

SEVENOAKS RAIL TRAVELLERS' ASSOCIATION

Minutes of Annual Meeting – 12 October 2010

Chairman: Tony Clayton

Present:

Kent County Council: Nick Chard
Network Rail: Mike Smith
South Eastern Railways: Sarah Boundy
Arriva Buses: Robert Patterson
Go-Coach Buses: Austin Blackburn
Sevenoaks District Council: Roger Walsh
John Morrison (Sevenoaks Cycling Forum)

About 18 SRTA members

Apologies: Mr. M. Fallon M.P, Councillors Williamson and Fleming, Dr Roger Johnson

1. State of the Station

Richard Parry introduced a series of pictures of the state of the station showing graffiti, leaks and derelict cycle storage. The key issues were who was responsible for the state of station, why had it become like this and what was going to be done.

Sarah Boundy (SER) agreed that the state of the station was a poor reflection of the number of Sevenoaks passengers and their overall financial contribution to the rail industry. If the station was to be built today it would be very different. SER aimed to removed graffiti from trains and from accessible areas of the station within 24 hours, but graffiti in rail areas required a scheduled possession. The staff at the station just did basic maintenance and cleaning, and anything else required a call to specialist teams. There was a limited amount of funding for maintenance and it tended to be scheduled rather than on demand. However there were concrete plans for station refurbishment in 2011 as part of the National Stations Improvement Programme, and the funding for this was committed and not subject to the Spending Review.

Mike Smith (Network Rail) outlined the design brief for the Sevenoaks station refurbishment, which was one of seven schemes now in detailed design phase. The brief called for:

- * widening of the concourse through a cantilevered balcony with a modified retail area
- * improved toilet facilities
- * upgraded concourse lighting
- * upgraded CCTV for the concourse and cycle parking areas
- * replacing CIS with new flat screen monitors
- * new signage to/from the town and to/from new station facilities
- * new seating on platforms
- * replacement waiting shelters on country end of platforms
- * replacement weather/wind breaks on London end of platforms
- * modified station interchange to provide widened public realm area in front of station and to facilitate the drop off/kiss and ride capability
- * modified ramp to comply with DDA

- * new cycle parking facility (including relocating all cycle parking to one area) and increasing cycle parking by 100 spaces

The limited space on the station site had required some compromises but better use of the old freight space would be considered. Some councils had partnered with Network Rail on station plans: discussions were ongoing with Sevenoaks DC who are considering additional funding to improve the area around the station; funding was not yet confirmed.

The intent was to complete the design over the winter and work on site in spring and summer 2011. Julie Houghton (NR) would be arranging stakeholder consultation.

In discussion the following points were made:

- * current CCTV coverage of cycle parking was completely inadequate
- * cycle parking was required on both town and Kippington sides because the road bridge was dangerous for cyclists.
- * cycle parking should be closer to the station – no reason why cars should be able to park closer than cycles.
- * taxis on the forecourt needed to be controlled
- * motor cycle parking and cycle parking needed to be separated.
- * would provision be made for maintaining the new facilities? – otherwise the station would just deteriorate again.

2. Growth without Gridlock

Nick Chard gave a brief presentation on the Kent County Council work on an integrated transport strategy Growth without Gridlock. His overall conclusions include the findings that:

- * if public transport was good, frequent and reasonably pricing then the evidence was that people would use it
- * take-up of Freedom Pass for children in Kent was high, contrary to the national trend.
- * HS1 had changed the dynamics of travel – Ashford was now 37 minutes from London. KCC was looking at a Parkway station at Manston.
- * bus services needed to be looked at in a tier fashion – Fast Track, Local, Inter-Urban and Rural Demand-Responsive.
- * the new Traffic Management Centres would include real time bus monitoring.

In terms of the Sevenoaks area KCC priorities were:

- * improved interchange at Sevenoaks and Swanley stations
- * additional parking at Sevenoaks station
- * reinstatement of the Tonbridge to Gatwick train service, with an aspiration of an Ashford to Gatwick service
- * minimise the impact of the Thameslink work

In discussion it was noted that:

- * there was no incentive to reduce railheading as SER gained the same income whatever the level.

- * DFT specified the minimum level of service, but there was nothing to stop SER putting on a Maidstone to City service if there was a business case
- * it was important to remember people who commuted away from London – for instance to Maidstone, Chatham or Canterbury. It was becoming increasingly problematic for people to get around Kent.
- * new housing developments had not taken account of public transport capacity. There were expected to be problems at West Malling, Canterbury and Maidstone as a result.
- * The Gatwick coach service had not been publicised. However there was evidence that it had been used not only by air travellers but also by coach travellers using Gatwick as a hub to access the national coach network.

3. Bus Services

Austin Blackburn outlined improvements made to the 401 service – modified route and timetable, lower price multi-journey tickets and better bus stop information. The buses also now had the KCC Countrylink branding.

Robert Patterson said that Arriva would be refreshing the 402 service in the Autumn and all Arriva buses would be reliveried in Arriva Blue.

In discussion the following points were made:

- * although the 401 and 452 gave a good evening service to West Sevenoaks commuters, the last bus from Sevenoaks Station to Kemsing was at 1832 which required leaving London not long after 1730.

4. Southeastern Railway report

Sarah Boundy said that:

- * the last two winters had shown the vulnerability of the Sevenoaks line to snow. Conductor rail heating would be put in place by the end of the year to help protect the service from interruption.
- * SER had invested in a more robust website which should be able to maintain normal operations during snow and other disruptions. In addition it was now run on the basis of real time running information rather than the published timetable, and so should give a more accurate picture during times of disruption.
- * January 2011 fare increases would average 7.8% (RPI of 4.8% + 3% allowable margin). Since SER was in revenue support from DFT it would be obliged to apply the full fare increase or lose subsidy, and because of limits on fare increases in the Travelcard area the increases in Kent would be higher than the average.
- * SER would not be running any trains at all on Boxing Day this year.

5. Formal business

The Annual Report and the Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2009 were accepted and approved.

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

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

Andrew Stott
Secretary
Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association