

SEVENOAKS RAIL TRAVELLERS' ASSOCIATION

Summer 2007 Newsletter

1. Annual Meeting

The Association's Annual Meeting is on October 10th at 8pm in the hall of [Christ Church URC](#) on the corner of London Road and Kippington Road. Charles Horton, MD of Southeastern Railway has agreed to be our guest speaker, if he free on that date; otherwise he will ask a senior colleague of his to attend in his place. Whoever comes will be willing to answer questions. We hope that you can ask as good questions this year as you did last year.

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, together with (one or more) advertisements in the Sevenoaks Chronicle and other media.

2. How do we see ourselves?

We exist as a pressure group to maintain/improve rail services from Sevenoaks, Dunton Green, Bat & Ball, Otford, Shoreham and Eynsford. 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 in 2006/07

The SRTA Web Page

Our report sent out just under a year ago referred to the new SRTA web page, then under development. The address is the same (www.srta.org.uk), and thanks to one of our committee members, Colin Miles, it is now well developed. It contains information about the Association, including some of the papers that have been written for the Committee (sometimes abridged).

It also contains links to the main Southeastern Railway web page, a summary of engineering works on specific dates and, finally, a summary the platform indicators at Sevenoaks station. This last shows how services are running through Sevenoaks (on time or late) – useful if you want to arrive in London in time for a meeting (but delays can occur between Sevenoaks and London). There is also a link to the travel information broadcast on Radio Kent.

Fares

Sevenoaks season ticket fares rose by 10.7% in January 2007. SER justified this on the grounds that fares from Sevenoaks had fallen out of line with those from stations further away from London. In general terms fare rises were, for some years, limited to 1% less than inflation. However, Sevenoaks is in London for the purpose of fare regulation, and the 'Transport for London' component of our fares was allowed (by law) to rise at the rate of inflation. The 'rail' part of our fares was therefore falling in real terms at more than 1% p.a. We believe that the 2007 fare increase will have largely corrected this anomaly and that a further substantial fare increase at the beginning of 2008 should not be necessary.

Eurostar

We have been concerned at Eurostar's plans to reduce the number of its services calling at Ashford to four (three to Paris and one to Marne la Vallee (Disneyland)). It was clear that Eurostar was not going to increase the number of services calling at Ashford in response to protests by anyone. As the present Ashford-Paris services call at Calais, the Association therefore asked Eurostar to stop the Ashford-Paris services at Lille instead, to provide connections to Brussels and provincial France. (The Ashford-Lille service is currently provided by the Brussels services that call at Ashford, but these will cease to call there after November.) We have now learned that only one Paris-Ashford service will call at Lille (and that too early for connections from provincial France), leaving the Marne la Vallee services to provide connections to and from Toulouse, Marseille, Bordeaux and, with a longer wait, Avignon. (The non-stop service to Avignon should run in the summer.)

We have also heard that from 19th November, there will be free travel to Ashford (and Ebbsfleet, which is virtually inaccessible from Sevenoaks by rail) on production of your passport and confirmation of your Eurostar ticket.

4. The 2007 Timetable - effective from Sunday December 7th.

Sevenoaks

The chief object of the 2007 timetable for services into Charing Cross and Cannon Street is to improve the flow of trains through London Bridge. The main changes are:

- (a) The 0641 Sevenoaks, fast to Charing Cross, will call at London Bridge at 0704.
- (b) The 1650 from Charing Cross will terminate at Tunbridge Wells (the Margate service will depart at 1646 and not call at Sevenoaks).
- (c) The present 1722 from Cannon Street will depart at 1720.
- (d) The present 1845 from Charing Cross will depart at 1850.
- (e) The present 2337 from Charing Cross to Hastings will call at Sevenoaks at 0010.
- (f) Two new services to Swanley will depart Sevenoaks at 1855 and 1921 to improve connections to Bat & Ball and Otford from Charing Cross.
- (g) The present off-peak fast services to London at xx30 and xx59 will depart at xx28 and xx56. Some slow off-peak services from Sevenoaks will call at Lewisham Junction.

There are improvements to late afternoon and early evening services to London on Monday to Fridays and the gap in Saturday morning services at 0900 to London looks as though it will be 'filled'. For both these changes see the timetables when they are published.

Otford

Here is a summary of the morning peak fast services to Victoria and Blackfriars in the 2007 timetable, departing Otford:

0709	Arr. Victoria	0749
0719	Blackf.	0803
0732	Victoria	0817 (with connection to Bfr. (0830), change at Denmark Hill)
0750	"	0830
0807	"	0853
0840	"	0918
0907	"	0950

Regular travellers on this line will note that SER have reshuffled fast services between 0700 and 0740, but speeding up some services to Victoria is the main *gain* in the mornings from the Eurostars no longer using the main line via Herne Hill. There are some small changes in departure times in the morning and evening peaks, also later in the evening. Our advice is that you should check the detail from the timetables when they become available.

As we have no Otford commuter on our Committee, we would welcome any comments on this change from regular users. Even better if one of you would like to join the Committee!

5. Longer Term Issues

In last year's report we referred to a paper written to try to establish the number of commuters from Ashford and beyond, who would wish to use the high-speed services to St Pancras from 2009. (This is essential in order to work out what service is required on the main line through Sevenoaks to minimise standing by local commuters.) SER have taken note of this and appear to be studying the issue carefully. More information may be available at the Annual Meeting.

The first part of the Thameslink project is due for completion in 2011. This covers the northern part of the project down to the new Blackfriars station. The rest of the project - London Bridge and southwards - will not be completed until 2015. This means that we will have to endure the present limitations of the system at a time when rail traffic is growing.

6. Stations Group

The change at Sevenoaks that has had most publicity is the **new flooring** on the station concourse. We would like to thank the Sevenoaks Chronicle and Michael Fallon M.P. for their help in persuading SER to provide a safer environment for passengers.

We hope to achieve similar success with another issue we have been raising with the train operators for some time, the regular **flooding of the No. 1 (Kippington) car park**. This issue is the responsibility of Network Rail, but we have to approach them through SER who have promised to ask the NR officer responsible for dealing with this problem to visit Sevenoaks for the next meeting of the Stations' Group.

Another long-running issue with SER (and its predecessor) is the operation of the **Ticket Vending Machines** (TVM's). We are concerned that dearer peak fares can be bought after cheap-day fares have come into operation; that the machines offer too many confusing choices simultaneously and assume that intending passengers are familiar with the rail network and the variety of tickets offered. The poor location of the credit card readers and the illegibility of the instructions are other matters of concern. We have begun to have a real dialogue with SER on these issues, who have acknowledged that these machines are not very user-friendly.

Beyond these main issues, the Group deals with a number of (smaller) issues, often at the smaller stations, such as disabled access to the up platform at Bat & Ball and providing train service information at the same station.

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