
BEXHILL RAIL ACTION GROUP (BRAG)

WINTER 2014 NEWSLETTER

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Looking back over BRAG's work in 2014 I am struck by two things. First, there can be no doubt that 2014 has produced more exciting opportunities for rail transport to improve economic performance and prosperity in Bexhill and Hastings than any previous year since BRAG was founded nearly a decade ago. Indeed, it is instructive to recall that BRAG came into being to defend - rather than expand - our existing rail services. And second, this ever widening agenda has increased enormously the workload of BRAG members - most of whom have demanding full-time jobs.... but no-one has ever complained! I am, therefore, grateful to everyone for their constant commitment - not least new members who have immediately taken on responsibilities for important tasks.

The most visible new opportunity is of course the project to upgrade the Marshlink line to enable high speed Javelin Trains to run directly from Bexhill, Hastings and Rye to London St Pancras. The strong business case developed by Network Rail is being complemented by an economic strategy led by East Sussex County Council, to ensure that the opportunities arising from faster train services translate fully into rising prosperity. A key part of our input is to ensure that Eurostar is made fully aware that this upgrade will increase demand for more Continental services to stop at Ashford.

The storms last winter devastated the Hastings-Charing Cross line. But the considerable investment made to restore the track has opened opportunities to campaign for faster services to London, which would benefit people from both Hastings and Bexhill.

Most Bexhillians still see services to Victoria as the main route to London - and value access to Gatwick Airport. BRAG's constructive relationship with Southern Rail has sought to identify and address timetabling and signalling issues which imperil the performance of our local services. However, so far it has been impossible to make a breakthrough to reduce journey times to London, and the case now being made by Gatwick Airport for a second runway could open a wider debate about investment in the airport's rail links to our part of Sussex.

The ever-rising profile of rail travel puts a spotlight on the quality of "customer experience" at stations. Conscious that Bexhill possesses a historically significant station building - recently restored to its original style - BRAG has pressed hard to ensure that the station's reputation and assets are fully exploited, to produce a vibrant and efficient experience for passengers.

And so to 2015: There is no doubt as to BRAG's current workload. Indeed with the outcome of the General Election uncertain - as well as recent changes in our local rail franchises - building strong relationships with political and rail "powers that be" will remain our priority.

May I wish all BRAG members and supporters a very Happy Christmas and New Year.

Hugh Sharp
BRAG Chairman

BEXHILL STATION NEWS

After a wait of more than 18 months, the happy day finally arrived in the summer when the shutters on the Bexhill station café were raised once more, and the café became fully operational again. It certainly seems as though it was worth waiting for, with the lease being taken by a professional caterer who already operates a successful café at Chichester station. Our station concourse is now coming alive again with rail travellers and local residents enjoying the refreshments which are on offer.

With many catering outlets already existing in the town, what is the attraction of an outlet within the station? The answer, of course, is footfall. Bexhill station has an impressive 1.6 million customers passing through its concourse annually; and this number also enables the station to qualify for the installation of automatic gatelines (previously known as ticket barriers) and “first-to-last” staffing (from the first train departure to the last arrival) to be implemented during the course of the next rail franchise which begins in July 2015. Chief Inspector Warren Franklin, who instigated “Operation Papiro” at the station to address the issue of fare-dodgers, has welcomed the news of the future gatelines.

Other issues currently being addressed include the vacant Trackside Pharmacy premises, and the problem of certain key trains, including the unacceptable cancellation by Southern of the 10.06 Bexhill to Victoria service, and the overcrowding on the popular 2-car 08.09 service from Hastings to Brighton which arrives at Bexhill at 08.20.

Yolanda Laybourne

TIMETABLE CHANGES IN JANUARY 2015

Southeastern – January 2015 will see a number of changes. Of principal interest to BRAG are adjustments to the timings of HS1 services between St Pancras and Ashford. Off-peak departure from St Pancras is brought forward from xx.42 to xx.37 Mondays to Saturdays, with the same onward connecting times from Ashford to Brighton via the Marshlink. However, additional evening peak services from St Pancras at 16.50, 17.50 and 18.50 offer a 7 minute connection at Ashford, reducing the journey time from St Pancras to Bexhill down to 1 hour 33 minutes.

