

# SEVENOAKS RAIL TRAVELLERS' ASSOCIATION

## Annual Report for Annual General Meeting 2013

### 1. Annual Meeting

The Association's Annual Meeting is on Wednesday 9 October at 8pm in the hall of Christ Church URC on the corner of London Road and Kippington Road. Our guests will include Rupert Atterbury-Thomas (Southeastern Railway), Mike Smith (Network Rail), Linda McCord (Passenger Focus), James London (Sevenoaks District Council), David Brazier (Kent County Council), Austin Blackburn (Go-Coach Buses) and Robert Patterson (Arriva).

We do not intend to hand out leaflets at Sevenoaks (and other) stations this year before the Annual Meeting. Instead we will rely on notices at the stations, emails to members and other contacts, and some coverage in the Sevenoaks Chronicle.

### 2. How do we see ourselves?

**Sevenoaks Rail Travellers' Association** (SRTA) represents the interest of all those who use Sevenoaks, Dunton Green, Bat & Ball, Otford, Kemsing, Shoreham and Eynsford stations. According to the latest available annual statistics, more than 4.6 million train journeys began or ended at our stations, and there are more than **3000 daily commuters** from the Sevenoaks area.

During the year we have had meetings with Southeastern, with Network Rail, and with Kent County Council, Transport for London, Sevenoaks District Council and Sevenoaks Town Council, and have had regular correspondence with all of these. We have regularly briefed Michael Fallon, the MP for Sevenoaks, on rail issues and helped him take up issues with the Department for Transport and with the London Mayor. We have also tried to coordinate our 'voice' for Sevenoaks travellers with those from Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells, to maximise our impact.

The benefits of our lobbying cannot, of course, be limited to our members who support us financially. We are grateful to the members who help defray our limited expenses. (This report also goes to other supporters, who have given us their e-mail addresses in order to receive our reports. We would be glad if you, too, supported us financially. Our subscriptions remain £5 for two years and £20 for 'life', and these should be sent to the Secretary whose address is at the end of this report.)

### 3. Events since the last Annual General Meeting

#### Trains Group

One major issue for the year has been the London Mayor's proposals for Transport for London to take over the Sevenoaks to Cannon Street/Charing Cross "slow" services, possibly from 2015. The Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association considered and broadly supported the takeover, subject to an assurance on certain aspects and other safeguards. TFL's takeover of other "metro" services in London - including in South East London - have generally been a success, with better trains, manned stations and a more dynamic and innovative service management style. The extension of Oyster and zonal fares to Sevenoaks would have been

welcome, and the example of Watford showed how the zonal system could be extended. At the same time SRTA wanted to see safeguards, such as no risk of dropping any fast services to make way for more frequent slow services and the free interoperability of tickets between Southeastern, TFL and Thameslink (there would be three train operators serving Sevenoaks). After discussions with TFL, the London Mayor gave us substantial reassurance on these points.

Unfortunately, and despite our representations, Kent County Council were opposed to these improvements in west Kent services - arguing that the proposals did not benefit the rest of Kent (an argument which was not heard during the development of HS1 which benefits east Kent and central Kent, but not west Kent at all!). We have challenged Kent County Council to say how they will ensure that the rail travelers of west Kent will get the benefits from KCC that they would have received from the London Mayor, and have got assurances that doors are still open.

An objective where we have made common cause with KCC is for improved services from Maidstone, via Otford fast into London. It looks as if the case for better peak services has been won, after 2017. We see no reason why the service should not run through the day, which would give Kent's county town a faster link to London, as well as opening up new capacity from Borough Green and Otford, relieving pressure on Sevenoaks.

A continuing issue is the rebuilding of London Bridge. This project progressed rapidly following the pause for the London Olympics, and although Sevenoaks train services are not yet affected the changes in passenger routes in London Bridge station itself initially caused confusion and chaos through poor publicity and signage. As the rebuilding continues certain trains will be unable to call at London Bridge due to the engineering works. From 2015, for 18 months Charing Cross trains will not stop as their regular platforms are rebuilt and this will be followed by a further 18 months when Cannon Street trains will be unable to stop. It will also likely to involve a reduction in the overall number of trains able to be run. SRTA has been pressing Network Rail and SER to consult with rail user groups ahead of publishing final plans.

The problems with the franchising of the West Coast mainline have led to a change in franchising policy. Although the details are complex, basically Southeastern will be given extensions to run most of their current services until 2018. They are currently consulting on what improvements should be offered in this time. SRTA has made representations based on improvements which can be achieved through closer working with TFL, and the urgent need for better passenger information – especially when things go wrong. We expect more things to go wrong during the complete rebuild of London Bridge!

The competition for the Thameslink franchise has been restarted, and the committee are responding to requests for input from the shortlisted bidders. The Thameslink franchise will cover the Sevenoaks to St Pancras via Bat & Ball and Otford lines.

## **Stations Group**

The Stations Group has continued to press issues of ticket queues, ticket vending machines, graffiti and station information and announcements with SER. We have pressed for improvements at Bat & Ball and Dunton Green stations, as well as pressing SER to make the most of the major improvements at Sevenoaks

We continue to press for a second Ticket Vending Machine to be installed on the Kippington side of Sevenoaks station, particularly as the barrier staff have become less willing to let people cross from the Kippington side to the Town side in order to buy tickets. After the refurbishment of the Town side of the station there are now 5 TVMs on that side, and rarely a queue, whereas even offpeak there can be a queue on the stairs for the one Kippington machine (where there used to be two!).

## **Membership**

At the end of September 2013 the Association's membership was 57 Life Members and 5 current 2-year Members.

## **Committee**

Sadly during the year Colin Miles, our Membership Secretary, died after a short illness. Colin also built and ran the SRTA website and was also our expert on fares and railway financing. We will miss his input and expertise, and our condolences go to his widow Maggie.

We are grateful to colleagues who serve on the committee for their continuing time and support which is essential to our work. We would particularly like to hear from regular commuters who would be prepared to join the Committee; the duties are not onerous – and we do make a difference!

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