
BEXHILL RAIL ACTION GROUP (BRAG)

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2012

2012 is turning out to be a very busy year for rail action groups across East Sussex. We have been busy working on submissions for the new Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern (TSGN) and Southeastern franchises, though as you will read below, the whole process has recently been thrown into doubt. Timetable changes are planned for December, and we have some doubts about the robustness of some of these and have communicated these doubts to Southern. Meanwhile locally, a consultation is planned into the possible construction of a new station at Glyne Gap.....

RE-FRANCHISING

In September, BRAG along with other rail user groups in East Sussex completed submissions for the public consultations for the Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern (TSGN) and Southeastern franchises. These documents can be downloaded from the BRAG website.

However, hot on the heels of this, came the debacle over re-franchising the West Coast Mainline (WCML). A legal challenge by Virgin Trains **has led to the suspension of all re-franchising** by the Department of Transport. The whole process is open to fundamental review. At the present time it is unclear when – or if – the process will start moving again, but our guess is that the delay is likely to be measured in terms of years rather than months. It is also unclear as to what interim arrangements will be made as the existing franchises expire i.e. whether they will be temporarily extended in favour of the current operators, or run directly by the DfT's own Direct Rail arm. The former seems more likely.

DECEMBER 2012 TIMETABLE REVISIONS – SOUTHERN

Southern has informed stakeholders of timetable revisions from 10th December. Some of these are to be welcomed; others while looking good on paper may prove impractical, while changes to one particular peak hour service are positively detrimental.

Starting with the good news: Journey times on many Marshlink services between Ashford and Bexhill have been reduced by one or two minutes following the removal of the permanent speed restriction at south Ashford.

Moving to evening peak hour services, a number of changes are planned as follows.

- The 17.35 Victoria – Ore will depart at 17.27 and run to accelerated timings. It will no longer wait at Eastbourne for 18 minutes, and will arrive at Bexhill at 19.16, a journey time of 1 hour 49 minutes: In theory this is very good news, but see below.
- Less welcome, however, is that the 18.06 from Victoria will depart nine minutes earlier, *but will run to the same timings from Lewes onwards*, in other words the journey time will be extended by nine minutes on what is already a very slow train. This service will not reach Bexhill until 20.11 – a glance at the online timetable indicates that it will be possible to depart from Victoria twenty minutes later at 18.17 and arrive at Bexhill at the same time by changing at East Croydon and again at Hampden Park....a deplorable and ludicrous situation.

Broadly speaking, the East Coastway – unlike the Brighton Mainline and West Coastway - is left with a very erratic timetable, with departures from Victoria at 16.47, 17.27, 17.57 and 18.47 supplemented by departures from London Bridge to Eastbourne at 17.23 and 18.22. The technical details are also questionable, with the 17.27 from Victoria running as little as four minutes behind the 17.23 from London Bridge between Lewes and Polegate, even though the headway on this section is 6 - 8 minutes in places.....

We predict that some aspects of this timetable are not going to work and the 17.27 from Victoria is likely to get stuck behind the London Bridge train and run late, possibly delaying the subsequent Brighton – Ashford service.

A cordial but ultimately unsuccessful meeting was held with Southern managers on 11th October. They explained some of the constraints on the Brighton Mainline, as well as this side of Lewes. The latter will hopefully be lessened in November 2013 when the East Coastway signalling is complete.

EUROSTAR

Test bookings to the Eurostar website indicate no significant changes to services from Ashford International in December.

GLYNE GAP STATION PROPOSAL

We have been notified via the East Sussex Rail Alliance of a consultation to consider the building of a station at Glyne Gap. The details of this – what design/facilities, how it will be funded, which trains will stop there and when it might be built - are still sketchy, but we understand that this is a Rother District Council initiative through planning and transport consultants Mott MacDonald. It may be connected to plans to build a new Marks and Spencer store on the site of the existing bowling alley at Ravenside.

A meeting will be taking place in early November and we hope to have feedback from this in the Winter newsletter.

There are many complexities to be considered, but BRAG supports in principle the construction of a station at Glyne Gap

MARSHLINK 'BUSTITUTION' REVISITED

It has come to our attention that a number of daytime services have recently been replaced by buses between Hastings and Ashford or v.v. due to defective rolling stock. While this is preferable to an explicit cancellation and an hour's delay, it is not acceptable other than in very extreme circumstances. This has been raised with Southern and through the two local MPs. We await a response, but nonetheless would be grateful if members and supporters could notify us of any further instances through the BRAG email address.

In the short term the line needs additional diesel rolling stock, but in the longer term the problem is best resolved through electrification.

BEXHILL TICKET OFFICE

We have a great team of staff at Bexhill station, but readers of earlier newsletters will be aware of our concerns about frequent and short-notice early closures of the ticket office. This matter has been raised with Southern management, and we hope that this will not be

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repeated. Again, we would be grateful for notification of any further occasions so we may collate these and raise the matter with Southern.

BARGAIN CORNER

There are very few bargains this time of year, but we would remind readers of a number of 'network' benefits available all year round. These include:

- Kids for a Quid. Children travelling off-peak with a fare-paying adult can travel for £1 to most destinations in the southeast. However booking conditions vary between train operators.
- Groupsave. Off peak, three or four adults travelling together go for the price of two.
- 2 for 1 offers. Travel to London by rail and get 2 for 1 entry to many attractions. See www.daysoutguide.co.uk for more information.

THE BRAG COMMITTEE

After seven years, Martin Woodfine has asked to stand down as our Treasurer and Membership Secretary. Yolanda Laybourne has kindly agreed to take on this role. The committee would like to thank Martin for his hard work, and also to thank Yolanda for stepping in to the breach.

JOIN BRAG

A group such as BRAG is only as strong as its members. The more members we have, the stronger our voice. New members are always welcome, and membership costs just £5 per year. For further information please email our Treasurer/Membership Secretary Yolanda Laybourne at bexrag@yahoo.co.uk.

FUTURE MEETINGS

Mon 12th November, 7pm

Mon 10th December, 7pm (Informal meeting and Christmas meal). All meetings take place at the bar/restaurant at The Sackville, Bexhill seafront and last until 9pm.

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