On Sundays the previously annoying and unachievable 1 minute connection on the ‘down’ journey from London is widened to 8 minutes, leaving St Pancras at xx.37, arriving at Ashford at xx.14 and connecting into the Brighton service departing at xx.22. Again this offers a much improved end-to-end journey time of 1 hour 35 minutes from St Pancras to Bexhill.

In the ‘up’ direction, there remains room for improvement, with the 25 minute connecting time at Ashford unchanged Mondays to Saturdays, but on Sundays an 8 minute connection offers a Bexhill – St Pancras journey time of 1 hour 38 minutes.

Southern – Timings and service patterns will remain roughly the same. Of concern is that the hourly off-peak service to Victoria sees a 3 minute journey time extension. This time appears to be spent standing in the platform at Lewes, seemingly for no apparent gain....

..... **AND IN DECEMBER 2015**.....

Southern has launched a consultation for its planned timetable recast in December 2015. This is an interim timetable while works at London Bridge continue. BRAG will be responding formally to the consultation, and individuals are also welcome to do so. Submissions must be received by the end of January.

Southern proposes modest journey time improvements of up to 5 minutes on off-peak Ore – Victoria services by eliminating stops at Plumpton and Wivelsfield. The Committee’s view is that the proposals are a step in the right direction, but in the longer term fall short of what is necessary.

Some of the connections and turnaround times in the draft timetable appear unachievable at first glance. More substantially still, attachment and division at Haywards Heath is set to continue for the foreseeable future, so these proposals fail to address the issue of overcrowding: Many trains are only 4 cars south of Haywards Heath, resulting in passengers regularly standing to/from Lewes and Polegate on off-peak and shoulder-peak services. In this context, Southern’s parallel proposal to introduce an *eight* off-peak train each hour between London and Brighton would appear a somewhat skewed sense of priorities.

Richard Madge

LONDON BRIDGE UPDATE

The Southern Summer timetable will cease on 19 Dec but the new winter timetable will not commence until Jan 5th (*Confusingly the new Southeastern timetable doesn’t begin until 11th Jan – Ed.*). There will be a hybrid timetable for this period for the latest London Bridge station improvement works from 20 December to 4 January 2015 when **NO** Southern or Thameslink trains will serve London Bridge.

No through Thameslink trains will call at London Bridge until 2018 but re-route via Elephant & Castle direct to East Croydon, adding 15 mins to the journey. However some peak Thameslink trains will start and finish at London Bridge from 5th January and some new trains to replace the original stock are already at Brighton for introduction before Christmas. No Southeastern Charing Cross services will stop at London Bridge until August 2016.

The new platforms 12, 13 14 & 15 have already been completed and are in use although they will not be available during this Christmas blockade when platforms 5, 6, 8 & 9 (there is no current platform 7) will be closed to make way for the first of the new through platforms (1-9) to be constructed. In Aug2016 track from these first new platforms will use the new bridgework over Borough Market, constructed by Network Rail in 2012.

The new platforms 10 & 11 will be opened on 5th January completing the new 6 terminating platforms. From August 2016 all six platforms 10–15 will be accessed through the partially completed new street level concourse.

The best advice is to try to avoid travel in this period. If you can’t avoid it then seek advice from journey planner websites including National Rail Enquiries, Southern, Thameslink & South Eastern where alternative routes will be displayed. London Bridge Underground station and the surrounding area remains open and alternative routes will be available, so that all customers will be able to complete their journeys. London Overground will be providing extra services to serve Canada Water and Dalston Junction.

