



Travel Topics

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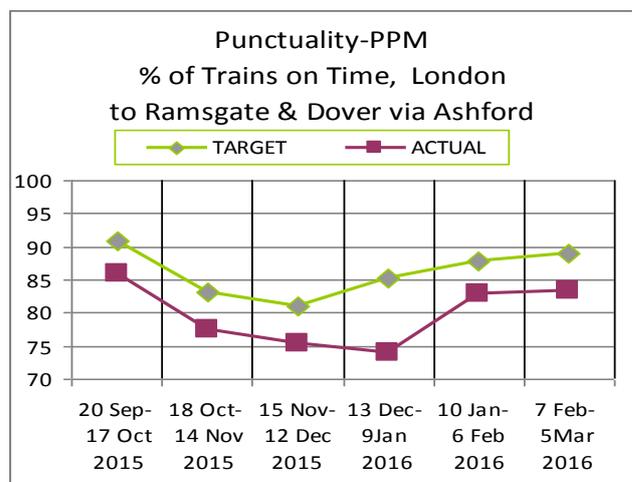
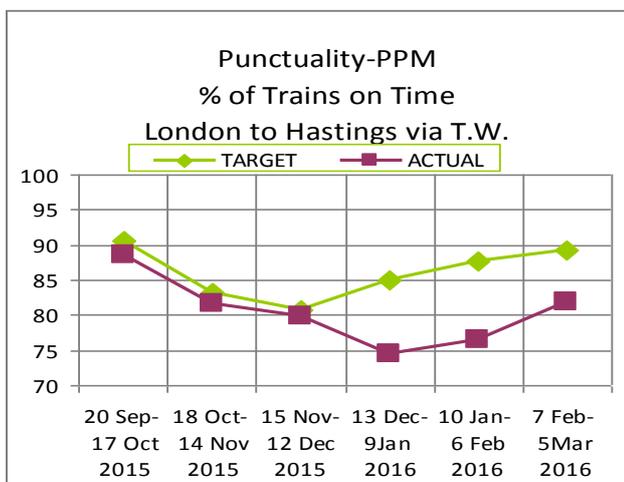
The watchdog for
all Rail Travellers from Tonbridge,
Paddock Wood and Hildenborough

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London Bridge: Is it falling down?

As most of you will be all too painfully aware, Southeastern's punctuality deteriorated late in 2015 and hit rock bottom in December and January.

Punctuality has since improved slightly, but it is still well below the Public Performance Measure (PPM) target as illustrated below, using figures from the railway's official websites:



In January services were hit badly by Network Rail infrastructure issues, fatalities at Hildenborough and near Dover, the collapse of the Dover sea wall, landslips on the Bexley Heath and Hastings lines, all of which had a domino effect on other services. It now seems it will now take until December 2016 to rebuild the track to Dover.

Understandably the poor performance has triggered calls to terminate the Southeastern franchise, but over the last year 63% of delays of over 3 minutes were attributable to Network Rail, so would this really help? Focusing on February-March delays: 72% were down to Network Rail, mostly infrastructure, just 26% Southeastern and 2% other train operators / freight.

So why are these incidents having such a big effect on services into Charing Cross and Cannon Street? In part we are advised it is because of the reduced London Bridge approach capacity, just 50%, during the London Bridge works.

That is all very well, but SET will have to operate with reduced capacity for another 20 months. So what are they doing to start meeting their targets **now**? We have asked whether some of the issues relate to temporary London Bridge infrastructure and will press for information on this at our AGM. Southeastern does claim to have a number of initiatives underway:

- improving rolling stock reliability
- stationing relief drivers at Cannon Street
- getting drivers to leave stations on time and know how to optimise their train speeds
- examining and improving peak passenger boarding and alighting
- on-going re-evaluation/optimisation of the timetable and work with the British Transport Police and Samaritans to reduce trespass incidents and fatalities

Hopefully we will see the improvements soon.
KP

Annual General Meeting – Tuesday 24th May at 19.30

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

Come and question representatives of Southeastern and Network Rail

What next at London Bridge?

