup> September (see next page). Despite the current uncertainty around franchising I believe the submission is still valid, and essential preparation for our future services. The original timeline for the Kent franchise was: Bidders Pre-Qualify to tender November 2012;

Invitation to Tender Spring 2013; New franchise awarded autumn 2013; taking effect March 2014. However, together with several franchises where invitations to tender have already been made, this is now on hold and will need to be reviewed. With the festive season fast approaching and Government in recess over Christmas I don't expect the second report to be finalised until Jan/Feb 2013. As a consequence I think it will be some time before the franchising process is re-started. In the meantime, DfT must comply with European law on Railway franchise length which is limited to 15 years, with extensions of up to 50% permitted in certain circumstances. The current Virgin and C2C franchises both appear to be approaching 15 years.

The good news is that the Secretary of State is mindful of this issue and is apparently able to negotiate an extension to the existing Virgin contract for 14 months, taking the franchise to February 2014. By the expiry of that contract the Government plans to have tendered and awarded a fresh franchise. **KP**

## Olympic Success

Transport for London and Southeastern staff deserve congratulations on delivering an excellent service during the Olympics and Paralympics. Advice encouraging commuters to change their travel patterns was heeded, freeing the trains up for Olympic spectators. Without this huge change they could not have done it, so thank you. I travelled twice to Olympic events in London, and once to hospital, and found the trains and tube a real pleasure to use. There were large numbers of staff visible on the platforms providing advice. If you engaged them, they treated you as a valued passenger.

I was directed quickly out of bottleneck tube stations, making changes I would not normally have considered, but will in future. I asked Charles Horton if there was anything we could learn from the Olympics and adopt into normal operations. One thing he commented on was how energised and proud the staff felt by their role in delivering such a successful Olympics. They were quite sad when it finally came to an end. I am firmly of the opinion that when front end staff do a good job, let's boost their morale by telling them. **KP**

## Our Response to local Franchise Consultations

As our Chairman has previously explained, TLC have recently responded to two DfT consultations on franchises in our area.

As members will be aware, two companies run rail services on our patch. Southeastern runs the majority of services to London, while Southern operates the Tonbridge-Redhill line. Both these franchises are coming up for renewal. The new South Eastern franchise starts (was due to start!) in April 2014, by which time Southern should already have become part of a 'super franchise' combining the Southern, Thameslink and Great Northern routes. As part of the franchising process the DfT issues public consultations and we have responded in both cases.

TLC does not support any one company over another. Rather, we used the two consultations to reiterate some of our key concerns, which we believe should be reflected in the specification for each franchise (the document which outlines levels of service and other requirements against which companies bid for). As part of this process we've made some innovative suggestions about the pattern of services.

One of our key demands is the restoration of direct services between Tonbridge to Gatwick Airport via Redhill, lost in 2008. We are calling for the Tonbridge-Redhill line to be brought back into the South Eastern franchise so that through services can be run to other destinations in Kent. This would include a new hourly semi-fast service between Ashford International and Gatwick Airport and an hourly slow service formed by combining the existing Redhill line service with the Medway Valley Line service, creating a through service between Strood and London via Maidstone West and Redhill. This would create an exciting array of new direct journey opportunities, including from Paddock Wood.

We also make the case for several more minor timetable adjustments, including half hourly services from Hildenborough on Sundays and better spacing of services from London to Tonbridge in the later evening peak and late evenings. In some cases a small change would provide a great benefit, such as adjusting the early morning timetable to provide a better connection with the single direct Eurostar departure from Ashford to Brussels. We also call for the hourly Boxing Day between Ashford and Charing Cross (serving Tonbridge and Paddock Wood) to be restored and written into the franchise agreement.

These services ran up until December 2009 but were then lost as the operator went into Revenue Support, a perverse financial mechanism which creates disincentives against running otherwise profitable services. We call for an end to such perverse financial and performance incentives.

A more general theme is the need for faster and more comfortable services. Over the years, a lot of "padding" has crept into the timetable. Commuters will be most aware of this when their trains linger at Sevenoaks for two or three minutes on the journey home, awaiting the time for departure. Such padding was to the operator's benefit under the old Passenger Charter compensation scheme, which encouraged the practice of making trains "on time" by making them slower, thus avoiding the need to give season ticket discounts. Under the new "Delay Repay" scheme compensation is only payable when a train is 30 or more minutes late, so there is less incentive for padding. We are therefore calling for journey time reductions such as Charing Cross to Tonbridge in no more than 35 minutes. We also ask for all Dover and Hastings trains to consist of 2 by 2 seating as opposed to 3 by 2 per seating, as members have commented that the middle seat of three is often very uncomfortable and passengers frequently prefer to stand rather than use it!

Finally, we have reiterated two concerns which are high priorities for members. The first is the need for better performance and clearer information at times of disruption. This is likely to be a major factor in the new South Eastern franchise, which will cover the period during which London Bridge station is reconstructed (January 2015 to January 2018). The second issue is the affordability of the railway for its passengers, particularly the ever rising price of season tickets. This matter largely goes beyond the franchising process, but we wanted to remind the DfT of its fundamental importance to our members.

