

SEVENOAKS RAIL TRAVELLERS' ASSOCIATION

Annual Report for Annual General Meeting 2012

1. Annual Meeting

The Association's Annual Meeting is on Tuesday 9 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), Tim Bellenger (London Travelwatch), Linda McCord (Passenger Focus), Peter Fleming and Jill Davison (Sevenoaks District Council), David Brazier (Kent County Council), Austin Blackburn (Go-Coach Buses) and Robert Patterson (Arriva).

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. According to the latest available annual statistics, more than 4.5 million train journeys began or ended at our stations, and there are more than **3000 daily commuters** from the Sevenoaks area.

During the year we have had meetings with Southeastern, with Network Rail, and with Kent County Council, Sevenoaks District Council and Sevenoaks Town Council, and have had regular correspondence with all of these. We have regularly briefed Michael Fallon, the MP for Sevenoaks, on rail issues and helped him take up issues with the Department for Transport and with the London Mayor.

The Association is in regular touch with the Sevenoaks Society and the Sevenoaks Cycling Forum on local transport and environment issues.

Our comments on rail issues have been regularly sought and printed by the Sevenoaks Chronicle, and our website www.srta.org.uk has been regularly updated with news about rail issues. During the past year we have appeared twice on BBC Radio Kent and given one interview to a BBC South East TV programme. We have issued periodic email updates to our members and supporters. We have also developed a presence on Twitter at @sevenoaksrailta.

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

The year has been dominated by the start of the London Bridge rebuilding and the forthcoming re-franchising exercises for both the South Eastern and Thameslink operations. In addition the intervention of the Mayor for London with his *Vision for Rail* has raised the possibility of the transfer of responsibility for all existing Southeastern Metro services to Transport for London.

Regular travellers through London Bridge cannot fail to see the massive new bridge which has been erected to carry Charing Cross trains as part of the London Bridge rebuilding. The past year has seen more detail begin to emerge of the implications for travellers of this project. During the rebuilding certain trains will be unable to call at London Bridge due to the engineering works. From 2015, for 18 months Charing Cross trains will not stop as their regular platforms are rebuilt and this will be followed by a further 18 months when Cannon Street trains will be unable to stop. It will also likely to involve a reduction in the overall number of trains able to be run. SRTA has been pressing Network Rail and SER to consult with rail user groups ahead of publishing final plans.

The SRTA's campaign together with other user groups to retain the current Cannon Street fast services appears to have been successful. Their future was linked with the proposal to introduce peak period Thameslink services on the SE mainline. Investigations by the operators have shown that it is impractical to merge the 20 minute frequency SE service pattern (needed to maximise the platform usage at the London termini) with the 15 minute frequency of the Thameslink service. Consequently it now appears that no SE mainline peak services will be diverted to Thameslink and the existing mainline service level and general pattern (including the Cannon Street fasts) will be retained.

Your committee submitted responses to both the Thameslink and South Eastern franchises. Both are short franchises covering just the period to the end of the London Bridge rebuilding. The questions issued by the DfT covered all aspects of the services. Many of the questions were common to both. SRTA's response stressed the importance of reliability, adequate seating capacity, value for money on ticketing, reducing journey times and good customer information. We also urged that a major factor in awarding the new franchises should be a proven ability to manage passengers effectively in time of disruption given the inevitability of mishaps during the London Bridge works.

On the specific franchises, we expressed strong support for the Maidstone East service to become a Thameslink route as soon as possible (although realistically this is probably 2018). This would provide residents in the Sevenoaks area with a valuable alternative fast route between Otford, the City and north London via Blackfriars in both the peak and offpeak. Its introduction should coincide with the opening of Crossrail with its links to Heathrow and Docklands with a major new interchange at Farringdon. We argued strongly for the retention of the Bat & Ball service broadly as now. We argued that both services should operate via the Thameslink core to north of London rather than terminating at Blackfriars since without this Kent would receive almost no benefit at all from the massive investment in upgrading the Thameslink route.

On the South Eastern franchise we called for all peak trains via Sevenoaks to be the maximum length, better customer information and better value for money on ticketing. We accepted that the present peak service pattern is probably the most satisfactory usage of the

limited number of train paths available through Sevenoaks. We proposed the introduction of later last services from London, especially at the weekends.

Finally SRTA was very pleased to note that rail travel during the Olympic period was largely problem free and welcomed the positive coverage of SER's Olympic services especially between St Pancras and Strateford.

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 refurbishment of Sevenoaks stations has been completed as discussed at the last AGM and is largely satisfactory. The Association, working with the Sevenoaks Cycling Forum, pressed for improvements to the unsuitable bicycle racks initially installed and these have been altered. We continue to press for a second Ticket Vending Machine to be installed on the Kippington side of the station, particularly as the barrier staff have become less willing to let people cross from the Kippington side to the Town side in order to buy tickets.

We had a meeting with the Southeastern Railway team who design the TVM software to discuss improvements to make the system easier to use and to give greater prominence to the cheapest fares.

SRTA has been asked several times about the position of a passenger with an Advanced purchase ticket to a station beyond London who suffers a delay with SER which prevents them catching the train specified on their ticket for the second part of their journey. Passengerfocus have confirmed to SRTA that provided the passenger allowed adequate time (for example as specified by the NR Enquiries website) to catch the onward connection the ticket must be honoured and the passenger permitted to travel by the first available train for the subsequent leg of the journey. SER have agreed to SRTA's request that their staff be reminded of the position since SER staff have appeared unclear about the position possibly because SER do not sell Advanced purchase tickets.

Fares

For 2012 only, the increase in fares was capped by the Government to RPI+1% and Southeastern Railway appear to have applied a standard percentage increase to all fares - instead of imposing an above-average increase on Sevenoaks travellers as has happened in recent years. The increase in the season ticket price from Sevenoaks to London was therefore 5.82%.

At a more strategic level the Association is becoming concerned about ticketing policy since the new Thameslink franchise will mean that there are two different train operators running trains from Sevenoaks and from Otford - with the possibility of a third operator, TFL, should the London Mayor's proposal to take over the Dunton Green services be accepted. It is important, for instance, that tickets continue to be valid by all the different routes available as they are at the moment under a single operator.

SRTA has been examining the implications of a suggested extension of the London Travelcard zones towards Sevenoaks. TfL have proposed that, if they were to assume responsibility for Metro services, Dunton Green would be placed in Zone 7 while Sevenoaks

would be outside the zoned area. However, as happens at Watford Junction already, Oystercards would be accepted at Sevenoaks and a fare set for “Sevenoaks and Zones 1-7”. In such a scenario TfL would set the zoned fares while the SE franchiseholder as the main operator from Sevenoaks would set the Sevenoaks fare. While having two potentially competing franchiseholders both operating services in the very restricted corridor between Sevenoaks and Orpington could risk an adverse impact on current mainline service levels, the current fares from Watford Junction suggest that TfL’s presence would provide a downward pressure on the levels of fare increase from Sevenoaks applied by the mainline franchiseholder. SRTA will continue to monitor this position very carefully.

Membership

At the end of September 2012 the Association’s membership was 55 Life Members and 20 current 2-year Members.

We are grateful to colleagues who serve on the committee for their continuing time and support which is essential to our work. Since both the Chairman and the Secretary have retired from full-time work this year we would particularly like to hear from regular commuters who would be prepared to join the Committee; the duties are not onerous!

Dr. R. G. Johnson (Chairman)
9, Chipstead Park Close
Chipstead,
Sevenoaks TN13 2SJ

A C Stott (Secretary)
PO Box 191
Sevenoaks,
Kent, TN13 2AW