

SEVENOAKS RAIL TRAVELLERS' ASSOCIATION

Annual Report for Annual General Meeting 2010

1. Annual Meeting

The Association's Annual Meeting is on Tuesday 12 October at 8pm in the hall of Christ Church URC on the corner of London Road and Kippington Road. Our guests will include Mike Gibson (Southeastern Railway), Mike Smith (Network Rail), Robert Patterson and Stuart Aitken (Arriva) and Councillor Nick Chard (Kent County Council). Sevenoaks District Council have also been invited. The meeting will include a special discussion about the state of the station and the surrounding area. There will also be an opportunity to ask the transport operating companies about issues about current services, about the preparations being made for this winter in the light of the two periods of major disruption due to snow last winter and the changes being made to bus and train services to accommodate the Dunton Green development. 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

Trains Group

Although the Kent Route Utilisation Strategy has been completed the future of its proposals now seems uncertain, and overall the Kent RUS failed to find an answer to the fundamental issues of constraints on capacity which in some cases are the legacy of the Victorian infrastructure. However the threat to Cannon Street services from 2016 still remains, and the fact that by this time there would be a new franchise creates uncertainty about who would actually take the decision. The SRTA has made strong representations about the lack of public engagement on this, and on the service plans during the scheduled London Bridge rebuilding 2012-2015.

The introduction of major timetable changes in December 2009 appear to have been broadly successful, although there have been continuing problems of timekeeping in

the final part of the morning peak. A number of train formations were adjusted in May to reflect new loadings: this appears to have eased some problems on the Charing Cross services but most Cannon Street services are still overcrowded.

Rail travellers from the Sevenoaks area were badly affected by major service disruptions caused by the snowfalls before and after Christmas 2009. The Association conducted a survey of its members and supporters about their experiences during the December and January snowfalls. The survey found:

- * Respondents had abandoned their rail travel plans on an average of 3 days
- * Uncertainty about train service – and about the return journey in the evening – was the major factor in deciding not to travel – the prospect of long, uncomfortable journeys was less significant
- * Three quarters (76%) of people found the Southeastern Railways website inaccurate
- * Four out of five (82%) of people found the electronic Customer Information Displays at stations inaccurate
- * Respondents found station staff helpful and available, but found them just as starved of information.

While one can accept that it may be difficult to run all services just after heavy snow, these days there can be no excuse of inaccurate and out of date websites and station information displays. In addition the emergency timetable once again had shortcomings, not least where the later use of the Saturday timetable had very poor timekeeping and was accompanied by Saturday-length trains, compounding the overcrowding problem.

The threatened strike in April was thankfully called off, but the proposed emergency timetable was disappointing in only providing service from 0700 to 1900.

Stations Group

The Stations Group has continued to press issues of ticket queues, ticket vending machines, graffiti and station information and announcements with SER.

The Association continued its support for the better integration of transport services, including better provision for cyclists and better bus services to and from the Sevenoaks station. This would have economic and environmental benefits. However the current amount of cycle parking spaces are already overwhelmed and the lack of sufficient, secure cycle parking is a disincentive to the target of doubling the number of people cycling to the station suggested for the District Council Cycling Plan. We continue to work with the Sevenoaks Cycling Forum on this.

Motorcycle and scooter parking is also a problem, with the pavement in the taxi area increasingly being used as a scooter park. Again the lack of suitable parking for alternatives increases the number of people who use their cars and so the pressure on car parking at the station.

The Association meets regularly with the Sevenoaks Society and the Sevenoaks Cycling Forum on local transport and environment issues.

Membership

At the end of September 2010 the Association's membership had risen to 41 Life Members and 34 current 2-year Members.

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