
BEXHILL RAIL ACTION GROUP (BRAG)

NEWSLETTER - AUTUMN 2010

TRAIN SERVICES

December 2010 Timetable. Readers may recall that a controversial proposal to re-structure the East Coastway and Marshlink timetable was dropped earlier this year after strong representations by BRAG and other user groups. The changes this December will therefore be relatively minor.

BRAG remains very concerned about journey times on the East Coastway, especially on services to London which will increase by a couple of minutes to fit around a new fast service from Brighton. Together with other groups we have made representations to Southern and local MPs. We question why there should be 8 trains an hour between London and Brighton, but just two per hour between London and the East and West Coastways combined. Our trains divide and attach at Haywards Heath, adding to journey times and also suffer significant overcrowding throughout the day.

On a more positive note, rural stations at Three Oaks and Winchelsea will regain an all-day service, operating every 2 hours - after a gap of five years; while the busy 18.47 from Victoria will gain an extra 4 carriages.

Southern has told us it has no plans to introduce the older 'Class 313' trains on services in the Bexhill area, but BRAG will continue to monitor the situation.

Connections. BRAG would like to hear experiences of those connecting at Hampden Park and St Leonards Warrior Square. Many advertised connections are just 4 minutes, with some as little as 2 minutes, and rather dicey.

Marshlink overcrowding. The worst overcrowding locally continues to be on the Brighton – Ashford service between Hastings and Brighton. This service operates with a limited pool of 2 car diesel trains, because the line is un-electrified between Ore and Ashford. In the current financial climate there appears to be little prospect of additional carriages or electrification. Southern recently proposed truncating the service to operate the diesel train between Ashford and Eastbourne only, supplemented by additional electric trains westwards to Brighton. BRAG along with many other stakeholders was concerned at the many gaps in the proposals, and concluded that the loss of the through service would have significant disadvantages for passengers wishing to travel via Ashford, would not assist the long-term economics of the Marshlink, and would also be incompatible with local re-generation objectives.

STATIONS

Bexhill recently won the national 'Best Small Station' award. BRAG would like to congratulate the staff at Bexhill and Southern for this achievement, and recognises the significant investment that has gone into improving Bexhill and other local stations in recent years.

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Eurostar through-ticketing. Through ticketing is now available from local stations to Eurostar destinations in continental Europe. The add-on fare is approximately £12 return. See www.eurostar.com. However, this option is of limited use for local people - currently only being available on bookings via St Pancras. We have repeatedly requested that a similar facility be made available via Ashford, which offers much quicker connections to passengers from East Sussex. We understand this option will go live in January.

The Germans are coming (we hope!). German national rail operator Deutsche Bahn (DB) has announced that it will begin test-running of its high-speed Inter City Express train (ICE) through the Channel Tunnel this autumn, with a view to running regular through services between the UK and Germany from 2013. Cologne and Frankfurt are likely destinations. BRAG has established direct contact with the project team and together with other stakeholders in Kent and East Sussex will lobby for the new services to call at Ashford International, and for through ticketing.

RAIL POLICY

Deficit Reduction. At the moment we simply don't know what the financial squeeze is likely to mean for the railways, but we expect there will be one! This may impact on both infrastructure investment and train services. BRAG's bottom-line is that Bexhill must maintain all-day through services to the current range of destinations, that is, Ashford, Brighton and London Victoria via Gatwick Airport. Watch this space!

Franchise Consultation. The Department for Transport has launched a Consultation into the future of rail franchising. In summary the government is proposing longer franchises, and that operators have more freedom in the services that they run. BRAG is considering its response but would not support any regime that sets the bar low, and brings with it the prospect of fewer trains and higher fares. In our area we have the example of the London – Brighton route, where two competing rail companies are chasing the same revenue pot through the over-provision of services, to the detriment of the East and West Sussex Coastway lines.

