

DRAFT

SEVENOAKS RAIL TRAVELLERS' ASSOCIATION

Minutes of Annual Meeting – 9 October 2012

Chairman: Roger Johnson

Apologies: Mr. M. Fallon M.P, Andrew Stott, Cllrs. Tony Clayton and Richard Parry

1. Chairman's Report

In highlighting the SRTA Committee's activities over the past year, Roger Johnson said it had been a particularly busy one in terms of responding to consultations on franchises and the 'Mayor's Vision for Rail' (which could lead to Transport for London taking over responsibility for Southeastern's Metro services). The SRTA attaches high priority to retaining flexible ticketing in the event that the number of train operators rose to three and a meeting – albeit inconclusive – had been held with TFL to discuss their intentions.

Southeastern had, in the SRTA's view, responded well to the challenges posed by the Olympics.

The refurbishment of Sevenoaks station had also gone well. We had still to see the outcome in terms of retail premises and there was a strong case for improving taxi pick-up arrangements, perhaps taking advantage of the new overhang, so that people did not have to cross the forecourt or queue in the rain. There had been problems with the security of the new bike racks but some modifications and redistribution between the different sides of the station had been made in response to user complaints. The SRTA would continue to press for a second ticket machine on the Kippington side of the station to alleviate rush hour queues.

On fares, the recent decision of the government to pare back the average increase in regulated fares from RPI +3 pp to RPI+1pp was welcomed. However it was noted that the rules permitted operators to adjust individual fares by ± 5 pp and there was the risk that Sevenoaks as a relatively wealthy community would be singled out for a higher-than-average increase.

Roger Johnson concluded by thanking the Committee for its work during the year

2. Presentations by Speakers

The meeting heard presentations from representatives from both the supply-side and demand-side of the rail industry, and subsequently posed questions to –

Southeastern

Mike Gibson conceded that the bad weather experience during the winter of 2010-11 had been 'terrible'. Since then, Southeastern had been working closely with Network Rail to improve co-ordination. Network Rail had continued to invest in conductor rail heating and de-icing tanks had been fitted on some 375 electrostar trains. Contingency timetables had been drawn up. Communication vulnerabilities were also being addressed with an upgrade of customer information screens at stations and better training of station and other staff. A Twitter feed had also been launched (although there would be no response to tweets considered abusive). Steps have been taken to ensure that staff availability would be at a maximum. New diagnostic equipment had been acquired to anticipate train maintenance needs. In relation to reliability, the ultimate goal was to have a "right time railway" eliminating the current 5-minute window and so potentially add to the network's capacity.

Southeastern had been pleased with their performance during the Olympics and Paralympics. Dire warnings in

the press had proved to be over the top.

On fares, Mike Gibson noted that Hastings line MPs had indicated to Southeastern that above average increases would be unacceptable. A meeting with them was scheduled in November.

Future arrangements for the Southeastern area franchise were on hold following the problems with the DfT's assessment of bids for West Coast Mainline.

The case for an additional ticket machine at Sevenoaks was being examined.

Network Rail

Mike Smith described the redevelopment work at London Bridge. The design emphasised lightness and the elimination of dark arches. Some indication of the end-product was already evident in the opened-up space on the southern side of the station.

Construction would take place between May 2013 and January 2018 and would have most impact on train services between January 2015 and January 2018. There would be consultations with interested parties so as to find a solution that would minimise disruption. The end-product would be a station better capable of handling current conflicting movements.

London Travelwatch ('LTW')

Tim Bellenger described LTW's role and how it was geographically delineated from that of Passenger Focus. LTW dealt with around 200 passenger complaints a month. Issues included the closure of stations, the cleanliness and appearance of trains, co-operation during the Olympics, problems passengers had had in avoiding maximum charges when using of Oyster cards for complete journeys, and the accessibility of stations for disabled passengers. LTW had drawn up 10 policies 'to keep things moving'. This work had continued despite severe budget cuts (from £1.6 mn down to £1.1 mn).

In relation to SRTA, LTW was focusing on future franchises, Thameslink, ticket facilities at Dunton Green, and station conditions at Bat & Ball, Shoreham and Eynsford. In relation to the possible transfer of Metro services which commence at Sevenoaks to TFL, Tim Bellenger hoped Sevenoaks area commuters would be reassured by the experience of TFL's operation of London Overground, which now has the highest level of passenger satisfaction, including value-for-money of any operator. Network Rail would be the arbiter of which services TFL would be permitted to run. He noted that TFL has a non-London area representative to protect the interests of those commuting from outside the London Assembly area.

