



# Travel Topics

Issue 117

Spring 2013

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

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## All Change at London Bridge!

Well almost. Major changes will take place at London Bridge between December 2012 and 2018 while Network Rail completely rebuild the station at a cost of £400 million as part of the Thameslink Project. Inevitably train services will suffer disruption, and there will be times when you will NOT be able to get off/on at London Bridge! The station is one of the busiest in the UK with 50 million people using it a year. Those who use the station know that it is a major bottleneck, cramped, overcrowded and parts of it are dark, making it totally unsuitable to meet our future needs.

The current station has six through platforms (1-6) at the high level and nine terminating platforms (8-16) on the lower level. Cannon Street trains use platforms 1, 2 and 3 and Charing Cross trains use 4, 5 and 6. The new station will reverse the arrangements; it will have nine through platforms at the high level and six terminating platforms at the lower level. This will greatly reduce delays awaiting platforms. It will also allow the number of trains going right through London to St Pancras and beyond to increase from 4 to 18 per hour. Additional benefits include: Lifts and escalators to every platform; a lighter, brighter and more spacious station; New entrances giving better access for local cycling, walking and bus routes (Tooley Street & St Thomas Street); and finally less congestion at the interchange into the Northern Line.

London Bridge is such an important station that Network Rail will be unable to close it for the duration of the work; instead they will keep it operating throughout taking three platforms out of service at a time while they are rebuilt and re-commissioned. Decommissioning starts in May 2013 with Platforms 14-16. There will be periods when complete closure of London Bridge is unavoidable e.g. to facilitate work on track, signalling and complex junctions, and to minimize disruption complete closures will be scheduled over bank holiday weekends. You have been warned! So when will this happen? Between early 2015 and early 2016 Charing Cross trains will be unable to stop at London Bridge, while between early 2016 and December 2017 Cannon Street trains will be unable to stop. In December 2014 Thameslink services will be rerouted away from London Bridge, and will not return until 2018 when all the work on track and platforms are complete.

Our main worries concern the period when Charing Cross trains skip London Bridge, early 2015 to early 2016. This is because unless some other provisions are made the only services stopping at London Bridge will be the Cannon Street trains and these trains run at peak hours only. To hear more about this from Network Rail and Southeastern don't miss the AGM! **KP**

## Annual General Meeting – Thursday 16<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. This year we hope to be given a presentation from Network Rail on the London Bridge scheme, which will dominate travel to town

over the next few years, so please come along and find out how the project will affect your journey to and from work. Refreshments will be available for those wishing to follow up their pet concerns, or who are willing to help us fight for them. **LS**

## Passenger (dis)satisfaction surveys

Southeastern was recently keen to trumpet the results of a passenger survey in which it received a score of 84% passenger satisfaction. Unsurprisingly, the company was less keen to publicise another survey in which it received an overall customer score of only 43%. Why the difference between the two surveys and who are we to believe?

The score of 84% was achieved in the National Passenger Survey by Passenger Focus, the Government's national watchdog for rail and bus users, whereas the figure of 43% cropped up in a survey by Which?, the independent consumer champion. Both surveys are based on a sample of passengers undertaking both commuter and leisure journeys, and both provide a comparison of different train operators. In fact, in the "league table" of operators Southeastern has little to boast about in either survey. In the Passenger Focus survey of 23 companies it came seventh from the bottom, while in the Which? survey of 19 companies it came third from last.

The scores in Which? are lower for all operators, ranging from 40% to 67%, whereas in the Passenger Focus survey overall satisfaction ranges 80% to 96%. A major reason for this discrepancy appears to be that the Which? survey seems to have put much greater emphasis on value for money. In the Passenger Focus survey only one of the 35 questions concerns this issue, but even so

customer dissatisfaction on the point is clear. Nationally, only 47% of passengers sampled by Passenger Focus rated "the value for money of the price of your ticket" as "satisfied or good". Tellingly, for Southeastern that figure was only 38%.

TLC has plenty of evidence that the ever rising cost of travelling by train is a major concern for our members. In January this year fares rose by an average of 4.1% across Southeastern and the price an annual season ticket between Tonbridge and London Terminals rose by 4.4% to £3,768. This level of above inflation increase cannot be sustainable for passengers, particularly considering that the price of a season ticket is generally second only to housing costs in a commuter's yearly expenditure. We continue to campaign on this issue, which is perhaps the most pressing concern for local rail watchdogs across the country.

Meanwhile, Southeastern claims that the 84% overall satisfaction score in the Passenger Focus survey is the best ever achieved by any operator on its line. While the quality of service has varied over time and there have been periods in the past when it has been much worse than today, we would be interested in our members' views on whether it's true that we've never had it so good. Anybody who has just paid out for an annual season ticket might beg to differ. **JM**

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## Tonbridge - Redhill Line

A Community Rail Partnership (CRP) for the Tonbridge – Redhill Line has been set up with the aim of promoting usage of this route and we are represented on the Executive Committee. We have for several years called for the reinstatement of a through service to Gatwick which would benefit not only air passengers but also rail users needing better connections for onward journeys towards the South Coast. The Tonbridge to Redhill Line has an hourly service on weekdays and summer

Sundays to East Croydon and London Bridge (Victoria would be better), with connections at Redhill for Guildford and Reading for onward travel to Wales and the West. Incidentally, members may be interested to know that from 19<sup>th</sup> May the 0725 train from Tonbridge will run to Victoria instead of London Bridge, arriving at 0840. We hope the CRP will be able to improve the profile of the line, which has historically been under-publicised. **JR**

