

Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association

Survival Guide to the London Bridge Rebuilding

1. Top Tips (sometimes called the Executive Summary!)

- a. If you can **avoid using London Bridge and Cannon Street** do so – these trains will be very heavily loaded. If you have to, check for alternative routes as explained in section 4.
- b. Have a smart phone and load **relevant apps and website links** , see section 6(a)
- c. SRTA has been working hard to encourage the Thameslink project team to invest more of the £6Bn funding for the project in **enhancing information systems for SER's customers**. SER has made improvements but recent disruptions have highlighted serious shortcomings that need to be addressed urgently. Think “snow” and you are unlikely to be disappointed!
- d. **Fares shown on the National Rail Enquiries website** and potentially Ticket Vending Machines for journeys impacted by the Thameslink works are currently showing a disturbing number of errors – check before you buy!
- e. If you have a **National Rail only season ticket** valid after January 12th 2015 you will have to have it reissued if you want it to open LUL gates when you are travelling free of charge between London termini as explained in section 5.
- f. **SRTA's website and Twitter feed** will provide updates. Please share up to the minute information on services with fellow travellers through social media.
- g. At **Charing Cross**, remember the exit via the overbridge giving quick access to Embankment tube is open until 0930.

2. Introduction

a. Survival Guide

The purpose of this guide is to provide rail customers from the Sevenoaks area with information to assist minimise the disruption to your journeys during 2015-18. This guide has necessarily been prepared in advance of the engineering works. The advice is based on the best information available at the time of writing and will be updated as the project progresses.

SRTA hopes that the project will proceed as planned and that the amended services will provide satisfactory alternatives. However, experience suggests that any large scale engineering project will encounter unplanned disruptions. There is also a significant probability that parts of the temporary timetables will periodically provide inadequate.

This guide reviews the project, temporary timetables and offers

b. Disclaimers

The authors have checked all the information carefully but changes may occur at short notice and outside the authors control so please check with SER before travelling.

c. Feedback

The authors would welcome feedback on the content of the guide as we expect to produce subsequent versions as the rebuilding project progresses. Please email enquiries@srta.org.uk .

3. Summary

a. Overview

i. Background

The rebuilding of London Bridge will provide a 21st century station serving three key routes into central London. It should eliminate the congestion that has been a feature of the morning peak for many years. However, the price for rebuilding a station including one of the busiest platforms in the UK (platform 6) while maintaining the train service is some serious disruption for rail customers.

At the end of the project in 2018, London Bridge will offer commuters three operationally independent rail routes through the station – (1) to Waterloo East and CX, (2) to Cannon Street and (3) Thameslink services to Blackfriars, KX/St Pancras and the north of London. These will operate all day including throughout the peak period with easy interchange between the different routes. By providing each service with their own dedicated platforms it is intended that much of the congestion experienced today by trains in the LB area will be eliminated.

ii. Timescale of changes

From **January 2015 to August 2016** the platforms currently used by CX trains will be rebuilt. During this period therefore trains to CX will not be able to stop at LB. Consequently passengers to and from LB will need to use CS services.

From **August 2016 until January 2018** the CS platforms will be rebuilt. During this period trains to/from CS will not call at LB. Passengers using LB will then need to use CX services.

iii. Changing your London Terminus

A commitment has been made that passengers should be able to reach their current London terminus at no extra cost even if they are forced to travel to/from a different terminus. To allow this interchange at no cost to passengers all railway tickets will be accepted on **specified** bus and tube routes between Charing Cross, Waterloo East, London Bridge, Cannon Street and Blackfriars. For full details see section 5 below.

iv. Consequences

From January 2015 the total number of trains from Sevenoaks to London remains almost the same as now. However, many passengers currently use Charing Cross services to reach London Bridge. All these passengers will have to find an alternative route. The current Cannon Street services are already the most heavily loaded at Sevenoaks in the AM peak. Consequently during the AM peak passengers will almost certainly need to find alternative routes. Suggestions are set out in the section 4(b) below.

b. Morning Peak services

Our assessment of the morning peak is that trains to London Bridge and Cannon Street will be extremely crowded. Loadings on services to Waterloo East and Charing Cross will probably be similar to today.

Dunton Green passengers are likely to face particular challenges as explained in Section 4(d).

c. Daytime and evening offpeak services

During the day there will be 4 trains per hour to Waterloo East and Charing Cross leaving Sevenoaks at 21, 29, 51, 59 minutes past each hour. The return service will leave Charing Cross at 10, 15, 40, 45 minutes past each hour. Given the pattern of services it is worth noting that the 21 and 51 minute up services run fast to Waterloo East while in the down direction the 21 and 51 minute departures run fast to Sevenoaks.

