

RAIL USERS COMPLAIN AT TIMETABLE BLUNDER

Local rail user groups have demanded an explanation after it emerged that details of a flagship new train service starting next month have been left out of public timetable booklets.

Local train times change on December 13th, but the latest timetable booklets published by train operator *Southern* omit details of new high-speed 'Javelin' services which connect at Ashford with local services along the Marshlink line to Rye, Hastings and Bexhill.

High-speed 'Javelin' trains travelling at speeds of up to 140mph will cover the journey between the new St Pancras station and Ashford in just 37 minutes, travelling along the High Speed 1 Line via Stratford and Ebbsfleet. At Ashford there is an hourly connection to and from 1066 Country along the Marshlink line via Rye.

Regular travellers say that in some cases the new connections will be much faster than existing services to and from London via Tunbridge Wells or Haywards Heath.

The Javelin services are operated by the *Southeastern* train operating company, while the Marshlink service is run by *Southern*. However, local rail pressure groups point out that train operators have a legal duty to show connecting services, even if they are run by other operators and that in any case the two train operators belong to the same parent company, GoVia.

Ray Chapman of St Leonards and Hastings Rail Improvement Project (SHRIMP) said

"This omission is inexplicable. The inauguration of domestic high-speed services from London to Ashford opens up a whole new world of opportunities. Many journey times between Rye and London have been slashed from over 2 hours, to less than 70 minutes. There are also some fast early morning connections from Bexhill to St Pancras of around 1 hour 40 minutes, instead of 2 hours, while many Hastings and St Leonards travellers travelling to north London, or connecting into mainline services at Kings Cross or St Pancras, may find it quicker and more convenient to travel via Ashford rather than have to cross London.

Hugh Sharp of Bexhill Rail Action Group (BRAG) said

"It does seem very strange that the train operator should be passing up an opportunity to market services along the Marshlink. There is extra capacity available via this route, in contrast to the Brighton Mainline, which we are regularly told is at full capacity, preventing more frequent and faster services from the East Sussex Coast to London."

In the longer term, SHRIMP and BRAG would like to see the electrification and upgrading of the Marshlink line via Rye. They claim that this would create an

opportunity for direct high speed services from London to Hastings and Bexhill without the need to change at Ashford.

Mr Chapman said

“If this were to be realised, it would bring the tantalising prospect of the Hastings to London journey time being reduced to around an hour, and London to Bexhill in 75 minutes instead of 2 hours currently.”

He concluded

“This would be invaluable in resuscitating this area’s re-generation efforts, creating an arc of re-generation linking 1066 Country, Ashford, the Thames Gateway and East London”.

A copy of the missing connecting times for high-speed services can be viewed on the Bexhill Rail Action Group website www.bexhillrailaction.org.uk or on request from bexrag@yahoo.co.uk

Notes to Editors

Southern timetable booklet *Train Times 2* is now available at local railway stations. It commences on 13th December and runs until 22 May 2010. It contains details of services between London and Brighton to Eastbourne, Bexhill, Hastings and Ashford via Rye. Onward connections at Ashford to/from London Bridge, Waterloo East and Charing Cross are shown in the timetable, but not high-speed services to St Pancras

Bexhill Rail Action Group

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