The Consultation document can be downloaded from

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open/2010-28/>

Responses must be submitted by 18th October 2010. BRAG would like to hear from supporters before submitting its response. Contact us by email on bexrag@yahoo.co.uk

BARGAIN CORNER

The Daysave Ticket has to be one of the great bargains of all-time. For £10 per person or £20 for a group of 4 it allows unlimited travel on the Southern network at off-peak times and weekends. Children travel for an additional £1 each. You can't use it before 10am Mon-Fri, or on homebound trains from London stations between 4 – 7pm. You can order it online at least 7 days in advance at www.southernrailway.com or buy it instantly from the tourist information centres in Eastbourne and Hastings.

Advance Fares. Check out the Southern website for 25% off Advance Fares, which are as low as £2.50 one way from Bexhill to London for holders of eligible railcards. Also, the recently introduced 'Super Group' tickets are a new type of advance purchase ticket: 2 people travel for £8 one way; 5 people for £15 and 10 people for £20. Both offers are to selected longer-distance destinations including London and Gatwick Airport.

Discount Railcards. Get 10% off the cost of a new 16-25 or **Senior Railcard** when you buy online at www.railcard.co.uk. Enter code **Senior10** for the Senior Railcard or **Save10** for the **16-25 Railcard**. Promotional price is £23.40 for either railcard (usually £26). Postage and packing included. Both cards are valid for 1 year and give 34% off most journeys. For the **Family and Friends Railcard**, which has other terms and conditions and benefits, enter code **Family10** for the same deal. Time restrictions and minimum fares may apply on all cards, see website for details. Promotion runs to 31.12.10

Don't forget the Network Railcard if you don't qualify for any of the above. Anybody can buy one (£25) either at your local station or online at www.railcard.co.uk. Although it has more time and minimum fare restrictions than other railcards, it too offers 34% discount on most travel in the southeast. From Bexhill stations it can save you over £9 each time on a combined off peak Day Return-Travelcards, meaning that it will have paid for itself after just three trips to London.

And remember.... if you have a disability you may qualify for the **Disabled Person's Railcard**. This costs £18 for 1 year, and gives you and a companion 34% off most rail fares. For further information see www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk.

All information believed to be correct at time of writing.

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that you can travel 3 different routes between Bexhill and London? These are

1. Using the through service to Victoria via Haywards Heath, operated by Southern.
2. To Charing Cross/Cannon St via Tunbridge Wells on Southeastern, changing at St Leonards Warrior Square

3. To London St Pancras, changing at Ashford International, via the Marshlink and Southeastern High Speed services.

When comparing journey time, frequency, cost or accessibility, one route may be more convenient than another depending on the time of day. Where you are travelling to and from in London is also a factor. For the time-rich/cash-poor, the Southern service to Victoria comes out on top, especially with some of the low-cost advance fare deals on offer (see above).

Generally, the best early morning connections to London are via Ashford; the Tunbridge Wells route is quickest during the day, while those returning later in the evening may feel safest using the through trains from Victoria.

When weekend engineering works take place, it may be quicker and less hassle to go via an alternative route than take the replacement bus.

Check the validity of your ticket because the cheapest fares are usually only valid on the Southern route to/from Victoria.

Did you know (2) that it is the same ('Anytime') fare at peak times from Hastings/Bexhill/Eastbourne to Brighton and onwards to destinations as far west as Worthing? The fare is £16.80. Break of journey is permitted.

SUPPORT BRAG

Website – would you or your organisation like to sponsor the BRAG website? We have an increasing number of 'hits', and the media and other stakeholders regularly contact us via this route. For under £40 per year, your logo and a link to your own website could be displayed on our homepage. Please email our webmaster Gareth Smith on bexrag@yahoo.co.uk

Join BRAG – The more members and supporters we have the more effective we can be in lobbying for improvements to local rail services. Be the first to know what is going on. Membership is only £5 per year and you can be as active as you wish! For further details, please email our Treasurer, Martin Woodfine on bexrag@yahoo.co.uk

BRAG MEETINGS – We meet the second Monday of every month at the offices of Hastings Direct, Conquest House, Collington Avenue, Bexhill. We are grateful to Hastings Direct for the use of their facilities. The next three meetings will be

Monday 11th October, 7pm

Monday 8th November, 7pm

Monday 13th December, 7pm

.....