At 14 and 44 minutes past the hour there is a service to London Bridge and Cannon street (calling at New Cross connecting with London Overground see para 4b(ii) below) and at 03 and 33 minutes past the hour from Cannon Street again calling at London Bridge and New Cross.

d. Evening Peak services

The evening peak services are almost entirely unchanged as the peak is spread over a longer period reducing the acute pressure on the London termini.

e. Weekends

It has been announced that there will be very extensive diversions at the weekend and the only advice is to check each time on one of the websites listed in section 5.

4. Re-planning your journey

a. Avoid rail heading to Sevenoaks!

Many commuters drive to Sevenoaks as a convenient railhead for services to London. As shown in section 3, services to London Bridge and Cannon Street will probably be under extreme pressure. Commuters using those services and with the option will do better to join their train much further from London to be sure of boarding their train and perhaps getting a seat.

b. City commuters

i. London Bridge & Cannon Street

Table 1 shows the trains leaving Sevenoaks during the morning peak. The schedule lacks any pattern and has some significant gaps. The first fast trains for London Bridge and Cannon Street are at 0549 and 0610. The 0653 and 0723 are likely to be very heavily loaded. Passengers may find it easier to wait for the 0728 although that train will be the first Ashford line service to Cannon Street since the 0549 service.

The slow services starting from Sevenoaks with guaranteed seats may look attractive.

SEV	NX	LB	CS
0501	0558	0555	0612 (slow) <i>Changing at Orpington</i>
0549		0618	0625
0610	0630	0638	0645
0616		0701	0708 (slow) <i>Changing at Orpington</i>
0636		0719	0726 (slow)
0653		0723	0730
0656		0738	0745 (slow)
0717	0754	0803	0810 (slow)
0723	0744	0752	0759
0728		0755	0802
0737	0811	0819	0828 (slow)
0747		0815	0822
0808		0834	0842
0817		0901	0908 (slow)
0827		0856	0904
0856		0923	0931
0914		1005	1012 (slow) <i>Changing at Orpington</i>
0944	1006	1016	1020
Table 1 Trains to London Bridge and Cannon Street (Fast services in bold)			

ii. London Bridge via Waterloo East

Passengers who wish to reach London Bridge but cannot find a suitable Cannon Street service will be able to travel to Waterloo East and then change to the Jubilee line to travel back to London Bridge using their rail tickets.

While this will take extra time it will allow commuters to Docklands to avoid London Bridge. However SRTA has expressed to SER our concern about potential severe congestion interchanging between Waterloo East and Southwark tube station should there be serious delays on the Jubilee line.

iii. New Cross and London Overground

An innovation in the timetable is the stopping of two peak hour services at New Cross which has a connection to London Overground services (4 trains per hour) to Canada Water (change for Jubilee line), Shadwell (for DLR) and onwards to Dalston Junction with a connection to Highbury & Islington. This avoids using London Bridge station. As noted later there is no equivalent evening peak stops. Offpeak services to/from Cannon Street will also stop at New Cross.

iv. Blackfriars (and by changing at Bromley South to Victoria)

There are two alternative routes to reach Blackfriars.

- Thameslink service from Sevenoaks which run via Bat & Ball. Typical journey times to Blackfriars are just over an hour. In December 2014 this service will transfer from SER to GTR (who in July 2015 will take over operating both the former Thameslink and Southern franchises as a single entity). Public statements by the new company do not indicate any significant changes to services or ticketing arrangements.
- Maidstone East line services from Otford. SER runs three fast trains from Maidstone East to London Blackfriars leaving Otford at 0626, 0722, 0907 with a journey time of just over 40 minutes. There are also the all day services between Otford and Victoria.

c. West End commuters

It appears that services to Waterloo East and Charing Cross should be adequate although departure times have been substantially changed. The absence of passengers travelling to London Bridge may improve the balance of passengers to seat.

SEV	Wat East	Charing Cross	SEV	Wat East	Charing Cross
0501	0543	0549	0803	0834	0840
0543	0614	0620	0812	0840	0846
0600	0656	0702 (slow)	0823	0854	0900
0616	0647	0654	0831	0900	0907
0630	0659	0705	0837	0926	0932 (slow)
0644	0715	0721	0847	0917	0923
0649	0718	0725	0851	0920	0928
0703	0734	0740	0906	0951	0958 (slow)
0711	0741	0747	0914	0945	0951
0732	0800	0806	0921	0948	0954
0743	0814	0820	0929	1000	1006
0752	0821	0827	0936	1021	1028 (slow)
0757	0842	0848 (slow)	0951	1018	1024

Table 2 Services between Sevenoaks and Waterloo East & Charing Cross

d. Dunton Green

Morning peak travellers from Dunton Green are faced with a difficult choice. Most services on the normal route to Charing Cross changing at Chelsfield will be operating. However some fast services will be diverted to Cannon Street (and these may well be extremely full) and some slow services will be diverted to Charing Cross. In general therefore we recommend using slow services to reach London Bridge and Cannon Street and fast services to Waterloo East and Charing Cross.