In preparing our responses, we worked closely with other local interested parties, including the Borough Council and Sevenoaks & District Rail Travellers Association, to ensure that the same key points were included in all the responses submitted by local stakeholders. The DfT does not issue individual replies to franchise consultation responses, but we hope some of our demands will be reflected in the resulting franchise specifications. **JM**

## Chairman's Note

We owe considerable thanks to Steve Robinson, one of our newer committee members, for the immense amount of work he did in the relatively short time he has been with us. He created and Web-mastered our TLC web site, researched rail fare increases with Sevenoaks

RTA, and worked on the recent rail franchise submission. Steve has taken a new post out in Singapore leading a Transport Research team at the University. We wish him well in his new role, and hope to keep in touch. **KP**

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## 2012 AGM

Members of the Association convened for this year's AGM at the Forsyth Hall on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> May, where chairman Kathy Pratt expressed her pleasure on being able to report the success of the national 'Fares Fair' campaign in holding fares down to RPI +1%. Mike Gibson of Southeastern reported on what he said was a better year for local commuters with services being less disrupted than usual by weather and operational failures.

He did, however, apologise for a recent major signalling incident at London Bridge. He went on to discuss travel during the forthcoming Olympics and the proposed Thameslink works due to begin in 2014. Brian Wharf of Go-Coach outlined his firm's bus operations, and in particular the Hildenborough commuter bus and its problems turning in the station car park. **LS**

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## What's new at Tonbridge Station?

Just before we went to press the hoardings were at last removed from the construction sites at Tonbridge station following its £1.4 million makeover, over six months later than originally scheduled. So what have we got for our money? The most obvious improvement is a larger ticket hall, which also has a wider entrance. The Barden Road entrance has also been improved, with a lower ceiling and inset lights. On the platforms there are new waiting rooms and toilets, and a customer information point.

It seems that the entrance/exit to the car park is to be made available for longer hours, and the metal staircase has been replaced, (though the passage to it appears to still be closed). Broadly, our aspirations have been heeded, but we would like to have seen some seats in the ticket hall, and there is still a shortage of cycle rack spaces. Some local people have criticised the design as too bland and lacking in imagination, but the building is ultimately functional, and has to be easy to maintain. **LS**

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## Lies, damn lies and ticket machine prices

We reported in our autumn issue last year about the misleading fare information being supplied by the Automatic Ticket Machines at our stations. While the uninitiated seeking a day return ticket from Tonbridge to Bromley South might flinch at being quoted £54.70, they would not realise that this was purely for the privilege of using the High Speed line. Yes, how would you use it?

We are now horrified to find that the same misleading prices are being supplied by some ticket office staff. On complaining to Southeastern management we were surprised to find that the ticket machine obfuscation seems to be linked to the terms of the franchise, but we are sceptical of this explanation, and are seeking advice from other sources. **LS**

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# 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

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

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

**Membership Secretary:**  
Steve Terry  
6 Poppy Meadow, Paddock Wood  
TN12 6BN Tel: 01892 833880

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

## All change at London Bridge

The most prominent part of the Thameslink project is a complete rebuild of London Bridge station, which with 50 million passengers annually, is one of the busiest in the country. When completed in 2018 it will eliminate one of the worst bottlenecks on the network and enable the train operators to increase the number of trains using the available tracks. Given the number of passengers using the station each day, the problem Network Rail have is to keep as many train paths available as possible while work is being carried out. This is to be carried out in phases, starting with the south London trains, which run out of the main station. As far as our services go, the first changes will occur in early 2015, when for a period of about 15 months Charing Cross trains will be unable to stop at London Bridge.

Following this there will be a similar period during which Cannon Street trains will be unable to stop, and at each Christmas there may also be complete closures of tracks through the station; we are currently trying to obtain more details of these.

At the same time work will be in progress on constructing a dive-under at Bermondsey, on the lines between New Cross and London Bridge. This will enable trains into the various termini to be separated without crossing movements. At the completion of the work Charing Cross trains will use platforms currently located in the southern part of the station, Thameslink trains using the current Charing Cross platforms. London Bridge will then have nine through platforms and six terminating platforms, the complete opposite of the situation at present. **LS**

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## Small cost for huge improvement

We are still pressing for more Eurostar services at Ashford, a station that many people from Kent and East Sussex find far easier to reach than Ebbsfleet. Eurostar refuses to divulge footfall at Ashford and Ebbsfleet, but anecdotal evidence suggests that Ashford's is greater per train despite the less frequent service. Local rail user groups, MPs and district councils support KCC's Rail Action Plan

for Kent (2011) calling for at least three Brussels and three Paris trains to serve Ashford daily.

The Office for Rail Regulation has told us that the track access charge payable by Eurostar to Network Rail for Ashford stops is £5.93 per train. This seems a small price to pay for providing a huge benefit to business and leisure customers from both sides of the Channel. The good PR would also generate revenue for Eurostar. **JR**

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