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## Toilet Training

A traveller recently complained that two toilets on the last train from Charing Cross (0015hrs) one Saturday night were out of order, and that there was no corridor connection to the other half of the train. It seems obvious that people travelling at that time of the night might have had a few cups of tea or something stronger beforehand and that

lavatories are essential. Following our representations, we understand Southeastern are now planning for this service to be operated by Class 375 stock with corridor connections between the two four-car units so that it will be possible to walk the whole length of the train should one or two toilets be out of use. **JR**

## South Eastern Franchise

The current Integrated Kent Rail Franchise began in April 2006, with a break point in 2012 and final end date of April 2014. However, the derailment of the process to award the West Coast franchise in 2012 has made a major re-scheduling of this and the other contracts inevitable. The new timetable published by the Department of Transport on 26<sup>th</sup> March extends the dates for all new franchises, spreading them out so that Train Companies and civil servants will not be overloaded. Nevertheless, why have SET been given a 4-year extension to 2018, more than any other?

As I explained in my earlier report the London Bridge redevelopment will impact local travellers significantly between 2015 and 2017. Any new Train Operator would be busy familiarising themselves with their service and be ill-equipped to accommodate the inevitable issues they would face during the London Bridge works because of their lack of relevant experience. That means that our new Franchise would need to start before 2015 or after 2018. While we have no preference for one operator over another, and would have liked the opportunity for others to bid for our franchise, in these circumstances there is a lot to be said for "The Devil you know". Southeastern will have already made detailed preparations to cope with the changes at London Bridge.

However, we have two main concerns: how the redevelopment will be handled, given that any franchisee will be unable to meet the current minimum service specification during the works; and also the terms under which the franchise has been extended. Southeastern has been in Revenue Support (i.e. the Government pay the operator to run services) for several years, and we had been

previously advised it would remain in revenue support until the contract terminated (in 2014). The continuation of Revenue Support means that there is little incentive for Southeastern to offer services over and above the minimum service specification. (Indeed the Boxing Day Service which had run at a profit or broken even for 10 years was dropped because it was not viable under the revenue support rules.) It's like a person who is better off on benefits, than working! This is neither in the interest of tax payers nor commuters. You may recall that our original franchise with Connex South Eastern ended in November 2003 when the Strategic Rail Authority took the Franchise away from Connex following financial concerns and ended up running it for two and a half years. The bodies responsible for Rail Franchises certainly have a lot to learn!

We are concerned about what has happened to the input we gave to the Franchising process last year. Most of our comments are still valid; will they be reconsidered, or just ignored? When it comes to 2018 we hope that as Kent is one of the later Franchises to be re-awarded, all parties will have been able to learn about the new franchising process before they work on ours, and that we will see the benefits.

When the West Coast franchise term was extended, after it had been re-assigned to Virgin, additional commitments were added to the Franchisee for the extension of the franchise. What is the situation for our 2014-18 extension? The 26<sup>th</sup> March franchising announcement raises more questions than it answered, so John Morton is writing to the Department for Transport seeking clarity on all these matters. **KP**

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## Tonbridge Line Commuters – Your Committee

The following look forward to your support at this year's AGM on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2013:

**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

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**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

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

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

## Eurostar's Ashford service

After receiving information that each Eurostar stop at Ashford costs that company £5.93, we wrote to the Chief Executive requesting implementation of KCC's Action Plan calling for at least three Paris and three Brussels trains in each direction to serve Ashford. His office replied that a recent survey among passengers boarding at Ebbsfleet indicated that most of the passengers came from East London and the area around Ebbsfleet. As someone else said nearly 50 years ago, they would,

wouldn't they? We have again written to Eurostar pointing out that a similar survey of passengers using Ashford would almost certainly produce different results since most of the custom would come from East and South Kent and East Sussex, an area which includes some sizeable conurbations. We have sent copies of the correspondence to Kent and East Sussex County Councils and Brighton & Hove City Council, as well as to the relevant MPs. **JR**

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## Can you get a seat?

A member has recently written to us expressing concern about train services from Hildenborough (and Chelsfield). He says that "it is now a daily occurrence for Hildenborough passengers to stand for 45mins to London; and a certainty for Chelsfield commuters at any time of the rush-hour". He adds that he has witnessed passengers being unable to join trains at Hildenborough and Chelsfield because of insufficient standing room.

Committee members who use Hildenborough accept that seats can be hard to find, but are keen to know the extent of the problem, so would like to invite comments from members. Do you use Hildenborough station on a regular basis, and, if so, do you catch a particular train? Can you usually find a seat, and if so, where? Contact us by e-mail via our website, or write to our Officers at the addresses shown above. **LS**

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## Tonbridge station

Although the station redevelopment work appears to have been completed, we have queried the continuing closure of the stairs from the front forecourt to the car park. SET have recently told us that they are slippery and dangerous in cold weather and will remain closed, possibly permanently. They also say, in response to our

requests, that there is insufficient space in the booking hall to provide any seating, or to maintain the beneficial informal single queuing system that usually operates. We are unhappy about these comments and will continue to seek improvements to the passenger environment at the station. **LS**

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Cheques should be made payable to Tonbridge Line Commuters, and sent to the Acting Treasurer, Lionel Shields, at 13 Streamside, Tonbridge, Kent, TN10 3PU.