

# SEVENOAKS RAIL TRAVELLERS' ASSOCIATION

## Report to Members

1. **Annual Meeting** Make a note of the date: **October 13<sup>th</sup> at 8pm in Christchurch URC hall** at the corner of Kippington Road, 150 yards north of the station.
2. **Introduction** The ten months since the 2004 AGM have been full of activity. Like last year, it had been our intention to write an interim report. As it is, there is all the more to put into one report
3. **2004 Census** The first significant event was the arrival of the autumn 2004 loading data for each service in the morning and evening peaks. The table below shows the change in the morning peak (2004 compared to 2003) in terms of departure time from Sevenoaks:

	<u>%</u>
6.31 6.59 7.03	+15.5
7.21 7.29 7.33 (now 7.36)	+11.6
7.44 7.48 7.53	<u>-8.5</u>
Average	+4.5
Rest of peak to 9.06	<u>+2.3</u>
Average	+3.6

In the evenings, 1700-1759 was previously the busiest hour. In 2004 many commuters returned home later, both during the last hour of the evening peak (1800-1859) and after 1859:

	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>
% Departing		
1600-59	19	17
1700-59	57	41
1800-59	24	42
Morning commuters returning home between 1600 & 1859(%)	93	90
The terminal split has also changed(%):		
CX/Waterloo	46	44
Cannon Street	29	26
London Bridge	25	30

The above changes reflect the increased importance of Docklands as a commuter destination, reached by changing on to the Jubilee line at London Bridge or Waterloo.

4. **Stock Implications** Rolling stock tends to be allocated to services on the basis of their loading in the previous census. Overcrowding rises as loading departs from that census. Stock is being re-allocated to minimise standing in the morning and evening peaks. However, as the slam-door stock is being phased out, stock used on individual trains can change and this state of flux is likely to continue until the autumn. SRTA has concentrated on and put forward proposals for the more permanent train formations after the slam door stock has been withdrawn. The proposals were well received by SET, but at the time of writing we await the results of our efforts.

There are two particularly full trains in the morning peak - at 7.36 (was 7.33) to CX and 8.09 to CS. We have asked SET to add 2 cars to the 7.21 to CX to relieve the 7.36. There is, however, no alternative service to CS to relieve the 8.09. We have instead asked SET to speed up the 7.58 Sevenoaks-CS (i.e. stop it at fewer stations between Orpington and LB) to make it more attractive to Sevenoaks commuters. This sort of change will also make the service at Dunton Green more attractive to future commuters who come to live in the development on the Cold Store site.

Some services in the evening will also be overloaded until their formations are beefed up - in particular the 1719 and 1803 from CX. Our proposals cover these mismatches.

- 5. 'Refreshed' Networkers** Before we proceed with the narrative, we need to explain about 'refreshed' Networkers. Connex ordered only 27 Electrostars with 2+3 seating (375/9 units). It had ordered 36 five-car suburban units, with fewer seats and more standing room ('376' units, currently used on the 7.58 Sevenoaks-CS service). The arrival of these units enabled some 30+ suburban units to be refurbished with 12 first class seats at the end of each unit (known as 465/9 units). In Connex days, it was planned to run these as 12-car trains providing 72 first class seats, but they are power-greedy units and Network Rail has permitted them to be run only as 10-car trains, resulting in a reduction to 48 first class seats). This formation offers too few first class seats for the services to CS fast from Sevenoaks, which need 70+ such seats on SET's own census figures. We believe that SET has accepted this proposition, but we await their confirmation that they are prepared to use 375/9 units.

However, 10-car formations will offer a significant increase in the number of seats on the Tunbridge Wells-CX services, compared with both the previous 11-car 375 trains and the earlier 11-car slam door formations.

- 6. Bidders for the Kent Franchise** The SRA issued a revised service specification in February. As in the past, the issue of such a document acted as a catalyst for us to write a new paper of some 4000 words covering in greater depth the subjects in this report. The bidders are:

Danish State Railways (71%) Stagecoach (29%)

GSER(=GNER,71%) Hongkong Mass Transit Railway (29%)

Govia (100%), runs the old Central division of Southern Region

First (100%), runs Scotrail and most of the former GWR

In March, SDC organised meetings with these four bidders over two days. Representatives from SDC, Tonbridge & Malling BC and SRTA were present at all meetings, together with representatives from Tonbridge (RTA) and Tunbridge Wells (BC) for some of them. From these meetings we formed a clear view that two of the bidders had a better understanding of what would improve travelling conditions for Kent commuters than the other two. We have since written a short note summarising our views on the bidders, a copy of which was sent to the SRA.

The timetable for choosing the franchisee has continued to slip. The bids were to be submitted 60 days after the contract for the CTRL domestic rolling stock was

signed. This eventually took place on June 1<sup>st</sup> after which the SRA issued another short note, including further revisions to the service specification. In the intervening three months we, too, had learned more and wrote a short note, stating clearly what we feel the bidders need to do. In our one meeting that we have had since that was issued it is clear that at least one bidder shares our views. Further time slippage will take place. We do not now expect SET to hand over to the new franchisee until next spring.

