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## **BEXHILL RAIL ACTION GROUP (BRAG)**

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### **NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2012**

Summer is with us - chronologically at least - even if the weather has some catching up to do, and the next few weeks will be a challenging time for the region's transport system as the Olympics get under way. Meanwhile an altogether different marathon, the refranchising of local rail services, has passed a further milestone with the opening of a formal consultation process by the Department for Transport..... Finally, as always, there are some good deals on off-peak tickets, so get out and enjoy the summer days if and when they arrive....

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### **LONDON 2012 OLYMPICS**

The Olympics begin on 27<sup>th</sup> July and will be followed by the Paralympics in late August. This means that there will be significant alterations to train services through central and east London until the beginning of September, as well as greater numbers of people travelling. There are also various events taking place outside London such as cycling at Box Hill, and also the torch relay – which will be passing through Bexhill on 17<sup>th</sup> July. The maxim is, as always, check before you travel. Southeastern services, both to/from Ashford on High Speed 1 and on the Hastings line will experience major alterations, with Stratford International, St Pancras and London Bridge stations subject to passenger control measures. There will be some additional late night services on Southeastern after key events, including on the Hastings line. Timetables are viewable on their website [www.southeasternrailway.co.uk](http://www.southeasternrailway.co.uk).

Southern have told us that there will be no additional late night trains to Bexhill via the East Coastway, nor will there be any additional late night Marshlink connections off Southeastern High services at Ashford. BRAG is extremely disappointed by this.

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### **THAMESLINK FRANCHISE CONSULTATION**

Readers will recall from previous newsletters that the new Thameslink franchise will be a super-franchise merging most existing Southern and First Capital Connect services. The formal stakeholder consultation has finally got underway. Further details are available at [www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk).

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BRAG, in common with other members of the East Sussex Rail Alliance (ESRA) will be making a formal submission. These submissions will be posted on respective websites in due course. The closure date for submissions is 23<sup>rd</sup> August. Individual responses are also welcomed and should be sent to:

The Combined Franchise Replacement Sponsor  
Department for Transport  
Zone 3/15  
Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London. SW1P 4DR

Or by email to [thameslink@dft.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:thameslink@dft.gsi.gov.uk)

Five bidders have been shortlisted. These are:

Abelio (Netherlands Railways)  
First Group  
Go-Via (Southern)  
MTR (Hong Kong Metro)  
Stagecoach

A useful meeting was held between BRAG/ESRA and the First Group on 11<sup>th</sup> June. We look forward to welcoming Go-Via to our meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> July, and we have also issued invitations to the other bidders. DfT rules prevent bidders from telling us their proposals, but it is useful to have opportunities to detail our aspirations.

In brief BRAG's priorities are (1) The maintenance of 7 day a week services between Bexhill and existing destinations that is, Ashford, Brighton and Victoria via Haywards Heath (2) The end of division and attachment of trains at Haywards Heath (3) More carriages on the Brighton – Ashford service (4) Better services for Normans Bay (5) Continuation of a growth model for the business, particularly the retention of cheap off-peak fares.

This franchise is likely to see a lot of change and disruption, with major works on the core Thameslink project focussing on London Bridge. This will entail temporary closures, diversions, and pressure across the whole system over a number of years.

The formal consultation for the Southeastern franchise has also been very recently published. Our Hastings and St Leonards colleagues in SHRIMP <http://www.1066shrimprail.org.uk/> will be leading submissions for this. Top of the shopping list will be a faster off-peak service on the Charing Cross route.

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### **MCNULTY – AN INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE**

Readers will be aware of our view that the jury is very much out as to what exactly the McNulty review means: Chinese whispers abound. Nobody would contest the notion of a more passenger-focussed network that also provides value for money for the taxpayer. However, we would also deplore anything that leads to fragmentation of the infrastructure, increases in fares and/or cuts in services - and at a local level, the de-staffing of stations. Our sources in the rail industry tell us that many staff are very anxious about the future. Railwaymen and women deserve to be listened to because they are the ones who have to make things work, and this has all too often been a case of trying to fit square pegs in round holes. We are not unique in our observation that Whitehall and Westminster have frequently made the wrong policy decisions towards the railways. For an industry perspective, follow this link: <http://actionforrail.org/>

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### **BEXHILL STATION TICKET OFFICE**

With an eye to the previous column, we have received a number of reports that Bexhill ticket office is regularly closing early (often at 1.30pm) due to 'staff shortage'. Whilst the occasional closure may be inevitable, this is clearly unacceptable and we shall be taking this up with Southern.

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### **EUROSTAR**

Eurostar's new timetable runs from 8<sup>th</sup> July to 8<sup>th</sup> December 2012 and is downloadable from the Eurostar website [www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com) (the company no longer produces paper timetables). There are no changes to the overall level of service from Ashford International.

Holders of Business Premier tickets (full fare) can park for free at Ashford on production of their ticket. Sadly the offer does not extend to Standard and Standard Premier ticket holders.

For those who haven't booked their summer holidays and who are looking for inspiration, check out [www.seat61.com](http://www.seat61.com) and [www.raileurope.co.uk](http://www.raileurope.co.uk).

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### **GRUB ON THE GO**

BRAG is delighted to report that a trolley service of drinks and light refreshments is once again available on the Hastings Line. The service runs on most morning trains from Hastings to Charing Cross and Cannon St up until 10.30am, and then on homebound services in the afternoon and evening. This initiative has had strong input from our own Ray Chapman, as

well as Hastings and Rye MP Amber Rudd. *Grub on the Go*, as it is called, is a co-operative, employing 10 people, and showcases many local products. We wish the venture well.

We would also highlight that Rail Gourmet operates a similar trolley service on East Coastway trains to Victoria, boarding the train at Lewes. As with everything, it is a case of “use it or lose it”.

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### **BARGAIN CORNER**

Southern are offering a 12% discount on off-peak tickets, and 20% off Advance tickets if bought online at [www.southernrailway.com](http://www.southernrailway.com). The offer runs until 23<sup>rd</sup> August. Remember: Tickets can be bought up to 12 weeks in advance, and railcard discounts apply in addition.

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### **JOIN BRAG**

A group such as BRAG is only as strong as its members. The more members we have the greater our voice. New members are always welcome, and membership costs just £5 per year. For further information please email our Treasurer/Membership Secretary Martin Woodfine at [bexrag@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bexrag@yahoo.co.uk).

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### **FUTURE MEETINGS**

**Monday 9<sup>th</sup> July** – Joint meeting with ESRA. Guest speaker from Go-Via (Southern)

**Monday 13<sup>th</sup> August**

**Monday 10<sup>th</sup> September**

We meet at the bar/restaurant at The Sackville Hotel on Bexhill seafront. All meetings begin at 7pm and finish by 9pm.

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