At the end of August 2016 the works at London Bridge reach a pivotal point as the focus switches from the south side of the station to the tracks serving Cannon Street. The major change is that Charing Cross trains will start to call at London Bridge, while Cannon Street services will stop calling there. This arrangement will persist until the project finishes in January 2018, at which point all trains will call at London Bridge.

Turning back to this summer, Friday 26th August is the last day on which Cannon Street trains will serve London Bridge. On Saturday 27th and Sunday 28th August all lines to and from Charing Cross and Cannon Street will be closed, but on Bank Holiday Monday 29th August the Charing Cross lines will reopen and trains to and from Charing Cross will start calling at London Bridge. They will use the new platforms 7, 8 and 9, which passengers currently have to admire from afar while their trains pass through without stopping. We presume that part of the new undercroft concourse will also be open at this point to allow passengers to exit!

Cannon Street station will remain closed up to and including Thursday 1st September, so for three working days (Tuesday 30th, Wednesday 31st and Thursday 1st) there will be no trains to Cannon Street. This will only affect those wishing to get to Cannon Street itself, since passengers for London Bridge will be able to take the trains to Charing Cross. We would expect some diversion of trains into Blackfriars during this period, but this has not yet been confirmed.

On Friday 2nd September a new timetable will come into operation with Cannon Street trains

running nonstop through London Bridge while Platforms 1, 2 and 3 are being rebuilt. As a consequence, the half hourly off-peak and late evening services which currently serve Cannon Street will revert back to Charing Cross, calling at London Bridge en route. This will mean that passengers at Charing Cross will no longer face the current gaps of 25 minutes between services during the daytime, or up to 30 minutes in the late evening. However, the 1603, 1629, 1933 and 2003 Cannon Street to Tonbridge services will continue to run from Cannon Street (not serving London Bridge).

There are a few further changes in the peak. The original draft timetable featured a gap in Cannon Street services at Hildenborough between 0644 and 0822. Following our feedback, Southeastern promised to stop another Cannon Street service at 0721, but in consequence threatened to omit the Hildenborough stop from a Charing Cross train around the same time. Following our protests, it has now been confirmed that the Charing Cross train will also be stopping at Hildenborough (this is the current 0715, diverted to Charing Cross). For early birds there will be an additional train from Tonbridge to Charing Cross at 0545, calling at Hildenborough at 0550, while later risers will benefit from a fast train from Tonbridge to Cannon Street at 0827, running nonstop to Cannon Street and arriving there at 0911. However, this will be the last morning train to Cannon Street because the 0847 will run to Charing Cross instead. We are pressing for tickets to be valid on the tube between London Bridge and Bank in order for passengers to be able to reach the City when direct services to Cannon Street are not available. **JM**

Meeting with new MP

During the past 40 years we have had considerable help from our MP Sir John Stanley who took an active interest in the fortunes of his commuting constituents. It was therefore with some trepidation that our Committee arranged its first meeting with Tonbridge and Malling's new MP Tom Tugendhat in March. We explained our doubts about the DfT/TfL governance proposals, and he agreed to seek clarification from the rail Minister Claire Perry as to who would operate the suburban services, and would then formally object if necessary.

He also agreed to write to the Minister seeking to obtain the same compensation rates from Southeastern as provided by either operators under the Delay Repay scheme. Regarding Boxing Day trains he fully understood the 'revenue support' situation which effectively prevented Southeastern from offering a basic service, and promised to write to the Minister to investigate how the issue could be rectified.

Overall we found him genuinely appreciative of the fact we exist and fight the commuters' corner.

JM/LS

Transport for London, or Trains for Kent?

For several years the Mayor of London has been making a case for bringing suburban train services under the control of Transport for London (TfL). This would mean that they operate as part of the same umbrella organization as the tube and are presented to the public as part of a single London network, although a private operator would be appointed by TfL to actually run the trains. This TfL network would include suburban services to Sevenoaks, though not any of the main line trains which serve Tonbridge, Paddock Wood or Hildenborough.

