



Travel Topics

Issue 119

Spring 2014

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

Find us at: www.tonbridgecommuters.org.uk

Train service changes from December 2014

In our last edition we highlighted the disruption facing travellers during reconstruction of London Bridge station. This primarily involves the closure of various platforms, necessitating trains omitting stops at the station. Our main concern related to the period from **December 2014 to August 2016**, when services to and from Charing Cross will not call at London Bridge, the station being served only by trains to Cannon Street.

We have now been asked by South-eastern, through their stake-holder consultation, for our views on the proposed revisions. The main change is the **diversion** of the off-peak short **Tunbridge Wells** trains from **Charing Cross** to and from **Cannon Street**, thereby providing a half-hourly service with a London Bridge stop. While this is not un-reasonable, we do have some reservations, relating in particular to the late evening. In principle we believe that after 2100, all Tunbridge Wells trains should depart from Charing Cross rather than Cannon Street/London Bridge, as we are sure that it is the West End where most demand originates. Our full response can be found on our website: www.tonbridgecommuters.org.uk

In summary, we requested that:

- On **Mondays to Fridays**, all **TW** trains from and including the 2130 should depart from **Charing Cross**. This is particularly important since the stopping trains to Orpington/Sevenoaks are also diverted to Cannon Street, leaving just 3 trains each hour from Charing Cross (out of the present 7) to cater for every station on the line.

- On **Saturdays**, all **main-line** services should depart from **Charing Cross** at and after **2025**, as we believe the late evening demand on Saturday night at London Bridge is negligible, and 2 or an uneven 3 trains an hour from Charing Cross is an exceedingly poor service from the West End.

We noted that the resulting standard Tonbridge line departures from Charing Cross would be at uncomfortably irregular intervals, viz 10, 15, 40 and 45 minutes past each hour, and asked whether there was any scope for adjusting the timings.

We also expressed concern about the **morning peak** proposals, which involve the routes of four trains serving Tonbridge and surrounding stations being switched between Charing Cross and Cannon Street, and vice versa. Although the overall effect would be neutral, the actual distribution left uncomfortably large gaps to each destination, as follows:

(a) At **Hildenborough** around 0715 there would be 2 Cannon Street trains within 4 minutes, at the same time leaving a **40-minute gap** to **Charing Cross** (0655 to 0735).

(b) At **Paddock Wood** and **Tonbridge** the diversion of the 0608 ex Ramsgate (0735 at Tonbridge) leaves a **44-minute gap** to **London Bridge/Cannon Street** between 0715 and 0759 (times at Tonbridge), while the gap at Hildenborough is even longer at **one hour** (0720-0820). (While passengers can catch the 0755 CX departure and change at Sevenoaks for LB and CS, we know this practice is not popular among Hildenborough commuters, as obtaining a seat at Sevenoaks is extremely unlikely).

We specifically asked that SET tickets be made available on TfL's District Line services between Cannon Street and Embankment and intermediately, and similarly on Jubilee Line services between Waterloo/Southwark and London Bridge. We are currently awaiting Southeastern's consideration of the various responses, and will publish the results when these are known. **LS**

Annual General Meeting – Friday 23rd May at 19.30

The Battle for Hastings

As readers will be aware, flooding over the winter had a severe impact on rail lines across the country. Pictures of the damage at Dawlish, where the railway was dramatically washed away by the sea, have understandably dominated the news, but closer to home the Hastings line has been just as badly affected. The problems started shortly before Christmas, when two landslips hit the Wadhurst area in quick succession. This caused severe disruption to services, and on 13th January an emergency timetable was put in place to allow trains towards London to run at reduced speed through the affected area, with time being made up by running fast from Tonbridge to London Bridge. While this understandably led to complaints from fellow passengers at Sevenoaks and Orpington, it opened up an interesting debate on the longer-term need for faster off-peak services on the Hastings line. Members may recall that Tonbridge lost its non-stop trains to London when domestic high speed services via Ashford started in 2009. Since Hastings line passengers have no access to the high speed route, we had suggested that their trains should run fast from Tonbridge to London and for the other services on the Tonbridge main line to serve Sevenoaks and Orpington on a regular 15 minute interval timetable. However, it was not to be, and we have the service currently in force.

On 30th January the problems on the Hastings line were compounded by a further landslip near Battle, causing the closure of the railway between there and Robertsbridge. This was followed by another landslip in the Battle area on 3rd February, involving an embankment at Whatlington. Yet another landslip, this time near Stonegate, hit the line on 9th February, and resulted in London trains reversing at Wadhurst, with buses on to Battle where trains resumed for Hastings. With so many landslips in quick succession it is no surprise that repairs took time, but passengers were relieved to hear that the entire line was to reopen on Monday 3rd March. Sadly it was not to be, and the railway was re-opened only as far as Robertsbridge. Even on the day of the partial reopening, services on the whole line were severely disrupted.

Following investigation of ground instability at Whatlington, and the subsequent necessary repairs, services were finally restored across the whole line on 31st March, almost a month later than intended. Network Rail was at pains to point out that independent experts had confirmed that the landslip at Whatlington was not due to trees being removed from the embankment or the presence of nearby tin and gypsum mines. Instead it blamed the soft clay soil used for the embankment when the line was originally constructed in the 1850s. There may be some truth in this, as the Hastings line is known to have been built in a hurry, resulting in long-standing problems with the infrastructure. According to David Ward, Network Rail's Route Managing Director (South East), 144 piles and 15,000 tonnes of ballast were eventually used at Whatlington, with the railway effectively being rebuilt from scratch.

