



West Sussex Rail Users Association

Putting Passengers First

NEWSLETTER

April 2008

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AGM

The Association's Annual General meeting will take place at 10am on Saturday 17th May 2007, Salvation Army Hall, Depot Road just a short walk from Horsham station. All members are welcome to attend.

The theme of the meeting is "How are Southern doing?" and Southern's managing director, Chris Burchell will speak and answer your questions. This is your chance to get involved and meet your friendly and knowledgeable committee members. So if you don't know your '377' from your '465 come along and find out.

LACK OF PERFORMANCE

You may have noticed the improvement in Southern performance has stalled. From a low of 77% in the dark days of 2003, performance had improved to 89% by the end of 2006 but it remained at 89% through 2007. It seems that the easy gains have been made and any further improvement will need some hard work.

Whilst Southern has stood still, other TOCs have continued their improvement and as a result Southern have slipped to the bottom of the SE TOCs below the likes of First Capital, South Eastern and South West.

Generally our trains run on time but where Southern fall down is in their response to emergencies. A signalling problem, bad weather or a failed train causes chaos with staff and trains in the wrong place. This is because Southern run a tight ship with no spare capacity. Good for finances, bad for passengers.

We travel on newer, cleaner, punctual, reliable trains but if something goes wrong, it always seems to go very wrong.

CHANGE OF NAME

We are expanding to include the West Coastway line from Worthing to Havant and so will be changing our name to West Sussex Rail Users Association ("WSRUA").

We will gain more members and have a bigger voice in improving services on Southern for both AV and WC passengers.

TIMETABLE TROUBLES

Our mailbag has been full of complaints on the Dec 2007 timetable changes with passengers from Billingshurst and Pulborough particularly frustrated at sitting in Horsham for 10 mins, waiting for the rear portion to arrive from Chichester.

The new timetable got off to a poor start with many problems but the joining of trains was carried out efficiently. Trains are running on time but the 10 min delay at Horsham caused by joining remains.

We have held discussions with Southern but they have told us "there is no going back." They claim the benefits of a faster service for Chichester passengers outweighs the pain to AV passengers.

Southern did agree to hold fare increases for AV stations to 1.3%. Then in January they whacked up cheap day returns by 10% despite a slower journey time.

In their defence, Southern were told by DfT to cope with the loss of SWT's Coastway service within their own resources. Put simply that means without any extra trains. The easiest way for Southern to do this was by using AV trains. It's all about money and Southern decided that a revised service would attract more passengers at Chichester but not lose many AV passengers. Annoying but probably true.

ANSWERS

Q Why do most AV trains stop at Redhill?

Southern The Brighton Main Line carries passengers to Brighton, Eastbourne, Worthing/Littlehampton and Chichester/Bognor. Redhill is on the left hand side of the tracks as is the AV line. It is therefore easier to signal AV trains up the slow line and off to Redhill. Any other trains would create crossing movements which would use up valuable capacity. Redhill is a very busy station and needs a regular half hourly service to London. There is no room at Victoria for extra trains so we cannot run additional trains to Redhill and Reigate.

Avrua Stopping at Redhill adds 8 mins to the journey time for AV trains. It is an historical anomaly that AV trains serve Redhill. However of the three Sussex Coast services the AV trains are the least busy. Without major resignalling on the Brighton Main Line, it looks like AV trains will continue to stop at Redhill.

FRANCHISE RENEWAL

In March, WSRUA met the franchise team at Go Via, Southern's parent company. It was a very useful meeting and allowed us to share the views of Southern passengers, both good and bad.

WSRUA have detailed a 10 point improvement plan, which will be sent to DfT, Passenger Focus and our members shortly. Some of these ideas will hopefully be included by the DfT in the new franchise.

Southern's franchise will be re-let in 2009 but a shortlist of bidders will be drawn up by the end of 2008 so we need to work now to influence the DfT who are making the decisions on the new franchise.

One point of interest is that Passenger Focus is involved in the franchise for the first time on a formal basis. This should give passengers a greater say in the franchise. Not sure what that will mean in practice but it has to be an improvement on the past, when Passenger Focus wishes have been largely ignored by DfT in setting franchises.

Passenger Focus must be doing something right, as they are about to be given the watchdog role for buses as well as trains. Or maybe it's just that they don't cause too much trouble for the Government and are seen as a soft touch!

If you have any comments on improvements that you would like to see in the new franchise please let us know.

THANKS...

to **John Bentley**, our long serving station rep for Amberley, who is retiring from committee life. We wish him well for the future.

DEC 2008 TIMETABLE

AV will receive an additional evening rush hour train from Dec 2008. Southern will continue the xx.02 and xx.32 departures through the evening peak.

The current 17.21 and 18.21 trains will be moved to xx.32 and a new 18.02 train will run. This should help with the current overcrowding on these trains.

Southern now operate Gatwick Express and will be extending rush hour services to Brighton from December. These changes will allow two additional trains for Redhill which should ease crowding at that station.

AND FINALLY

South West Trains told guards to implement penalty fares for all non-ticket holding passengers or face disciplinary action. This followed on from the unpopular decision to extend the morning peak to 12 noon.

The no excuse policy soon backfired when many passengers complained that their ticket office was shut and the ticket machine did not accept credit cards.