The service pattern from Dunton Green to Cannon Street (Calling London Bridge about 6 minutes earlier) and to Charing Cross are as follows

DG	Cannon St	
0603	0645	Change at Orpington
0639	0726	Direct
0659	0745	Direct
0720	0759	Change at Chelsfield (connection may be very full - not recommended)
0720	0810	Direct
0740	0828	Direct
0800	0904	Change at Chelsfield for Charing Cross & tube from Embankment to Cannon St
0820	0908	Direct
0840	0931	Change at Orpington
0909	1012	Change at Orpington
0939	1020	Change at Orpington
Table 3 Services from Dunton Green to Cannon St		

DG	Charing Cross	
0603	0654	Change at Orpington
0603	0702	Direct
0639	0721	Change at Orpington
0659	0740	Change at Orpington
		There is NO service to Charing Cross at 0720 – only to Cannon Street
0740	0820	Change at Chelsfield
0800	0840	Change at Chelsfield
0800	0848	Direct
0820	0900	Change at Chelsfield
0840	0923	Change at Chelsfield
0840	0932	Direct
0909	0951	Change at Orpington
0909	0958	Direct
0939	1028	Direct
Table 4 Services from Dunton Green to Charing Cross		

5. Transferring between Stations

The authorities have given a commitment that customers should be able to reach their current London terminus at no extra cost even if they are obliged to travel to/from a different terminus. To allow this interchange at no cost to passengers all railway tickets will be accepted on **specified** bus and tube routes.

You can use the following Underground and bus routes without being charged:

You can travel between the following tube stations

Charing Cross, Embankment, Blackfriars, Cannon Street, London Bridge, Southwark, Waterloo and Elephant and Castle.

(Note this does not include entering or leaving at intermediate stations such as Temple or Borough)

Alternative routes

Between London Bridge and Waterloo/Southwark on the Jubilee line or bus services (services 381 and RV1)

Between London Bridge and Charing Cross on Jubilee/Bakerloo/Northern Lines or bus services (services RV1 and 15)

Between Cannon Street and Charing Cross/Embankment on District/Circle lines or bus services (service 15)

Between Elephant and Castle and London Bridge on Northern Line or bus services (service 35, 40, 133 & 343)

Between Elephant and Castle and Waterloo on Bakerloo Line

Between Blackfriars and London Bridge on District/Circle/Northern lines and on bus services (service 17 (City Thameslink), 381 & RV1 (Blackfriars South bank))

Note rail tickets are valid for bus travel only between the London termini beyond those stops normal fares apply. Tickets should be shown to the driver.

National Rail only season tickets (ie not Travelcards) valid after January 12th 2015 will provide free travel as specified above. However in order to operate the ticket barriers they need to have a special code in the magnetic strip. Tickets issued from 13 November onwards have this already. Tickets issued before 13 November need to be exchanged at the local SER booking office; this is free of charge and details of re-issuing are on the SER website. Valid tickets without the necessary code will be rejected by the automatic gates and ticketholders will need to use the manned gates at tube stations.

6. When Things Go Wrong - Information sources

An inevitable feature of any major engineering project is unplanned disruption. Listed below are a number of sources of information which may be able to provide useful information.

i. Real Time Trains

A useful website is *Real Time Trains*. Details of all trains around Sevenoaks can be found at <http://www.realtimetrains.co.uk/search/advanced/SEV>

For details of other stations replace *SEV for Sevenoaks*, by *CHX for Charing Cross*, *CST for Cannon Street*, *LBG for London Bridge* etc. There is also a search box for other stations. The site also has an app for mobile phones. However if trains are diverted the site is slow to update the new routings and timings.

ii. National Rail Enquiries

<http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/> is the official industry site but in the past it has not performed well when disruption occurs. This was partly because it was driven by the planned timetable and assumed everything is running normally unless it was told otherwise. SER say that they now have the capability to update it in near real time.

