

SEVENOAKS RAIL TRAVELLERS' ASSOCIATION

Annual Report for Annual General Meeting 2008

1. Annual Meeting

The Association's Annual Meeting is on October 14th at 8pm in the hall of Christ Church URC on the corner of London Road and Kippington Road. Our main guest this year will be Richard Howkins, South East Route Planner for Network Rail. He will talk about the work on the Kent Route Utilisation Strategy, including Peak capacity to/from London, planned service within Kent (including linkages with adjacent areas, off-peak frequencies, improving connectivity, reducing journey times), accessibility of railway stations including car parking, services during evenings, weekends & bank holidays (e.g. reducing impact of engineering work), freight and train performance. Roger Johnson will then talk about the SRTA's own submission to the strategy study.

In addition the Train Operating Company will be represented by Sarah Boundy who will be able to answer questions and issues about current services. It promises to be a very interesting meeting.

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. In the year to March 2006, nearly **4.3 million train journeys** began or ended at Sevenoaks station alone and there are more than **3000 daily commuters** from the Sevenoaks area.

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

Peter Benford

The year has been overshadowed by the death of Peter Benford on 5 December. We owe the existence of SRTA to Peter, who had served as Secretary for 40 years. It was Peter who prodded us to produce a leaflet and conduct a survey which grabbed the attention of so many travellers, and brought new people into the organisation. For a number of years he contributed a regular column to the Sevenoaks Chronicle. In addition to his administrative and organizational skills he was a master of the timetable and he successfully advocated numerous changes to the benefit of local train users. A number of SRTA members and representatives from other railway bodies attended

Peter's memorial service. Our sympathies are with his widow Myra and the other members of his family.

Fares

Sevenoaks season ticket fares rose by 6.1% in January 2008 and regulated fares rose by 6.8% across the South Eastern Railway's network as a whole. This follows a 10.7% increase from Sevenoaks in January 2007. SER justified this by saying that when they took over in April 2006, subsidy, then at £140M a year, was to reduce by £20M per annum with the object of our returning a premium to the Treasury at the end of the franchise period, and that they were aiming to recover this by both attracting more passengers and also exercising the provision to increase fares by above the rate of inflation, based on an RPI + 3% formula.

Car Parking Charges

Car parking charges, which are not regulated, were increased with effect from 29 June 2008. The Sevenoaks daily charge rose by 80p (17%) to £5.40 and the annual season ticket by £117.50. SER claimed that these charges were necessary because of costs, including ensuring that the car parks were well lit, made secure and regularly cleaned and maintained. Your committee will continue to pay attention to these points to ensure that the train company are delivering what they say we are paying for.

Equally unwelcome was the introduction of a £1.50 charge for parking on Saturdays at Sevenoaks and Otford. Your committee objected to this on the grounds that there was no evidence (unlike other towns) that the car parks were being used by town centre shoppers and that it would discourage use of trains at the weekend, causing loss of train fare revenue and more traffic on the roads. Unfortunately the train company were unmoveable on the issue.

Trains Group

The two main issues for the Trains Group this year have been developments in the new **December 2009 timetable** and the longer-term **Kent Route Utilisation Strategy**.

When the Domestic services on the high-speed line from Ashford to St Pancras begin in December 2009 we were expecting significant changes in the services and timetables for the rest of Kent. Although final proposals have still not been forthcoming, offpeak SER have announced that there will be a regular service every 15 minutes between Tunbridge Wells and London stopping at Sevenoaks, and Sevenoaks will also be served by 2 fast trains an hour going to Ashford (and possibly beyond) via Tonbridge. This would be a welcome extension to offpeak services. However for the peak services it appears that the service pattern will be essentially unchanged during the "high peak", although several additional services will stop at Sevenoaks during the "shoulders". The train operator is constrained by some infrastructure limitations (which the Kent Route Utilisation Strategy needs to address), but we are continuing to press for the available slots to all be used by full-length trains – which is not the case at the moment, especially in the evening peak. We are also pressing for the peak period slow services to be speeded up between Orpington and London to increase their appeal to Sevenoaks commuters.

