

WEST SUSSEX RAIL USERS ASSOCIATION

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In this newsletter there are details of the further industrial action by both the Drivers' Union ASLEF and the RMT, the Chris Gibb report on Southern, the 2018 timetable, performance, and August Bank Holiday engineering work.

Industrial action

ASLEF has announced that its Southern drivers will be banning overtime working from Thursday 29 June for an indefinite period. Southern say that the effects of the overtime ban will not be as serious as last December. They have produced emergency versions of the pocket timetables covering our area for **Monday to Friday services**. I had intended to attach copies of those affecting our services - no.13 (Southampton/Portsmouth to Brighton), no. 15 (Crawley and Horsham) and no. 16 Southampton/Portsmouth, Chichester and London but when I had a look at these 3 timetables I found there are no cancellations of any of our services. Should you wish to check these timetables they can be downloaded from www.southernrailway.com/your-journey/dispute/travel-advice-for-aslef-industrial-action-on-29-30-june. These emergency timetables strictly start on Monday 3 July and the Southern website indicates that there will be no through services from Victoria to either Portsmouth or Southampton on Thursday 29 and Friday 28 June. I have queried this with Southern and I am awaiting a response. What I think will happen on those two days is that there will be no Portsmouth or Southampton portion on any of our trains and passengers for Chichester and west of Chichester will need to change at Barnham in both directions. From 3 July, you will see that Portsmouth and Southampton portions are resumed. On **Saturdays and Sundays** from 1 July, Southern plans to run the full normal timetable. The action by ASLEF is rather surprising as the Union agreed a settlement with Southern some weeks ago but it was rejected by members. A more recent offer of an increase of nearly 25% in basic pay over 3 years was also rejected. Had it been accepted it would have eventually increased a driver's basic pay to around £60,000 p.a. for a 4 day 35 hour week and with normal overtime/rest day working this pay would reach £70,000 p.a.

In addition to the ASLEF action, the RMT is planning a further one day strike by its conductor members on Monday 10 July again linked with similar planned strikes on Merseyrail and Northern Rail. If this 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 on 10 July. I will keep you in touch with developments on this.

Surprisingly, this fresh industrial action is being taken even though drivers, conductors and on board supervisors (OBS) have been working their new roles since January with a marked improvement in performance. There have been no losses of staff and Southern has confirmed that every train that had a conductor will have either a conductor as before or an OBS.

Chris Gibb's report

Chris Gibb's independent report to the Department for Transport on the Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) Franchise commissioned and completed last year was finally published last week. The report is very detailed and runs to some 163 pages and can be read at www.gov.uk/government/publications/southern-rail-network-gibb-report

Mr Gibb's initial findings are in this paragraph of the Report:

3.2 The Southern System

On Southern all the elements of the system have been under strain: unreliable infrastructure, a timetable that is very tight and with overcrowded peak services, some key stations that are overcrowded, depots that are full and for historic reasons are in the wrong place, and people that are involved in informal and formal industrial action. The system cannot possibly work to passengers' satisfaction with these components in this state.

The Report details the main causes of problems during 2016 as the infrastructure being inadequately managed, and the industrial action by the RMT and ASLEF. It also details the problems of shortage of drivers at the start of the franchise, too many underused off-peak services and too many services to 7 stations with low passenger usage – included in these are Amberley and Warnham. Some action has already been taken by Network Rail to make improvements to the infrastructure and further action is planned. £300m has been made available for this. Some Southern night trains on the Brighton Main line have been removed from the timetable to allow NR greater access. Finally, Mr Gibb says that the franchise should remain with GTR.

2018 Timetable

The second stage of the consultation on the 2018 timetable is now underway and we will be meeting the Southern team shortly to discuss what is being proposed. We have already mentioned replacement of the current Southern services between Horsham and London Bridge by Thameslink trains running through London Bridge and on to Peterborough. We are told that there will be two Arun Valley services running to and from London Bridge and at least one will have a portion for Chichester and Portsmouth. The services between Victoria and Bognor/Portsmouth/Southampton are likely to remain much as now except that the 16.36 from Victoria will split at Horsham rather than Three Bridges. There are unlikely to be any changes to services on the West Coastway between Brighton and Portsmouth/Southampton and this includes continued use of the awful class 313s. Interestingly, Chris Gibb recommends replacing the 313s in his Report, so we may yet succeed on this!

Performance update

Performance continues to improve and this was confirmed by GTR at their Stakeholder Forum a few weeks ago Network Rail continue to be responsible for over half of the delays but their current activity should reduce this. There will, of course, be a deterioration if the industrial action is resumed on Thursday.

August Bank Holiday Engineering work

There are no major works affecting our services over the Bank Holiday weekend. From Monday 28 to Thursday 31 August Network Rail will be carrying out engineering work between Horsham and Barnham closing the line with buses replacing trains between 22:00 to 04:00 each night. There will be no trains to or from London Bridge via Sydenham on Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 August and trains that usually run between London Bridge and Horsham will be diverted to Victoria.

Membership Renewal

Most members have paid their 2017 subscriptions. 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 members have not paid the subscription for last year and, in a few instances, 2015. Rather than deleting them, we are asking these members for payment for 2 or 3 years and the payment slip shows £4 or £6 as appropriate.

Trevor Tupper
Secretary/Treasurer