



# Travel Topics

Issue 124

Autumn 2016

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

Find us at: [www.tonbridgecommuters.org.uk](http://www.tonbridgecommuters.org.uk)

## London Bridge; access routes and the battle for Bank

The end of August saw some major changes at London Bridge, with the next phase of Thameslink Programme getting underway. Charing Cross services have now resumed calling at the London Bridge, with the new platforms 7, 8 and 9 coming into operation. The downside is that Cannon Street services are no longer able to call at the station, a situation which will last until January 2018, when all trains will be able to stop at London Bridge.

Earlier stages of the London Bridge works were generally well managed, with minimal unplanned disruption. Unfortunately, this did not hold true for the changeover in late August, which heralded multiple signalling failures and other infrastructure problems that blighted journeys for several weeks. Perhaps the worse disruption came on 31<sup>st</sup> August and 1<sup>st</sup> September, when some journeys between Tonbridge and London took as long as three hours. The railway industry seemed reluctant to admit that there were any issues at London Bridge, instead using social media to tag the problems as being at other locations such as Charing Cross and Lewisham. Since the failures were clearly connected to the London Bridge project, we feel that passengers would have welcomed a more honest admission of the teething problems. Performance has since improved, though Charing Cross services continue to be less punctual than before. In contrast Cannon Street services tend to run more often to time than they did – the secret seems to be not stopping at London Bridge!

Providing one manages to get there, the new station at London Bridge is attractive and spacious. Unfortunately, signage between the new platforms and the Tube is exceptionally poor. A direct route is available in the peak, but often passengers are dissuaded from using it. At other times it is necessary to take a long walk via either St Thomas Street or the Shard (upper) concourse, both poorly signposted. Passengers arriving at the Shard concourse are greeted with an indicator board

which does not include Southeastern services, and no signs explaining how to get to Southeastern services. It is necessary to know that services leave from platforms 7, 8 and 9 in order to have any hope of finding the train you need.

The changeover coincided with a new timetable which sees the off-peak and late evening services which ran to Cannon Street revert to Charing Cross. Train lengths have also been amended to take account of the higher numbers using Charing Cross services given that they now serve London Bridge. However, passengers boarding at London Bridge in the evening peak regularly have to stand, and this seems particularly prevalent in the shoulder peak around 18:30 to 19:30 when fewer services are scheduled to run.

Morning passengers to Cannon Street at the end of the peak are now poorly served, with the last direct departure to the City from both Tonbridge and Hildenborough earlier than it has been for many years. This is particularly problematic given the refusal of Transport for London to accept tickets on the Tube between London Bridge and Bank, which would have allowed passengers to easily reach the City by taking Charing Cross trains to London Bridge. We have protested about this via our MP Tom Tugendhat, but Rail Minister Paul Maynard has been unsympathetic to our cause. The reason cited is that the Northern Line is too busy. This, however, can scarcely be true outside the rush hour, which is precisely when the need to use the Tube arises due to the lack of direct trains to or from Cannon Street. Passengers are permitted to use the 521 bus but this is a single decker service which is often overcrowded or delayed by road works.

We would welcome feedback from members about how the new timetable is performing. Are there any trains which are particularly busy or unreliable? We would like to know so we can assess the underlying issues and put forward practical solutions to railway management. **JM**

## Annual General Meeting – 24 May

Attendance at this year's AGM was the highest for several years, and Chairman Kathy Pratt opened the meeting on a positive note by outlining our successes over the past year. These included improvements to Tonbridge ticket office, winning a significant Delay Repay case and diverting Redhill services to Victoria. The members of the Committee were prepared to continue in their posts for a further year and were duly re-elected. We are also pleased to welcome Robert Mansfield onto the committee to strengthen our representation of passengers from Hildenborough.

The meeting featured informative contributions from guest speakers Ben Ward (Southeastern) and John Ruch (Network Rail). Ben Ward chose the occasion to announce that Southeastern would be improving its Delay Repay formula for season tickets holders. This is something we had been vigorously campaigning for, having identified that the compensation levels offered by Southeastern

were significantly less generous than those paid out by other train companies. Responding to questions, Ben confirmed that Southeastern had no plans change the role of guards during its current franchise. This should avoid the sort of industrial action we have seen on Southern, at least until 2018.