Network Rail have started work on the Kent Route Utilisation Strategy, following the completion of the South London Strategy. The Kent Strategy gives an opportunity to address the optimum use of the existing infrastructure and the investment needed to meet current and future demands. The Committee has submitted a paper with initial views to Network Rail, and shared this with local councils and other interested groups. The key message is that in recent years the lot of the passenger has become worse, with a 19% increase in morning peak passengers from Sevenoaks since 2002 but a decline of 7% in the number of seats, and so the Strategy must address the fundamental issues of constraints on capacity which in some cases are the legacy of the Victorian infrastructure.

In late September, the SRTA responded to an invitation to make a written submission to the Kent County Council Select Committee on the CTRL Domestic Rail Services.

In other matters the Trains Group have also continued to press for the commuter services consequences of the development at Dunton Green, and the prospective development at Fort Halstead to be considered in an integrated way. In particular we discovered that the assumptions about train services in the Fort Halstead developers' presentation had not been aligned with the plans of the train company.

Stations Group

After several years consistent pressure from the Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association there has at last been action to tackle the regular **flooding of the No. 1 (Kippington) car park**; Network Rail have installed new drainage which seems to be working. This shows how, even in the fragmented responsibilities of the modern railway system, change can sometimes be achieved.

We are continuing to press on another long-running issue, the **Ticket Vending Machines** (TVM's). There is a loophole in the DfT regulations which means that although booking office clerks have to offer the lowest fares for the planned journey the automatic ticket vending machines do not always have to. There are particular problems with offpeak fares and tickets bought for a Saturday on a Friday. SER have acknowledged that these machines are not very user-friendly and have put us in touch with the software developers so that we can express our findings and concerns directly.

Passenger Information is often "railway centric" and needs to be made more relevant so that passengers can make appropriate decisions. For example, when services are disrupted, platform signs need to show more than just the single word "Delayed"; the location of the nearest train or its earliest possible arrival time could and should be given. When a stopping service is also available, announcements about which train is likely to reach London first would be more helpful than saying which is the first to leave. There are also far too many routine announcements: commuters don't need to be reminded ten times per week that smoking is prohibited and that they should approach a member of staff if they have any queries.

Dr. R. G. Johnson (Chairman)
9, Stanhope Way,
Riverhead,
Sevenoaks TN13 2DZ

A C Stott (Secretary)
PO Box 191
Sevenoaks,
Kent, TN13 2AW

SEVENOAKS RAIL TRAVELLERS ASSOCIATIONS ACCOUNTS
FOR YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2007

2006		2007	Notes
	Income		
60.50	Subscriptions	90.00	
5.00	Donations	5.00	
2.55	Bank Interest	2.65	
-----		-----	
68.05	Total	97.65	
	Expenditure		
36.50	Hire of Hall	30.00	1
48.85	Photocopying	41.36	1
2.30	Postage	9.79	
0.00	Advertising	133.95	1,2
-----		-----	
87.65	Total	215.10	
-----		-----	
(19.60)	Surplus/(Deficit)	(117.45)	
232.05	Opening balance	212.45	
-----		-----	
212.45	Closing balance	95.00	
=====		=====	

Balance Sheet at 31 Dec

212.45	Accumulated Fund	95.00	
273.00	Subscriptions in Advance	333.00	
-----		-----	
485.45	Total	428.00	
0.45	Current Account	43.31	
485.00	Investment Account	590.00	
0.00	Accounts Payable	(205.31)	1
-----		-----	
485.45	Total	428.00	

Notes

1. Following the death of the Secretary the bank accounts were temporarily inoperable. A number of bills relating to the AGM 2007 were therefore still outstanding at 31/12/2007.

2. The Committee decided to try the purchase a display advertisement in the local paper to advertise the AGM and attract new members. The cost has been fully charged as an operating expense in 2007; the element of new subscriptions relating to future years' membership has been credited to subscriptions in advance in accordance with the Association's normal practice.