



## WEST SUSSEX RAIL USERS ASSOCIATION

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I am writing this Newsletter as our valued Secretary, Clive Burgess, has resigned having moved from Horsham to the delights of Bexhill. We are grateful for all his work for the Association over the past three years and especially his work in developing our website which is now [www.wsrua.org.uk](http://www.wsrua.org.uk). We are now looking for a new Secretary and we hope that we will have nominations/volunteers to fill this post for our Annual General Meeting in June. More about the AGM later.

### Membership

I am enclosing a membership renewal form for those who do not have a standing order or who have not already paid their 2009 subscription. If there is no form enclosed, you can ignore the rest of this paragraph. There are three ways you can pay the £2 subscription: (a) by cheque payable to West Sussex Rail Users Association; (b) on-line using the bank details shown in the standing order form below; or (c) by Standing Order (SO) by completing the bottom section of the renewal form. For payments by (a) and (c) please return the form to me either with cheque or the SO area completed. For (b) please send me an e-mail telling me that an on-line payment has been made. If you do not want to remain a member of the Association, please let me know by e-mail, telephone or letter so that I can remove you from our list.

### Website and Publicity

Your Committee is bringing the website up to date and future Newsletters will appear there. We will alert you by e-mail when these are added. If you do not have an e-mail address, these Newsletters will be sent by post. The website is a valuable resource both for members and for other rail users in West Sussex. Ideally, we would like to have a webmaster to look after the website, if any member would like to take this on, please let me know. We have redesigned the Association posters and these are displayed on many of our stations. These posters give contact details and include an area in which we can announce future events. We are grateful to the work put in by Valerie Webb in designing these posters and to Roger Keyworth for laminating them.

### Annual General Meeting

The AGM has traditionally been held in April but we are deferring it this year to see who is awarded the franchise to run our services from September 2009. We expect the announcement to be made in early June and we have tentatively pencilled in 20<sup>th</sup> June as the probable date of the meeting and this will be in Horsham. We will confirm date, time and venue as soon as we have more information. We expect most of the existing Committee to be seeking re-election and their names are in the next paragraph.

### Committee

Your current Committee is: Chairman – Monica Edmonds (also representing Christ's Hospital); Secretary Vacancy; Treasurer and Membership Secretary – Trevor Tupper (also representing stations on the West Coastway other than Chichester and Bognor)); Other Committee members - Roger Leat (Bognor Regis); Jake Clausen (Littlehaven); Chris Cooper (Amberley), Valerie Webb (Pulborough), Peter Dempsey (Crawley), Peter Bulling (Barnham) and Roger Keyworth (Chichester). We are looking for new Committee members to represent Horsham, Billingshurst, Barnham, Littlehampton, Angmering and Worthing. We hope that volunteers will come forward at or before the AGM to fill the vacancies.

### Franchise

Go-Via's franchise to run our trains expires in September and the Department for Transport (DfT) is now considering the final bids from the 4 short-listed companies; Go-Via, National Express, Stagecoach and Ned-Rail. Last year we met all four bidders and we came to the conclusion that the experience of Go-Via and National Express in running extensive and busy commuter lines were the most likely to be front runners. Recently both Stagecoach and National Express have had problems with their existing franchises and this has added to our view that Go-Via is the best of the bunch despite their recent dramatic fall-off in performance.

We should know the “winner” in the first week of June and we hope to have a senior figure or two from whoever gets the new franchise at the AGM.

### Timetable

The changes in December 2007 and December 2008 have been of benefit to passengers along the coast who have saved between 3 and 15 minutes in journey times, but have been universally condemned by those living between Arundel and Christ’s Hospital who have faced increased journey times of 7 to 8 minutes in each direction. In the off-peak, there is little doubt that the majority of passengers have benefited as the numbers from Barnham, and Chichester far outweigh the numbers from the intermediate stations. But the position in the peak-hours is more evenly balanced in terms of passenger numbers and we have been in discussion with Southern to see whether there is any prospect of putting in an additional stop or two in the Portsmouth/Southampton portions of these trains. There is, however, not much prospect of success here as any change would probably require an 8 car portion for stations beyond Chichester and trains of this length are difficult to accommodate in the platforms allocated for Southern trains at Portsmouth Harbour and banned completely on the Southampton line because of power supply problems. As far as we know, no further changes are planned for the June 2009 timetable and, because of the franchise renewal, it is unlikely that there will be any significant changes in December 2009.

### Fares

Fares increased on average by 6% in January in line with the maximum allowed under the franchise of the September RPI of 5% plus 1%. We made representations on behalf of passengers south of Horsham who have increased journey times and Southern have told us that prices from these stations have been increased by less than the 6% permitted. In practice, it has been difficult to get confirmation of this as there are now so many fares available, despite the so-called simplification of the fares structure last September, that any lower increases in regulated peak-hour fares are often more than offset by higher increases in non-regulated off-peak fares. However, for those travelling off-peak who can plan their trips a week or more ahead, there are now advance purchase tickets from stations south of Horsham to Victoria starting as low as £3 in each direction (£2 with a railcard). These are only available on-line at the Southern website [www.southernrailway.com](http://www.southernrailway.com) and are generally valid for travel on trains arriving Victoria after 10.00 and departing up to the 15.32 and on or after the 19.32. The advance ticket requires travel to be made on the trains selected at the time of booking. Members should be aware that there is a range of prices in these advance tickets and there is little or no price-difference between some of the higher price tickets and the super off-peak returns (previously called Price-busters) or even the normal off-peak cheap day returns.

### Performance

Members are probably aware that some peak-hour Gatwick Expresses are starting and terminating in Brighton and are formed of the class 442 units previously used on the Waterloo to Bournemouth line. These units have been out of use for some years in store at Eastleigh. The DfT instructed Southern to use these units but their reliability, despite an extensive and expensive uplift, has been poor with several failures in service. This, coupled with poor weather and a large number of suicides, resulted in very poor and unacceptable performance by Southern during January and February. Things have improved since the beginning of March but the deterioration in performance could not have come at a worse time for Southern in their bid to retain the franchise even though the underlying reasons were often either down to the DfT or Network Rail.

### “Rail Action Group”

Members will have seen this Group mentioned in the press and elsewhere in the media. The group seem to be campaigning for Southern to be stripped of their franchise without suggesting who should take it on, other than the Government. The Group is focussing on the Brighton line problems mentioned above but claims to be representing *all* Sussex rail users. We have tried to contact them via their website but none of the links work and they have not published any telephone contact numbers. We hope you agree that communicating through WSRUA is preferable to a single issue organisation. WSRUA is respected in the rail industry and has established contacts with the train operators and our local MPs. We have been able to help a number of members get refunds and solving issues during the year through our connections with the people who run the industry. Oddly, since the service has started to improve once more, the Rail Action Group has been quiet.

Trevor Tupper - Membership Secretary