
BEXHILL RAIL ACTION GROUP

NEWSLETTER WINTER 2012

CHAIRMAN'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE

The BRAG Christmas Dinner was held for the second year running at the Sackville Restaurant on Bexhill seafront. As crackers were pulled and paper hats donned, we looked back on a very active and successful 2012.

The Sackville has become our regular home for BRAG meetings on the second Monday of each month. And during this year we were often joined by representatives of organisations bidding for the newly combined Southern-Thameslink Franchise. It is a tribute to the work of all BRAG members – but in particular Richard Madge, Ray Chapman and Martin Woodfine – that our profile is now sufficiently high that these busy business people travelled long distances to engage with us about the issues facing the Brighton Main Line and East Coastway.

The fact that they felt BRAG was important reflects the relentless work we have done to hammer home the disadvantages which outlying parts of the franchise suffer when operators put all their attention on what they perceive to be the most lucrative services. For Bexhill this has meant journey times to London which have, year by year, crept up as services to Brighton and Gatwick have been given greater shares of the available paths on the crowded main line out of London.

I also want to single out Yolanda Laybourne's tireless work in tracking the growing number of days when Bexhill ticket office has closed significantly earlier than the advertised hours. BRAG has confronted Southern Rail with this evidence and we are continuing to watch the situation. BRAG is also constantly alert to any national moves to cut ticket office staffing in favour of self-service machines. Given the complexity of modern fare structures no machine can replace the detailed knowledge and advice of well-trained ticket office staff.

On other fronts we have campaigned constantly for upgrading the track and services between Hastings and Ashford in order to maximise opportunities to reach London more quickly via the Javelin services to St Pancras – and of course to access Eurostar services to the Continent.

2013 promises at least as much action and excitement – with the added uncertainty about how and when the Government will lift the current block on the new franchising process: Truly a New Year for BRAG members to anticipate with confidence.

Hugh Sharp
BRAG Chairman

www.bexhillrailaction.org.uk

Dec 2012 TIMETABLE

The winter timetable began on 9th December. Readers of the Autumn newsletter will recall the concerns of rail user groups in East Sussex as to the viability of some of the evening rush-hour timings, to the extent that an urgent meeting was held with Southern in October.

Unfortunately the concerns have all been proven to be founded. Timings for two particular trains, the 17.23 from London Bridge to Eastbourne and the 17.27 Victoria to Ore, have proven completely unrealistic in practice. Both trains have lost time every evening between East Croydon and Haywards Heath, after which they are timetabled to run virtually on top of each other. Due to insufficient headways in the timetable they have then lost further time to Eastbourne, meaning that the following 18.32 Brighton – Ashford service has also been caught in the resulting train jam.

At Eastbourne, signallers have been faced with a dilemma: Either allow the Ashford train to leave first, which then causes the Victoria – Ore train to run up to 20 minutes late; or hold back the Marshlink train – which then causes delays of 15 minutes or more between Hastings and Ashford for the rest of the evening due to the constraints of the single line sections between Ore and Appledore. On all but two occasions, signallers chose the former.

Consequently the 17.27 has failed to run on time once during the first two weeks of the new timetable. Flooding and a cable fire have added to the disastrous mix, but BRAG and the East Sussex Rail Alliance (ESRA) both maintain that there is a structural problem with the timetable, and will be taking the matter further in the New Year.

TIMETABLE (2)

Another by-product of the new timetable is that the area is now visited regularly by a 'Class 313' unit. This forms the 07.52 Brighton – Ore service; and 10.22 Ore – Brighton (10.35 from Bexhill).

These trains date from the mid-1970s, and were designed for inner-suburban routes in north London. They lack both toilets and air conditioning, and the appropriateness of their use on long-distance routes is questionable. Southern have told us that deploying one to this service frees up one of 'our' units to lengthen a rush-hour service from Horsham to London, which is very nice.... for people in Horsham.

Generic use of '313s' on the East Coastway through to Ore is precluded by the current timetable structure as Brighton – Ore and Ore – Victoria workings swap over. However, this is something we shall continue to watch.

NEW ROLLING STOCK ORDER

Amid much fanfare, Southern has recently placed an order for further new carriages. However, comment in the January edition of the industry magazine *Modern Railways* suggests that we should not get too excited. It would appear that the Department for Transport is using Southern as a 'procurement agency' buying and 'running in' new trains, which are then re-deployed elsewhere. We are reminded previously of new trains coming to the Southern lines and then being sent to First Capital Connect, to be substituted with old trains from the Bournemouth Line for the Gatwick Express/Brighton peak hour services; and 313 units on local Coastway services (see above).

RE-FRANCHISING

The saga continues, with any further development likely to be subject to the outcome of an industry-wide review by Eurostar Chairman, Richard Brown. So far we have had meetings with three of the prospective bidders: Go-Via, First Group and Abelio.

BEXHILL STATION TICKET OFFICE

As the Chairman has noted, there have been a number of instances of Bexhill Station ticket office closing early and without notice. This is unacceptable. We should be grateful if readers could notify us of any further instances so that we may take this up with Southern. Our email is bexrag@yahoo.co.uk.

BEXHILL STATION CAFE

The cafe and newsagent at Bexhill ceased trading abruptly in early December. BRAG is very saddened by the loss of this facility, and will seek to clarify if there are any plans for a new operator to take this over.

The pharmacy at the station continues to trade.

INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

Eurostar will be extending the season for its south of France service this year. From the end of April to the end of June, an experimental service will run on Saturdays from London and Ashford to Aix-en-Provence and back. The service will also call at Lyon and Avignon TGV. On the return, however, some of the shine is taken off by a one hour-plus 'service-stop' at Lille, where passengers will be required to disembark (with their luggage) to undergo security checks.

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In the high summer, the weekly service from London and Ashford to Avignon Centre station will run as in previous years.

Meanwhile, Deutsche Bahn has recently announced that its much-trumpeted through services from London to Cologne, Amsterdam and Frankfurt have been further postponed, and will not now begin until December 2016 at the earliest. This is due to delays in the production of rolling stock.

BARGAIN CORNER

Deutsche Bahn offer a through one way fare of 49 Euros from London to principal stations in Germany. This includes Berlin, Munich and in this instance, over the border to the Austrian city of Salzburg. The fare is valid for travel on booked Eurostar and ICE trains.

To get the cheap fares, early booking is essential at www.bahn.de with tickets going on sale three months in advance.

To travel from Ashford, book from London St Pancras on the 06.50 service via Brussels [this calls at Ashford at 07.28].

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 14th January 2013, 7pm

Mon 11th February 2013, 7pm

Mon 11th March 2013, 7pm

We meet at the bar/restaurant of The Sackville, Bexhill seafront. Meetings finish by 9pm.