John Ruch gave a detailed insight into the project to rebuild London Bridge station. He reminded us that the purpose is to provide segregated routes for Thameslink, Charing Cross, Cannon Street and London Bridge terminating trains. Instead of 6 through and 9 terminating platforms there will be 9 through and 6 terminating platforms. London Bridge sees 90,000 passengers every morning and evening. In taking questions from the floor, John confirmed that from 2018 it would be possible to divert our trains on the Thameslink lines in the case of major disruption – though we hope that this will rarely be necessary! **JM**

---

## New Franchise

We were recently invited to offer our comments on the details of the new South East franchise, and arranged to meet David Kimball from DfT, one of two Specification Managers for the franchise, in Tonbridge on 15th September. He began by outlining the context of the new franchise, which will be a normal commercial model, unlike GTR, which was a one-off.

Formal consultation will commence in November 2016, and the DfT will solicit views not just through formal channels, but also by staging events at stations, though this could prove a challenge. Invitations to tender will be issued in April 2017, the successful bidder will be announced at the end of 2017, and the contract is due to commence in June 2018, though this may slip up to 6 months.

Having explained who we were and who we represented, we presented him with our main issues, viz:

- transfer of Redhill line to SE franchise
- 2 Sunday trains per hour at Hildenborough
- re-introduction of a Boxing Day service
- transfer the Orpington stops from Hastings to Ashford trains to improve journey times
- provision of downside wheelchair access at Hildenborough

- concerns at the possibility of inner-suburban services being devolved to TfL (though we were pleased to hear that this did not seem to be a prior requirement)
- misleading ticketing displays on ATMs
- excessive standing, particularly on evening Charing Cross to Tunbridge Wells trains

We suggested it was important to avoid false incentives, such as seating accommodation, only to find the increased use of unpopular high-density rolling stock.

Mr Kimball asked us about the state of passenger information. We said that while more was available, it was variable in consistency. He replied that there was now a single source, (Darwin database), but communication to passengers was an issue; on-train information depended on the whim of the guard. He promised to keep us informed of progress at key points in the franchising process, but appeared unwilling to commit train companies to recognise Rail User Groups.

Nevertheless, we are pleased that DfT representatives have been prepared to meet commuter groups; this has not happened in the past. **LS**

## View from Hildenborough

Having only moved to the area in March of this year, I suppose I am in a unique position to give an objective view of Southeastern (SET) and their current performance (writes Robert Mansfield). Before I moved from Croydon where I was a daily user of Southern Rail, I was aware that SET passengers regularly record low levels of customer satisfaction (with Southern only marginally ahead) and so I was not sure what sort of train service I would find.

So far, I have been pleasantly surprised. Of course, there are incidents when things go wrong, which is inevitable, and the ongoing saga that is London Bridge means you can never be entirely sure how your journey will pan out. But on the whole, I don't think the lot of the Hildenborough commuter is too bad.

Sure, we have the daily carriage jostling to ensure a swift passage over the bridge, the passenger drop off/pick up point can often be mistaken for an obstacle course and when things do go wrong, you can rely on SET's information system doing a great impression of a dictator's ministry of information, but generally things could be worse. Indeed, one of my main motivations for becoming involved with the TLC is that I'm keen to support an organisation dedicated to holding the train operator to account.

Ideally I'd like to see greater frequency of services, particularly off-peak so as to give some flexibility. When things are working well, if you miss a train you're faced with a wait at Sevenoaks or a taxi. Whilst it might seem frivolous to consider a taxi instead of waiting 20 mins or so, when you're standing on a cold platform and the winds going right through you, the cost seems immaterial! When things go wrong, you're often left with no choice at all and just have to catch trains in the rough direction and hope.

Whilst I think we benefit in terms of getting a seat (ahead of those commuting from Sevenoaks to London), I think we suffer for trains from London compared to our kin in Sevenoaks and Tonbridge. I would also love to see a path built from Rings Hill to the down platform, to enable greater flexibility on leaving the station and to help those amongst us who are less mobile.