Finally, will our work bear fruit? We cannot say, but recently, the Secretary was invited to a reception hosted by the CEO of the Hongkong MTR. He found that he was the only RTA representative, which suggests to us that at least one of the bidders thinks what we write is helpful!

- 7. Maidstone East (ME) Line** At least two of the bidders see growth potential in the ME line. They recognise that investment will be required to achieve this - to convert the short (6 car) platforms between Otford and Ashford to 8 car length. This would enable 8 car trains of 465/9 stock with over 600 seats to be run on the busiest services. At present, train length is limited to 6 cars, except for the one service run with 375/9 stock, because it has too many passengers for a 6-car train. This can call at stations because 375 units have 'Selective Door Opening (SDO) - i.e. the on-board computer knows that the doors of the rear two cars should not be opened at short platforms. SET does not have enough 375/9 units to run more such trains on the ME line.

An improved and speeded-up timetable will be necessary. This could be introduced in 2007 after Eurostars no longer run to Waterloo, via the line through Bromley to Victoria.

The growth potential foreseen by the 'better' bidders is good news for Sevenoaks commuters, as rail passengers from towns and villages served by the ME line drive to stations from Staplehurst westwards and fill the services before they reach Sevenoaks. Tonbridge & Malling BC is ready to approve the doubling of West Malling station car park to accommodate an extra 300 cars.

- 8. ATOC** In June, ATOC (The Association of Train Operating Companies) published a Strategy document. One paragraph said that premium (rail) pricing might have to be introduced if road-use charging was introduced and Sevenoaks-London was one of the example lines mentioned. The Secretary sent an e-mail to a former Connex director who went to work at ATOC, who forwarded it to the head of ATOC. He replied that 'the press comments about peak rail pricing had got a bit out of context.' He continued that the main purpose of the Strategy document was 'to highlight the need to provide capacity for passengers where there is overcrowding' – the sort of measures mentioned in this review.
- 9. Booking Office Opening Hours** Also in June, SET put up notices at stations of changes in Booking Office opening hours. SRTA 'looks after' stations that range from Sevenoaks to four stations with no booking office – Dunton Green, Bat & Ball, Shoreham and Kemsing. The change in opening hours at Sevenoaks is mainly that the booking office will close at 2000 (two hours earlier) on Sundays. The change will have no effect on stations with no booking office. Most affected

will be Otford and Eynsford, whose opening hours will be limited to 4 hours in the mornings (Monday to Saturday). Outside these hours, passengers are expected to rely on (unreliable) machines, which produce 'a permission to travel'. The Association has made it clear that such proposals are unsatisfactory. Stations need adequate, but simple ticket vending machines for use when their booking offices are closed. Without these, SET is likely to lose revenue. SET should not regard booking office personnel only as sellers of tickets, but as part of (sometimes the only) SET presence on the stations.

- 10. Stations Group** Sevenoaks has been without a Station Manager since early in 2005. This has hindered the Stations Group's work for some months. A new Manager (Sarah Brown) has now been appointed, but the Group's first scheduled meeting has had to be postponed twice, first from July 7<sup>th</sup> and then because of a lineside fire near Swanley.

Following our involvement, improvements at Sevenoaks have been made to the footpath over the road-bridge, to the station flooring and doors and alterations to the platform signs and loudspeakers. The enforcement and clamping policies of CPS have come under regular review and discussion.

Current issues include the proposed reductions in staffing at Sevenoaks and other stations – the subject of letters in the Chronicle and referred to in paragraph 9. There is a need for more ticket vending machines at Sevenoaks to reduce queuing, also improvements to the vending machine software to reduce perplexing choices which delay transactions and result in missed trains and over-charging. The unattended stations also need the cashless ticket vending machines referred to above to reduce delays for passengers arriving at London termini without tickets. Another issue is poor information when services are disrupted. Flooding in the Kippington side car park remains a problem and connections between mainline services and trains to Bat & Ball and Otford require review.

- 11. Domestic** Dr. Roger Johnson, who chaired last year's AGM, has since taken over as Chairman. We take this opportunity to express our gratitude to his predecessor, Dr Brian Houghton, for having been SRTA Chairman for three years and for his continuing hospitality to the Committee.

- 12. Annual Meeting** Mr Michael Holden, MD of South Eastern Trains, which is likely to be operating our services until at least spring 2006, has agreed to come to our Annual Meeting (8pm, Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> October in the hall of Christchurch URC on the corner of Kippington Road). Please support us with your presence.

Chairman: Dr. R. G. Johnson  
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Secretary: P.T Benford  
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We are always pleased to hear from members and supporters. Our e-mail address remains 'sevenoaksrta@hotmail.com'.