Until recently these proposals have not been explicitly endorsed by central Government and Kent County Council has traditionally not been supportive of them. However, a change was signalled in January when the Department for Transport (DfT) published a joint prospectus with TfL on “a new approach to rail passenger services in London and the South East”. This proposed a “partnership” between DfT and TfL for the specification and management of rail services. However, the substance of the partnership appeared to be simply an acceptance of TfL’s original proposal to gain control of suburban train services within M25. Transfer of Southeastern services to TfL’s appointed operator would take place in 2018 when Southeastern’s current franchise expires.

We remain sceptical as to the merits of these proposals. Though presented as “devolution”, for passengers outside London the scheme might feel rather more like “centralisation”. TfL is politically accountable to Mayor of London and the London Assembly, elected only by Londoners, and as such exists to serve the needs of London and not the wider South East region. We feel it might therefore be tempted to make decisions which are to the detriment of passengers from Kent, such as

introducing more stopping services on already busy sections of line. Though the latest proposal promises safeguards against such detrimental changes, it would remain open to TfL to argue, for example, that there was space for extra trains. With this in mind, we feel that a neutral rail operator appointed directly by DfT is more likely to be even handed in its handling of the needs of groups of passengers from different geographical areas.

Our main concern, however, is of a more practical nature. The part of the railway which TfL wishes to take control of is not a self-contained unit, so the infrastructure would have to be shared between two operators. In particular, the section of line between Sevenoaks and Orpington is a two track railway and currently runs at capacity. Splitting control of a single railway between two operators would seem to make running the railway more complicated, especially at times of disruption. Whose services would be prioritised in the event of signalling problems or a broken down train? What would happen if a train was cancelled and another train needed to cover its stops, but that train was operated by the other company? Though the current management is far from perfect, it is difficult to see how splitting the operation of train services on one physical railway line would lead to a coordinated service for passengers.

We have included these points in our response to the joint TfL and DfT prospectus. However, the language of the document suggests that the proposal is set to go ahead and the current consultation is likely to be a formality rather than a genuine consideration of views. Nevertheless, we shall continue to monitor developments and assess what it means for the future of the longer distance trains serving our stations. **JM**

Tonbridge Line Commuters – Your Committee

the following are offering themselves for election at this year’s AGM:

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-mail: enquiry@tonbridgecommuters.org.uk

Delay Repay delayed

One of our members recently contacted us about a claim for Delay Repay compensation. The journey in question was from Cannon Street to Marden, which involved an advertised connection at Tonbridge. On this occasion the Cannon Street train ran 20 minutes late and the connection was missed, eventually resulting in a 35 minute delay at Marden. Southeastern refused to pay compensation on the grounds that Delay Repay would only apply if one or more legs of the journey were delayed by 30 minutes or more, rather than the total delay incurred because the second leg was missed.

This harsh interpretation appears to contradict the wording of the Southeastern's Passenger Charter which simply states that "if you arrive at your destination station more than 30 minutes late, as a result of a delay to a Southeastern service you can claim compensation using our Delay Repay policy,

irrespective of the cause". Following our intervention, Southeastern agreed to pay compensation in this specific case but were silent on the general principle involved. We therefore escalated the matter to Anthony Smith, the Chief Executive of Transport Focus. He confirmed that under these circumstances passengers were entitled to compensation and promised to raise the matter with Southeastern to avoid any repeat of the misinterpretation of the rules.

We view this as a significant victory in the battle for greater fairness in the way Delay Repay operates. The next step is to ensure that Southeastern adheres to the ruling, and so we would be interested to hear from any members who submit claims involving a missed connection. Meanwhile, we continue to fight for higher Delay Repay compensation for Season Tickets. JM

Engineering Work

Weekend travel is often disrupted by engineering work on the line. We do recognise that the work has to be done and, if possible when the fewest passengers are hindered. However, the decision to close sections of the Tonbridge-Hastings line on Monday and Tuesday evenings instead was made apparently without any consultation with the

commuter groups affected, and we are trying to find out whether this caused inconvenience to more or fewer passengers.

We also believe diversionary routes should be maintained and frequencies should not suffer on lines remaining open when parts of the system are closed. JR

TONBRIDGE LINE COMMUTERS

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