That being said, much as any school report, there are always elements where SET 'could do better'. I've already touched on the live information SET provide and I'm sure we all have our own tales of woe. I recall the evening of the 2016 TLC AGM which I was keen to attend, having only signed up to be a member the day before, and from work I quickly rushed to Cannon Street to meet my partner and take the train home. We sat on the train and awaited departure. There was a muffled announcement that was missed by 80% of the carriage. I noticed passengers from other carriages departing and scurrying off in the direction of the concourse. I saw a fellow Hildenborough passenger pass the outside of the carriage and ran over to see what he knew. Apparently, the train had been cancelled. Upon return to my seat I relayed notice of the cancellation and the carriage swiftly emptied. We decided to sit tight and see what happened. I consulted the National Rail app. and after a while found the train was being rerouted via Otford and Ashford, rather than through Tonbridge. We decided to chance our arm and change at Otford and hope to connect back down to Sevenoaks. At this point we were resigned to missing the AGM. Shortly before the amended train was to depart, the same people who had earlier exited the train were returning, and when I again consulted the app, it seemed the original service had been restored. Thankfully, we made the AGM (just). **RM**

---

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

**Hon. 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**  
28 Colin Blythe Road  
Tonbridge  
TN10 4LB Tel. 01732 351383

**Robert Mansfield**  
21 Ashley Road  
Hildenborough  
TN11 9EB

*e-mail: enquiry@tonbridgecommuters.org.uk*

## Delay Compensation

Rail passengers will soon be able to claim compensation if their train is more than 15 minutes late under an improved compensation scheme announced recently by the Department for Transport (DfT). 'Delay Repay 15' will be introduced within months on Govia Thameslink Railway services, including Southern, and then rolled out across the country. Passengers will be able to claim 25% of the cost of the single fare for delays between 15 and 29 minutes. The existing compensation thresholds will apply for delays from 30 minutes and passengers can apply for compensation through the train company.

All future franchise competitions let by the department (our area from 2018) will include requirements to introduce this policy and it is hoped to roll this out for all DfT franchises this Parliament. 'Delay Repay' is currently operated by the majority of operators and a number of existing franchises, including Virgin Trains West Coast and C2C have also taken steps to introduce automatic compensation for certain ticket types. As well as 'Delay Repay', the introduction of the Consumer Rights Act on 1st October 2016 strengthened the right of passengers to claim compensation for poor service. **LS**

---

## Reduction of Eurostar services at Ashford

Eurostar have published a new timetable for services from December 2016, under which the 09:17 from St Pancras to Paris will cease calling at Ashford at 09:55, leaving St Pancras later at 09:24. In the opposite direction the 08:43 from Paris will also drop its call at Ashford, arriving at St Pancras earlier at 10:00 (rather than 10:09). We understand this radical service reduction at Ashford is to allow engineers to install the new signalling systems in preparation for the new e320 trains, and that, once the work is finished, these trains will be reinstated.

Both these trains are very convenient for passengers from East and South Kent as well as Sussex who prefer to travel in the right direction to Ashford rather than in the wrong direction to Ebbsfleet or St. Pancras. Not everybody in this area is in a position to use a car to Ebbsfleet anyway. The 09.55 out allows good connections

to other destinations in France for business and holidays, and it is popular with passengers who just wish to visit Paris for the day.

This news comes on top of the fact that the Brussels service from Ashford was severely reduced several years ago. There have been rumours that there is a long term intention to make Ashford specialise in "recreational" journeys: skiing in the Winter and the South of France in the Summer plus Eurodisney (only on certain days of the week). While we support maintaining those services, cancelling the rest will hinder other traffic to and from the Continent and will have a detrimental impact on the many tourist attractions and other businesses in this corner of England.

We will, of course, keep up the pressure on Eurostar to ensure that services are indeed reinstated when possible, and will let you know how things go. **JR**

---

## TONBRIDGE LINE COMMUTERS

The subscription for the year ending 31 Mar 2017 is £4.00. If you have not yet paid you may pay over the internet using the details given below:

Bank: **Santander** Sort code: **09-07-21** Account number: **90919302**

Please supply a reference, either your **membership number** (shown on the address label below) or **name**.

The date shown is the current expiry date of your subscription. Please give below any change to your e-mail address (if you are happy to receive ('Travel Topics' in this form):

Please renew my Association membership for:

1 year (£4) . . . . . 2 years (£8). . . . other ( ) . . .

---

Cheques payable to Tonbridge Line Commuters should be sent to: Hon. Treasurer, Lionel Shields, at 13 Streamside, Tonbridge, Kent, TN10 3PU.