Dick Tyler

NETWORK RAIL SUSSEX AREA ROUTE STUDY 2014

Network Rail has launched a consultation on a variety of options for a £1 billion capital expenditure programme for 2019 - 2024 on rail routes extending from London into Sussex. The options are to be evaluated against predicted rail travel growth over thirty years up to 2043, and various estimates of this are provided.

Whilst welcoming capital expenditure on rail infrastructure, the opinion of BRAG is that the study focuses excessively on the provision of future rail capacity into and out of London, and the avoidance of overcrowding on these routes, eclipsing improvements and interventions that should be considered elsewhere in the area, including East Sussex.

Notably, the study was initiated before Network Rail's Sussex and Kent Routes were combined into a single South East Route. This has had the unfortunate effect of virtually excluding the travel needs of Hastings and its environs from the study, because the Sussex area ends at Bexhill. The study also fails to see the Sussex Coast as an economic zone in its own right, with its own coastal travel needs, both into and beyond Brighton.

Consequently many of the options proffer benefits to the Brighton Main Line (BML) only, and not the East or West Coastway routes: Reconstruction of the 'Willingdon Chord' does not even merit a mention, despite the potentially large increase in demand for journeys between East Sussex and Gatwick Airport in the event that a second runway is approved.

The consultation is open until 13 January 2015. Likely improvements to the BML that may help East Coastway users include additional platforms at Victoria and East Croydon, and grade separation of tracks at two congested suburban junctions and at Keymer junction. The latter improvement could help reduce East Coastway journey times and enable the discontinuation of train splitting at Haywards Heath in the future. The provision of an 'Arundel Chord' near Ford in West Sussex to provide an alternative through route from Brighton to Gatwick and London is also considered, and addresses one of the key BML resilience issues that BRAG has previously raised.

Chris Wheeler

SOUTH EASTERN UPDATE

South Eastern Railway (SER) has had its franchise renewed, with notable changes in terms, for at least 4 years possibly extending to 6.

SER is now required to produce performance data service-by-service, rather than on a franchise-wide basis where poor performance hides behind better services. This is very welcome. However, SHRIMP have seen the performance targets for SER over the next 6 months and raised a concern through Amber Rudd MP about low expectations, which fuels suspicion that previous performance data was misleading. (Our thanks are extended to the Dartford Rail Travellers Association).

Another change is to SER's fare structure, which will lead to improved fare options and more special deal promotions. The DfT has also released funding - and a contract has been secured - for the implementation of smartcard facilities at stations. Whilst there is no confirmed timetable beyond that it must be operational within this franchise, SHRIMP and ESRA have emphasised the need for

this, not least to allow Southern to extend their successful 'Key' product through Hastings and along the Marshlink corridor. Those developments may also assist in the extension of Southern's *Unizone* student discount ticketing through to Bexhill and Hastings, another current campaign.

The challenge of the London Bridge rebuild is rapidly approaching (see separate item), with major disruption to services and stopping patterns for the next 4 years. In the short-term there will be a service blockade of London Bridge station over the Christmas / New Year period, with NO services calling at London Bridge en-route to Charing X. This will then expand in January 2015 with an 18 month closure of platforms 5 & 6, meaning that NO services to Charing Cross will call at LB. Details are available on SER and National Rail websites. SER have worked with Transport for London to accommodate passengers without extra charge on local Underground and bus services. It is also important to note that there will be knock-on effects at other London termini, including Victoria, and whilst pressure was exerted on SER to allow use of HS1 services without extra charge, this has been ruled out.

The 'Hastings Express' service is due to commence in early January, with a reduced stopping pattern and 15 minute reduction on the average journey time to Charing Cross. Due to track congestion SER have not been able to time this new train during the early morning peak, with a departure from Hastings at 08.04 to arrive into Charing Cross at 09.34; this should be of most benefit to travellers to T/Wells. Return journey leaves Charing Cross at 16.20 arriving into Hastings at 17.50. SHRIMP is in conversation with SER about a retiming of services between 0600 and 0700, possibly enabling a faster service during that period.