Given the scale of the engineering works required at so many different locations over the last few months, most passengers will understand that some disruption was inevitable. However, what has been unacceptable is the poor quality for the information available to those wishing to travel. At various times, particularly when services had to turn round at Robertsbridge, it seems that Southeastern struggled to provide a reliable service or indeed to know what services were running! Emergency timetables were not always being uploaded quickly to the National Rail Enquiries journey planner, and information at stations about replacement buses and expected journey times was exceptionally poor. As one emergency timetable was replaced by another, it became very difficult to keep track of details such as whether trains had resumed stopping at Sevenoaks and Orpington. TLC urges customers whose journeys were delayed by 30 minutes or more to claim compensation under the Delay Repay scheme. We would also be interested to hear from members who have been affected by the disruption and the poor information about services. Meanwhile, we hope that the spring weather will continue on a drier course and allow some respite for the railway after its winter woes.

JM

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LS

New Facilities at Paddock Wood

Regular travellers from Paddock Wood will have noticed during January the sudden appearance of hoardings at the Tonbridge/London end of the platforms, followed swiftly by the removal of the platform canopies, ironically just prior to the recent particularly bad weather. Since then, however, there appears to have been little in the way of further progress. We accordingly arranged to meet with Network Rail, to find out what was happening.

Firstly, we were told that the canopies needed to be replaced because the old ones were in poor condition, leaking and made of asbestos. Replacement of the rotten timber and repair of the ironwork supports was due to start immediately after removal, and the new canopies fitted as work progressed. However, the material originally specified proved unsuitable, and different material had to be specially ordered. Because of the high wind conditions a temporary canopy was considered unsafe and there was no choice but to leave the platforms open to the worst of the wet conditions. This work is expected to re-start during early April and continue for several weeks. Secondly, the new bridge. During foundation works on the 'up' (for Tonbridge/London) platform, traction current supply cables were

unexpectedly discovered in the ground, which necessitated a re-design of the bridge foundations. The bridge itself is of a modular, pre-fabricated design and will be delivered to site in sections. It has already been largely assembled at the factory, and Network Rail have promised us some photos which we will post on our website. The exterior cladding will be styled to look like the existing station building.

The actual installation will not actually take that long, and NR are hoping to complete the fitting of the part that spans the lines overnight, as this will arrive in one piece. The whole project should be completed by the summer.

Once the new bridge is in place, the existing Victorian bridge, which is an attractive example of a standard modular design used by the original South Eastern Railway in Kent, will be removed and the gap in the canopies made good.

At the time of writing, Network Rail have been unable to find any takers for the original bridge, as the 4-track span is too long for most preserved railways, and shortening it would take a lot of work. Sadly, if a home cannot be found, it will have to be sent for scrap after it is taken out.

Do any members have a lake in their garden for which they would like an ornamental bridge? **ST**

Trains to Gatwick?

Kent County Council have, like us, long been convinced of the need for a through train service to Gatwick and commissioned travel consultants Ove Arup to investigate the feasibility of an hourly service from Ashford (and possibly Canterbury West) to Gatwick calling at Tonbridge, Edenbridge and Redhill. It should be noted that the Department for Transport's criteria for new services are very stringent, involving a cost/benefit

ratio of 1:5, and only completely new passengers will be counted. A benefit obtained of, say, £2 or £3 for every £1 spent will not suffice; equally, existing passengers switching from a more circuitous route via London to the more direct route via Tonbridge will not be counted. (One is tempted to infer that passenger convenience does not carry much weight at DfT.) We will examine the report closely when it is published. **JR**

Tonbridge Line Commuters – Your Committee

We are pleased that the following are offering themselves for re-election at the 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

e-mail:
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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

Hildenborough news

We were pleased to hear that there is now an additional car parking option, as Eddie Simpson has recently gained planning permission for a car

park for 300 cars in Philpots Allotments on the opposite side of Rings Hill. In addition to cycling and walking, the car parking options are now:

Location	All day Parking	Weekly	Monthly	Annual
Railway Station	Mon-Fri £6	£27	£96* *from Meteor	£1026* (£567* half yr)
Cinnamon Square	Details expected end-May			
Gym (hildencarpark@gmail.com)	Block of 10 x 1-day vouchers: £30		£36 DD	£400 Cheque or bank transfer
Philpots Allotments (ed@philpotsallotments.com)	Not available		£25	£ 300
On-street	Free, but limited!			

You remember Welsh Ian from the ticket office? I met Ian in early March. He really appreciated the Get Well and Retirement cards with all your comments, and the generous collection, which raised £274.76! The roof problems that Ian reported back in 2013 finally resulted in the work just recently undertaken; a complete re-roofing of the ticket office and waiting room.

Finally, don't forget we have two commuter buses: **Bus 200** from **Tonbridge** Stacey Road via Brookmead to Hildenborough, at 06.55, 0715, 0735, 0755 and 08.15, returning from the **Station** at 17.49, 18.11, 1833, 1855 and 19.18. **Bus 235** from **Penshurst** via Leigh to Hildenborough, at 6.31, 0655 and 0719, returning from the **Station** at 18.08, 1849, 1915 and 1949. **KP**

Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM will be held in the Council Chamber of Tonbridge Castle on Friday 23rd May 2014. This has been arranged specifically to enable Sir John Stanley to attend the final time as our MP. Sir John has been extremely supportive to our Association since he was first elected over

40 years ago, and we hope members will come and hear from him on this occasion. We also expect to find out from senior railway staff about the progress of the works at London Bridge, and their likely effect on services from our area. The meeting will commence at 7.30 pm. **LS**

TONBRIDGE LINE COMMUTERS

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