

SEVENOAKS RAIL TRAVELLERS' ASSOCIATION

Minutes of Annual Meeting – October 14 2008

Chairman: Roger Johnson

Present:

Network Rail: Richard Howkins

South Eastern Railways: Mike Gibson and Sarah Boundy

About 22 SRTA members

Apologies: Mr. M. Fallon M.P, Tunde Olatunji, Ian Rashbrook (Swanley), Matthew Hogben (Sevenoaks), Martin Lewis

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman said that the year has been overshadowed by the death of Peter Benford on 5 December 2007. The SRTA owed its existence 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. 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. Our sympathies are with his widow Myra and the other members of his family.

The past year had seen reasonable reliability and punctuality relative to past performance, but overcrowding still continues especially in the evening peak. The December 2009 timetable would offer genuine improvements offpeak, but the peak service pattern would remain the same and so there was no alleviation of overcrowding in prospect.

As regards Sevenoaks station, parking was an increasing issue. Despite the significant increase in car parking charges, including charges for Saturdays, there were now season ticket waiting lists for both car parks and there was a growing problem of unwanted car parking on the local streets. This was despite a switch of some commuters to bicycles and scooters which was causing its own problems. The case for decking at Car Park 4 was becoming overwhelming, although with the split responsibilities of the rail industry it was unclear who could take the long-term investment decision required. However after a long campaign by SRTA action had finally been taken by Network Rail earlier in 2008 to solve the problem of flooding in Car Park 1.

2. The Future of Kent's Railways: the Route Utilisation Strategy

Richard Howkins said that Network Rail had been commissioned by the Government to study the state of Kent's railways today and for the next 30 years. Baseline data had been collected on peak capacity, peak and off-peak travel patterns, journey times, passenger growth and freight capacity and capability. A draft Route Utilisation Strategy would be published in the first quarter of 2009 and there would be a three month consultation period. A final document would be published in summer/autumn 2009 which, subject to formal consideration by the Office of Rail Regulation, would then become the committed plan for Kent's railways.

Work so far had identified six major areas for action: peak capacity to and from London; services within Kent; accessibility of rail station; evening, weekend and bank holiday services; train performance; and freight capability.

The capacity limitations were due to the lack of quad track and the Hither Green level crossovers and London terminal capacity. Increasing capacity would mean solving all three. The Study would evaluate ERTMS, including its effect on Sevenoaks/Orpington capacity. In addition: integration with local feeder bus links were within scope of the Study; consideration would be given to reducing the impact of engineering work and later services in the evening; and performance improvements including optimization post-Thameslink and faster crossovers eg at Parks Bridge Junction.

Roger Johnson welcomed the list of issues reflected in Richard Howkins' presentation and summarised the additional issues and proposals made in the Association's first submission to the Study, including the developments at Dunton Green and Fort Halstead, the changing London destination pattern with the shift of employment to Docklands and the fundamental problem of the multiple capacity constraints on the Sevenoaks/London route.

In discussion points made included:

- * SER were expecting a 17% increase in capacity in the December 2009 timetable as a result of people switching to HS1; some members questioned whether this would really happen, especially as relatively few Kent commuters worked in the Kings Cross/St Pancras area.
- * SER's business model was to increase passengers off peak

3. Recent developments and current issues

Mike Gibson said that 2007-08 had been a good year with some of the best punctuality on record; complaints were down and customer satisfaction was up. Fare rises were not welcome, but it was important to understand that the rises reflected Government policy that rail investment should increasingly come from passengers and not the taxpayer.

SER were committed to work with Network Rail and Sevenoaks District Council to make improvements. SER made little money from car parking, because each place only generated one payment each day, whereas the rental, CCTV, surfacing and lighting costs were the same as a town centre car park.

In discussion the following points were made:

- * Sarah Boundy said that Oyster ticketing would be considered, but there was a problem of ungated/unmanned stations in the Sevenoaks area.
- * SER would consider the use of Portis ticket machines in the morning peaks, especially Monday.
- * SER were prepared to press for car park decking if there was a business case.
- * poor information (especially about cancellations), unreliable connections and other issues at Bat & Ball meant that many Bat & Ball residents found it easier to drive to Sevenoaks. SER agreed to consider adjusting Blackfriars train departure times to make a more reliable connection at Sevenoaks from trains arriving from London in the evening.

- * it was suggested there were too many station announcements, and they were losing their effectiveness. SER said there were some legal requirements to make security and safety announcements, and other passenger feedback had been in favour of more repetition of train service announcements.

4. Formal business

The Annual Report and the Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2007 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