

WEST SUSSEX RAIL USERS ASSOCIATION

64, Brampton Court, Stockbridge Road, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8PD

Tel: 01243 788028. E-mail: contact@wsrua.org.uk :

Web site : www.wsrua.org.uk twitter.com/wsrua

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New Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern Franchise

We surveyed our membership during the summer and used your responses to draw up a list of priorities for the next franchise period. We had already met 3 of the 5 bidders for the new franchise when the process was thrown into confusion with the fiasco of the award of the West Coast franchise to First Group and the subsequent challenge by Virgin. All refranchising in the pipeline has been put on hold awaiting two reports to the Department of Transport on what has gone wrong. It is clear that there are serious flaws in the DfT procedures and we doubt the bidding process for our new franchise will resume very soon. It is fortunate that the existing Southern franchise still has nearly 2 years to run and they will continue to provide our services until July 2015. Our priorities for the new franchise can be viewed via the WSRUA web site Campaigns page www.wsrua.org.uk/campaigns.htm

December timetable changes

The new timetable starts on Sunday 9th December 2012 and there are some changes to the existing timetable. The Monday-Friday London Bridge service is retimed slightly north of Three Bridges and will (should!) arrive at East Croydon 3 minutes **earlier** at 08.24 and London Bridge at 08.41. The return service will leave London Bridge 3 minutes **later** at 17.50 but arrival times will be as now. The 17.32, 18.02 and 18.32 southbound trains from Victoria will all leave 2 minutes **later** but arrival times will be as now. The 18.02 will make an additional stop at Gatwick Airport adding a bit to the loadings but useful to those joining there and saving a change at Three Bridges. The final weekday change is an additional late evening service from Southampton at 23.12 to Chichester 00.05 and Barnham 00.14. This train currently runs empty from Southampton so putting in a few stops and carrying those late-night owls will be a useful addition and will also reduce the night-time noise in our flat as it will no longer be passing through Chichester at 75mph!

There are also changes to our Sunday services. The hourly service from Bognor to Victoria will call additionally at Coulsdon South. The East Surrey Rail Users have been pressing for this extra stop for several years and Southern agreed to the request which goes to show that rail user groups have influence. Fortunately, the extra stop will not add anything to departure and arrival times for Arun Valley and Coastway passengers. There are improvements for Sunday West Coastway services with 8-10 minutes shorter journey times between Brighton and Portsmouth/Southampton. Full details of these changes will be in the new pocket timetables available later this month.

Your Committee

Apart from the franchise bidding meetings, your Committee has been active in several other areas. We have attended, and contributed to, several meetings of a Horsham District Council Committee dealing with concerns around disruption to rail services in bad weather. We have continued to support the Arun Valley Community Rail Partnership and the Partnership's co-ordinator Pene Mather. It is due to Pene that the Aldingbourne Trust now provides many of our stations with hanging baskets and other floral displays. Pene has also arranged for local organisations and schools to provide artworks at a number of Arun Valley stations. We have also kept a close eye of the Horsham station redevelopment which is virtually complete and we attended the official opening by the DfT Minister on Monday of this week.

Fares increases

The arrangements established by the Government for the annual round of increases to regulated fares, standard singles and returns and season tickets provided for an increase of 6.2% from 6 January 2013. This increase is the July 2012 RPI increase plus 3%. This huge increase drew a lot of criticism, not only because of its size well ahead of wage inflation but also because there was a spike in the July RPI of about 1 percentage point. After a few weeks, DfT bowed to the pressure and revised the increase to RPI

plus 1% meaning that fares will now increase by 4.2% in January, still exceedingly high compared with current movements in incomes. We have no news yet on how Southern will apply the 4.2% or on what increases, in any, there will be on non-regulated fares, mainly cheap day returns and advance tickets.

In the meantime, the only real offer is on advance tickets. If you are fortunate and book well ahead, it is possible to get tickets with up to a 25% reduction to Gatwick, East Croydon or Victoria. These advance tickets are for one-way travel and often it is cheaper to book an off-peak return if you are coming back the same day.

Arun Valley Line resignalling

The Arun Valley line between Christ's Hospital and Amberley is one of the last main lines in Great Britain still using mechanical signalling. It is controlled by three 19th century signal boxes at Billingshurst, Pulborough and Amberley. The replacement of all of this by modern colour light signals controlled centrally has been on the cards for several years. We have been told by Network Rail that the Arun Valley scheme is due to start shortly with anticipated completion/commissioning in October 2013, providing all goes to plan. The scheme will renew all the signalling between Christ's Hospital and Amberley with modern colour light signals that will not only increase route capacity but also improve headways, increasing reliability in this area of the network. Level crossings on the route will be renewed and re-controlled; also the existing crossovers at Billingshurst and Pulborough will be fully signalled so that train services can be better managed during engineering works which should reduce rail replacement bus journeys in the future.

Inevitably this scale of this work will require the railway to be closed on some weekends and we expect Southern to work with Network Rail to keep closures to a minimum. The timetable impact during the works and the possibilities for permanent timetable amendments are still to be confirmed at this time. When the work is completed, signalling on our line will be controlled from the Three Bridges Signalling Centre.

Refreshment trolleys

We have been pressing Southern to re-introduce these trolleys but so far without success. We have suggested some options to them and hope these are being explored. There is a franchise commitment for the provision of refreshments and we have reminded Southern of this. If all else fails, we might be able to call on the services of an entrepreneurial young Dutchman who boarded a train that I was on at Zwolle. On his back was a large rucksack full of flasks of hot water and strapped to the rucksack was a column of about 50 coffee-filled paper cups and a bag of milk and sugar sachets. I don't know whether he was an official seller but he had a lot of customers for his coffee at 1.50 euros a cup and when he got off at Leeuwarden an hour down the line, he had no cups left. Any member fancy doing this?

Membership

I enclose a renewal form for those members who have not paid their membership subscription for 2012. I will be asking Members to renew their subscription for 2013 in March or April when we have settled the date and venue for our AGM.

On a sad note I have to record the deaths of 3 long-standing members. Earl Kitchener and Peter Dempsey (our Crawley representative for many years) both died earlier in the year, and Colin Curtis OBE died in September. Colin had worked for London Transport and was instrumental in the engineering design of the Routemaster bus. Since his retirement he was very involved in the preservation of Crawley signal box as well as several bus preservation societies.

And, finally, your Committee wishes you a very happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year free of disruptions!

Trevor Tupper
Membership Secretary