He noted that Otford station could benefit from new investment.

Passenger Focus ('PF')

Linda McCord described PF's current priorities which included better passenger information, future franchising arrangements, the impact of engineering work and penalty fares.

PF had conducted extensive surveys to identify passenger concerns. On the new franchises, a priority was a pattern of services should adapt to changes in demand. On engineering works, it was clear that passengers needed advance warning of whether their journey would involve the use of buses (transfers being unpopular). On penalty fares, PF felt the industry need to be more trusting and issue penalty fares with somewhat less relish.

Questions from the floor

Peter Fleming (Sevenoaks District Council) noted that the London Bridge redevelopment involved a very long

period of disruption which was affecting the attractiveness of Sevenoaks as a commuter town. Elsewhere in the county, developers were offering to cover the cost of rail travel as an inducement to potential buyers.

Mike Smith conceded that there was still a need to pin down the extent of the disruption but in the long run better reliability and flexibility from 'door to desk' would be the principal benefit.

Roger Johnson asked whether it was likely that Thameslink would take over the running of the Maidstone East line. However, no decisions had been taken. He noted that current investment plans when completed will enable SRTA area passengers to travel from Otford to Farringdon via Blackfriars with a change to Heathrow or Canary Wharf via Crossrail when this was completed which would represent a significant benefit.

Gerry Dolby-Gray pressed the Network Rail representative for more detail on the impact on train services to London Bridge during the rebuilding period. It was admitted that details were still emerging and the timetables had not yet been sorted out.

John Morrison, representing Sevenoaks Cycle Forum, said that the poorly designed racks had been chosen by a sub-contractor. Despite the modifications, some cyclists continued to lock their bikes to the railings outside the station. He felt that Southeastern had dropped the ball. It was noted that the re-development work had been a joint project of Network Rail and Southeastern. Lessons had been learned from the cycle racks episode.

5. Bus company reports

Arriva

Robert Patterson noted that Plusbus had been implemented for Sevenoaks. Improvements had also been made to the 452 service to provide a regular 'straight-through' service to Dunton Green during off-peak periods and services including intervening stops during peak times.

Go-Coach

Austin Blackburn noted that his company had expanded their school services, were now operating a service from outside the station, and were carrying out various improvements, including better signage. He regretted that his company had not had an opportunity to bid for the 452 route.

6. Other points

There were further questions from the floor on –

- Overcrowding. (It was noted that most peak services had trains at maximum length),
- What was meant by 'right-time'? (The importance of doors being closed 30 seconds before timetable departure was emphasised as small delays at a series of stops gave rise to a serious risk of delay on arrival in London)
- Why were the new cash machines outside the station and exposed to the elements? (Cover was a possibility to be examined.)
- Shouldn't there be a Sevenoaks town video screen in the station? (This would be looked at.)
- A complaint about the complexity of the ticket machines and the uncertainty (and the risk of being over-charged) over the cross-over time from peak to off-peak ticket availability. (PF noted that confusion over ticketing was widespread and a lot of work would be needed to address this. LTW noted that the machines rather assumed that the user had the same familiarity with the options as a trained ticket clerk. But some new more passenger-friendly machines were being introduced.)
- Consideration should be given to changing the forecourt layout at Sevenoaks and the traffic pattern better to meet the needs of pedestrians and vehicles respectively.

7. Formal business

The Minutes of the 2011 Annual Meeting and the 2012 Annual Report circulated in advance to members and the Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2011 were accepted and approved.

Cllr. Tony Clayton was elected unanimously as Chairman of the Association in succession to Roger Johnson (who will, nevertheless remain on the Committee). The meeting expressed its appreciation for Roger's tremendous efforts as Chairman over the years. Andrew Stott was re-elected unanimously as Secretary.

David Gamble proposed that the other members of the Committee (Ms Canet, Cllr. Parry, and Messrs Dolby-Gray, Houghton, Johnson, Miles, and Ryan) should be re-elected en bloc. The motion was unanimously carried.

The meeting was concluded at 9.50 pm.

Andrew Stott
Secretary
Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association