Finally we have been made aware that ticket machines at some SER station car parks are proving fickle with some coinage denominations. This has twice been raised with SER as well as the car park operator Meteor and the Royal Mint. If you find yourself being overcharged through coin-rejection, SER will refund the excess on application.

Martin Woodfine

St Leonards and Hastings Rail Improvement Programme (SHRIMP)

GATWICK SURFACE TRANSPORT CONFERENCE - 17 October 2014

This year's Surface Transport Conference was dominated by Gatwick Airport's hopes for approval to build a second runway after 2019. Annual passenger movements have now reached 37 million with the existing single runway, with 40 to 45% using public transport to and from the airport. This figure could top 95 million by 2045 with a second runway, with a target of 60% of these customers using public transport: That's over 250,000 passenger movements a day!

Even without the second runway and associated expansion, 40 million passenger movements per year are likely in the future. There are also implications for airport staffing, with one prediction of an increase in staff to over 45,000, adding pressure to transport infrastructure.

These changes coincide with broader increases in rail usage, and therefore a substantial uplift in rail capacity will be required. Gatwick anticipates that passenger usage of its railway station will double by 2020, and almost treble by 2035. This demand can be met through a major redevelopment of the existing railway station into a surface transport hub - regardless of whether the second runway is approved - the introduction of new Gatwick Express rolling stock in 2016, and of new Thameslink trains in 2018. Eventually a train will depart for London every 2.5 minutes.

Network Rail's proposals to increase capacity on the Brighton Main Line (BML) between 2019 - 2024 will clearly be essential to achieve the projected service frequency.

We hoped that East Sussex County Council's support for a second runway would lock-in a commitment to build the 'Willingdon Chord', to improve rail journey times and frequency on the East Coastway line. Indeed, Gatwick's own presentational material suggests travel times from Hastings of under 60 minutes: These are completely unachievable with existing road and rail infrastructure. Regrettably, discussions with Hugh Sumner, Gatwick's transport consultant did not indicate any interest in including Hastings and Bexhill in the expanded Gatwick travel-to-work area, which would necessitate a commitment to upgrade the East Coastway to achieve acceptable travel-to-work times and also benefit airport passengers. We were told that the 'Gatwick Diamond' area remained the main target for expansion.

This issue will be amplified further if the Davies Commission ultimately supports Gatwick's case. BRAG will advocate strongly for Gatwick to fund a Network Rail feasibility study into building the Willingdon Chord if the second runway is recommended.

Chris Wheeler

NORMANS BAY NEWS

A meeting took place between Network Rail, local farmers and residents on 9th December 2014. Network Rail representatives have agreed to provide two sets of double gates so that the farmers could move livestock from one side of the road leading to the crossing without risk of straying on to the railway track or Sluice Lane. Network Rail has agreed to provide gates on either side of the actual crossing so that the road can be closed to vehicular traffic. They will also provide pedestrian gates (kissing gates) to allow walkers to transit the crossing if the road gates are closed.

No decision has been taken thus far by Normans Bay residents to close these gates at night and, initially, the gates will remain locked open. The general feeling is that the gates will rarely, if ever, be closed but the keys will be retained by Normans Bay Residents' Association office holders. All the work must be completed by the end of January 2015 so that Network Rail can begin testing the new system, which despite earlier information to the contrary, will be operating under local control until trials are completed.

Nick Munro

New Members are always welcome. Please contact our Treasurer and Membership Secretary Yolanda Laybourne via the BRAG email address bexraq@yahoo.co.uk

2015 Meetings. We meet the second Monday of each month, 7pm, at the offices of Hastings Direct, Conquest House, Collington Avenue, Bexhill. Meetings are therefore as follows: 12 Jan, 9 Feb, 9 Mar, 13 Apr, 11 May, 8 Jun, 13 Jul, 10 Aug, 14 Sep, 12 Oct, 9 Nov and 14 Dec (Christmas Meal).
