

SEVENOAKS RAIL TRAVELLERS' ASSOCIATION

Minutes of Annual Meeting – October 6 2009

Chairman: Roger Johnson

Present:

Network Rail: Mike Smith
South Eastern Railways: Mike Gibson
Arriva Buses: Malcolm Spalding

Tunde Olatunji (Passenger Focus)
Martin Lewis (Tunbridge Wells)
Reg Oakley and John Morrison (Sevenoaks Cycling Forum)

About 20 SRTA members

Apologies: Mr. M. Fallon M.P, Councillor Peter Coates

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman said that the new December 2009 timetable would give the best service for years, with a peak service as good as the infrastructure allowed and 6 fast trains each way to London offpeak. Nevertheless the introduction of HS1, although welcome, only gave capacity for 5 years' growth in usage.

There was growing concern about the London Bridge rebuilding starting in 2012 and lasting for 3½ years. Platform 6 at London Bridge was already reputed to be the busiest heavy rail platform in the world, and the Association was very concerned about the impact on Sevenoaks services. Because of growth in Dockland diversions to Victoria were even less convenient than during the last rebuilding 30 years ago.

Beyond 2015 there was the proposal in the Route Utilisation Strategy to withdraw Cannon Street services. The proposal in the RUS to use Thameslink to Farringdon was an inadequate substitute, because most Cannon Street commuters worked in financial services which tended to be situated in the eastern part of the city.

2. Sevenoaks Rail Travel: Today and Tomorrow

Mike Gibson, Southeastern Railways, said that the December 2009 timetable would be a significant improvement. Once the new timetable had bedded in SER would be carrying out regular passenger counts and looking at punctuality. There might be tuning of the timetable in May 2010.

SER recognised that overcrowding was a problem. Regular passenger counts were taken and train lengths were adjusted where possible. SER acknowledged that a mistake had been made in the January shortenings, and the 0718 from Sevenoaks would be restored to 10 carriages from 12 October.

Punctuality continued to improve. The last 4 week period had seen a performance of 96% on Kent Mainline, the best in the franchise period. It was hoped to mitigate the traditionally poorer Autumn performance this year.

By 2014 the Government subsidy would reduce to zero and the company would pay £10m to the Government. Fares from January 2010 would rise 1.6% on average. The aim was to have car parking on a self-financing basis – which the company saw as fair since 75% of travellers did not use the station car parks.

All SER stations were being repainted and re-signed.

The snow on the night of 1-2 February 2009 was the worst for 20 years. The measures taken proved inadequate, and even some de-icing trains became stuck. A decision had been taken at 0500 not to operate any services on safety grounds – trains could have become stuck and with roads impassable it would have been impossible to evacuate passengers, and even if services had run in the morning it might not have been possible to get people home in the evening. The website had collapsed under the load, and SER had now strengthen the website and the text alert services.

Mike Smith, Network Rail, said that NR were incentivised to increase availability by 37% in CP4. Preparations for the December 2009 had involved enabling work, including the complex turnback siding at Tunbridge Wells. Between 2009 and 2014 the National Station Improvement Programme would benefit 28 Kent stations (Ashford, Lewisham and Dover in 2009), Access For All 19 Kent stations (including the new footbridge/lifts at Orpington), and 40 platform extensions at Kent stations.

Malcolm Spalding, Arriva Buses, said that Arriva ran 80 vehicles from depots in Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. The company ran both commercial and subsidised services, and both Kent County Council and Sevenoaks District Council had power to fund services (KCC had established criteria for funding). The topography and relative wealth of the Sevenoaks area did not make it attractive for introducing new services, and commuter feeder services were a particular challenge because of the cost of the longer day. However section 106 planning payments could be used to pump prime bus services for later commercial operation (as at Dunton Green), and there were other possibilities for feeder services in the Sevenoaks area which Arriva would be willing to work with SER, SDC and KCC to develop.

In questions from the audience the following points were made:

- * SER would look at the state of the ladies toilets and the continued closure of the gents toilets at Sevenoaks
- * SER's target was to deal with graffiti in accessible places within 48 hours. However trackside graffiti could take longer because of the need for a possession.
- * SER noted that parking was again overflowing onto local streets and would look at the business case for more car parking
- * there was a shortage of cycle parking, particularly secure parking, and SER/NR would look at increasing cycle parking as part of the National Station Improvement Programme.

- * SER saw no commercial case for the installation of train information displays at Bat & Ball.
- * Decisions about services to Cannon Street after 2015 would depend on the re-franchising process. The SRTA should tell DFT that Thameslink was not a viable option.

3. Formal business

The Annual Report and the Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2008 were accepted.

A motion having been proposed, Roger Johnson was re-elected unanimously as Chairman of the Association.

Roger Johnson proposed that the other members of the Committee (Drs. Houghton and Canet, Cllrs. Clayton, Parry and Gulliver and Messrs. Dolby-Gray, Miles, Ryan and Stott) should be re-elected en bloc and the motion was unanimously carried..

Andrew Stott
Secretary
Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association