

WEST SUSSEX RAIL USERS ASSOCIATION

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In this newsletter there are details of the continuing industrial action, membership renewal, Easter engineering work, performance, timetable changes and wifi developments.

Industrial action

The RMT is extending the misery caused to passengers by calling a further 1 day strike on Saturday 8 April and has linked it with similar planned strikes on Merseyrail and Northern Rail. Both of these Operators serve Aintree Racecourse and it is rather more than coincidence that the 8 April is the date of the Grand National. Southern will be meeting the RMT on 4 April in an attempt to bring an end to this long running dispute. The drivers' Union ASLEF agreed a settlement with Southern a few days ago and this has been put to their members with a recommendation to accept. The result of their ballot will be known on 3 April.

If the April 8 strike goes ahead, Southern expect to operate most of their services. On the last one day strike they operated 92% of the service and they expect to be able to repeat that next week.

On the RMT dispute, Southern has now introduced the On Board Supervisor (OBS) role and many conductors have moved to this new role. Southern has confirmed that every train that had a conductor will have either a conductor as before or an OBS. The main change is that responsibility for closing train doors on those trains equipped with CCTV and at stations with adequate lighting passes to the driver. Where there is no CCTV, as on the class 313s used on the Coastway, conductors will remain in charge of door closing.

Some of the problems in 2016 were caused by driver and conductor shortages. Hopefully this will be a thing of the past as some 160 new drivers have completed their training and a further 90 are being trained. And 100 new OBS's have been recruited and many of these have completed their training

Membership Renewal

Our membership year runs from 1 March and subscriptions for 2017-18 are now due. Many members have already paid their subscription either directly or by standing order. If you have not paid, a renewal form is enclosed. The subscription remains at £2 and can be paid by cheque through the post, by direct bank credit or by standing order, the renewal form gives details of all these options. A few did not pay their subscription for last year and 2015 and rather than deleting them as members, we are asking them to pay for 2 or 3 years and for those members the payment slip shows £4 or £6 as appropriate.

Easter Engineering work

For the forthcoming Bank Holiday weekend, for once, there are no major works other than at Victoria on Easter Sunday and no blockades. On Easter Sunday, Victoria will be closed and all our trains will start and terminate at London Bridge. On that day the line between Barnham and Bognor Regis will be closed with buses replacing trains. On Sunday April 9 there will be engineering work between Three Bridges and Billingshurst with replacement buses.

Performance update

At last, there are signs of improvement and this is reflected in the latest update to the Joint Improvement Plan put together by Network Rail, Southern and Thameslink. This can be downloaded at <http://www.southernrailway.com/your-journey/performance-results/performance-improvement-plan/> .

There is hope that the figures will improve further over the coming months if there is a cessation of the industrial action and improvements to the resilience of the Network Rail infrastructure, failures of which were responsible for over 50% of delays in 2016.

Looking ahead

The second stage of the consultation on the 2018 timetable starts in a few weeks and we will be involved in this. We will report on the proposals in a future Newsletter. From what we have seen so far, the main effect for the Arun Valley line is the replacement of the current Southern services between Horsham and London Bridge by Thameslink trains running through London Bridge and on to Peterborough. The services between Victoria and Bognor/Portsmouth/Southampton are likely to remain much as now. However, we have received some confirmation that our daily service from Southampton and Bognor to London Bridge will remain and that we might get the addition of a Chichester and Portsmouth portion on the return service. We will be pressing for improvements to West Coastway services particularly on the hourly trains between Portsmouth and Brighton (Southern's one Inter-City service as it connects the only three cities on the Southern Network outside London – Portsmouth, Chichester and Brighton) with fewer stops and replacing the 40 year-old class 313s with class 377s Electrostars which are air-conditioned and have toilets.

Wifi

Southern plans to equip all the Class 377 Electrostars with wifi and power points by 2020. Many Southern stations now have wifi facilities and my experience of this at Chichester and Horsham has been good. For those of you who use the new Class 700 Thameslink units, these will also get wifi and seat back tables (the latter will be retro-fitted to the units already in service).

Timetable

There are no significant timetable changes in May. The next major timetable change will be in 2018 and as mentioned above we will be involved in the consultation.

Trevor Tupper
Secretary/Treasurer