Station departure board information is available on

<http://www.livedepartureboards.co.uk/southeastern/sumdep.aspx?T=SEV&R=1> It offers departures and arrivals from a specified station using the same code as in (i) above.

iii. Phone numbers

Telephone numbers include

- a. SER Customer Services Team **01732 378 751**
- b. **Train Tracker** on **0121 634 2040**, choosing **Option 1** at each of the three prompts. Although accessed via London Midland it covers the whole of the UK. Train Tracker uses a Voice Recognition system that works very well, provides real time running info and even speeds things up by remembering your last enquiry. Likely to be much faster than calling SER and being queued to speak to an agent.

iv. SER Twitter

This is available at Twitter [@SE_Railway](#) providing help and advice. SER previously outsourced its daytime Twitter feed to Serco. However from 31 December 2014 it will be in-house direct from the control room on a 24/7 basis.

v. SER Website

<http://www.southeasternrailway.co.uk/> includes a journey planner as well as a limited newsfeed. Live running information is on <http://www.journeycheck.com/southeastern> and in the case of severe disruption the front page of <http://www.southeasternrailway.co.uk> is sometimes replaced by a one-page update.

vi. Limitations on smart phones in congested locations

SER is placing much emphasis on smart phones and tablets to circulate information during disruptions to both staff and customers. Many of us have experienced a significant degradation in service on our mobile devices at major sporting events as everyone uses mobile devices.

SRTA has expressed concern that large groups of customers and staff using mobiles to download information may suffer loss of data services or even voice services. In central London mobile phone cells cover small areas and a short walk can take you to a new cell which is fully functional. SRTA has pointed out to SER that their staff without this luxury of moving away from a crowded concourse may suffer significant issues in obtaining information during disruptions.

7. Claiming compensation for delays

SER operate a Delay-Repay scheme to compensate customers for delays over 30 minutes, including season ticket holders. Full details are available from <http://www.southeasternrailway.co.uk/contact/delay-repay/>

In view of Sevenoaks being the last station before London for many AM peak services, we are concerned about trains being too full to board. SER have responded to us that "If a customer chooses not to board a train because it is crowded I'm afraid that compensation would not apply. However, if a train skipped a stop or stops because it was crowded (or to recover the timetable in the event of disruption), then assuming that boarding the next service would delay the customer's journey by 30 minutes or more, then compensation would be paid."

8. Journey Planner Issues

At the time of updating this guide (late December 2014) there is growing evidence that the changes to routes as a result of the Thameslink works at London Bridge have led to a disturbing number of errors in the fares quoted on the National Rail Enquiries website. Examples seen recently include fares which include charging for free inter-station transfers by tube and also charging peak fares on off peak services.

SER have confirmed that this is a problem with online journey planners and say that they will update their systems. They suggest a workaround may be to select "London" or "London Terminals" as the destination rather than a specific station name. If you understand the fare system enough to know what this means, this may work for you! There may be similar issues with Ticket Vending Machines, where a ticket to London Bridge should produce the necessary "London Terminals" ticket.

So if in doubt use a manned booking office. Keep receipts for tickets in case you are overcharged so that you can subsequently reclaim any excess. SRTA has already raised the matter with SER and is happy to report any potential errors to SER if you encounter them.

9. Train loading information

The morning peak is going to be the period of maximum stress on the new timetable. SRTA will attempt through its website and Twitter feed to provide information to local commuters. If we can get sufficient information we may be able to provide a traffic light guide to loading on peak period trains to indicate the most heavily loaded.

10. Feedback

The SRTA will be continuing its close contact with SER throughout the whole period. We welcome feedback on services throughout this period which can inform our representations to SER.

Finally this short guide has been provided to assist travellers. We are planning to revise this from time to time as circumstances change and so corrections and suggestions would be very welcome enquiries@srta.org.uk

About the Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association

Sevenoaks Rail Travellers' Association (SRTA) [represents the interests of commuters using Sevenoaks and stations nearby](#) – Bat and Ball, Dunton Green, Eynsford, Kemsing, Otford, and Shoreham. We lobby railways management, regulators and planners. These efforts have secured longer and more frequent trains, as well as better facilities at local stations. The SRTA Committee and its Stations and Trains Groups have frequent contacts with the senior management of the train operators, station managers and local government, and we run an [award-winning website srta.org.uk](#).

Membership is open to all. Our work needs the continuing support of local rail travellers and our influence with the train operating companies and with politicians depends not only on the quality of our interventions but also on the size of our membership. We are proud of the [positive feedback we receive from members and supporters](#).

If you are not already a member, we hope that you will consider becoming a life member. Over 80% of our members have chosen life membership. Life membership gives the Association the most dependable basis for the future, and saves the administrative burden of regular renewals. Life membership costs only £20. Alternatively for those expecting to be in the area for a short time, or for those who simply want to make less of a financial commitment up-front, we also offer a 2-year membership (currently until 31 December 2016) for £5.

You can join instantly and pay by Paypal - click [here for life](#) or [here for 2-year](#). Alternatively you can [download our membership form](#) and send us a cheque by post.