

# SOUTHERN RAILWAY STAKEHOLDER ANNUAL FORUM REPORT

Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2011, Croydon Park Hotel, East Croydon

This was a very well-organised, all-day, complimentary event by kind courtesy of the Southern, complete with hearty 3-course lunch with splendid choice including carvery provided, as well as free all-day travel on the Southern for those who needed it. Some 100 delegates attended, from Milton Keynes, Southampton and Hastings and everywhere in between. I represented the Southwark Rail Users Group. We were ranged around 14 circular tables, each also having a representative from Southern Rail or Network Rail to permit personal contact and conversation. Each delegate had a radio keypad, on which we could register preferences in numbered order as certain questions were asked throughout the day. The results after a few seconds were computed and put up as bar charts on screen. In some cases, the figures were compared with answers to the same question last year. Typical were satisfaction questions: e.g. from best to worst in preference concerning train services, toilets and kicking off with which mode of transport we used to reach the forum (amusement when realised that the tram had been omitted from the choices!). Also included were several questions concerning what we most wanted to see done for the future out of a selection presented on screen. During the breaks and afterwards, we were invited to visit various stalls set up outside the meeting room to discuss anything of concern to relevant managers.

Of great note and welcome is that, despite invariable mention of customer services as a generality, everybody who spoke referred to us as **passengers**.

1. **David Storey**, Franchise Improvement Director, got us settled in and the most important thing he mentioned was the ticketing system and the introduction of ITSO. Apparently, TfL has agreed to get rid of Oyster (!) and convert to the more advanced ITSO card.

[ITSO is a government-backed non-profit organisation which sets a common technical standard that:

- means transport operators throughout Britain can link up so passengers only have to use one payment 'smart' card no matter what bus, train or route they are using
- means that same card can be developed for multiple uses, including council services such as leisure centres or libraries
- means information gathered securely through card use can be used to provide better and more targeted service]

2. **Chris Burchell**, Southern's Managing Director, who came across to me as most able, gave us an update. The last six months had been mixed performance but still had 82% of passengers satisfied. Despite the snowfall, Southern achieved its best January for nine years with 90% punctuality. They are taking the possibility of more snowfall very seriously, as it seems to be more annual than a "once in every 40 years event" as we are told.

Key customer service obligations targets were met for Dec. 2010 and March 2011.

750 new cycle spaces have been provided – 750 more to come.

Southern very pleased to have won an award for Integrated Transport Excellence at the annual Rail Business Awards.

3. **James Burt**, Service Delivery Director and **Joel Mitchell**, Head of Performance were next. **James Burt** first:

Southern operate 2322 trains every weekday (South Eastern: 2061, South Western: 1667).

Next six months: aiming for continued growth in difficult economy.

11<sup>th</sup> December 2011 is next major timetable change with 10/12-car operation. South London Metro *via* Sydenham – up to 10-car, with 12-car on East Grinstead route.

Working on introduction of plan for Control Period 5 (2014 -2019).

Aiming for Right Time (not "within five minutes of timetabled arrival being counted as on-time), 7-day railway with simplified fares and better stations.

Admits that the Class 313 stock is less reliable than previous stock on the line (Coastway services). Class 442 (Gatwick Express & Brighton Main Line) still not as reliable as needed. Both classes are three or four times less reliable than the Class 337's (the newest trains). For the 442's, there are no replacement traction motors available, so the old ones have to be refurbished; however, good improvements have been noted since the refurbishment of their depot at Stewarts Lane.

[The British Rail Class 442 Wessex Electric electrical multiple units were introduced in 1988 on the South Western main line for fast services, which operated from London Waterloo to Weymouth. The Class 313's were introduced for the electrification of the Kings Cross/Moorgate suburban system in 1976-77.]

**Joel Mitchell** concentrated on fleet and service reliability.

Class 377: A new computer set-up mode process has been introduced for drivers to speed up getting the trains going, especially after unexpected shut-down of train systems. New software introduced for ice-on-conductor-rail mode to inhibit train shut-down when meeting iced-up conductor rails.

Class 313: Pre-1980's control relays, exposed below train carriage bodies, replaced with sealed units. Major overhauls to the camshaft power heads (controlling the motors). Train driver's illuminated displays in cab now LED's instead of tungsten bulbs (one blowing could cause a train to be taken out of service).

Class 442: The door mechanisms dating from the 1980's have been replaced – joint programme with industry experts (RDS) for door performance and monitoring.

Punctuality: "Peak Killers": Eight key trains have been identified on the Southern network that are "peak killers" that **must** run 100% to time to keep the rest running to time. If any of the eight is delayed, then it could affect up to 30-40 other trains during the peaks. Everyone concerned has been briefed – drivers and other crew, signallers and platform staff.

Right Time Railway: Southern continues to roll out the Right Time Railway. 4,000 Right Time Railway Watches have been issued to all drivers and others. A new version of "Bugle" (a station information system for the passengers) is being launched. "T -30" is being re-launched – doors shut 30 seconds before advertised time/train start. Changes being made to how service is handled at Victoria on the Sussex side.

Station indicators: "CIS" – Customer Information Screen system being upgraded to remove trains stuck on screen, "Delayed" etc. £3/4m being spent on this.

**Paul Thomas**, Network Rail Customer Relationship Executive, told us that Southern handles 150 million passengers annually. Victoria (Sussex routes) and London Bridge are at capacity.

NR are investing in remote condition monitoring, e.g. at railway points.

Thermal imaging cameras are being installed for electrical equipment of all kinds, so if it starts to go wrong, it sheds heat and is thus detected and remedied.

£15 million (my notes say £15 but that's a tad out!) being spent on conductor rail heaters in the Sussex area to inhibit ice formation on the top surface.

Intention to rebuild infrastructure to enable introduction of 10-car services on South London Metro services by December 2013 on the Battersea Park/Balham routes.

**Judith Ward**, Southern Environmental Manager, spoke on commitment to reduce electricity consumption by 25% at end of franchise and 2% on diesel. So far, electricity consumption has been reduced by 12.54% since commencement of scheme.

Actual current supplied for traction energy on trains has been reduced by 13.74% as a result.

Solar panels at Selhurst and Streatham Hill depots will hopefully provide 13% and 40% power input for all depot requirements at Selhurst & Streatham, respectively.

It is hoped to save some £17 - £40K annually overall by changing the domestic voltage from 240V AC to 220V AC using specialised step-down transformers at running depots at Brighton and nine other locations without detrimentally affecting the equipment performance.

All trains equipped with regenerative braking are now operating in regenerative mode.

**Emma Toms**, Head of Customer Experience, spoke on the National Passenger Survey, out of which she highlighted the following improvements adopted as a result.

Train toilets: There is now a 3-times daily report on every single train toilet regarding condition and availability. 95% of target has been met. More water bowsers (basically mobile platform water tanks) have been provided at termini to top up supplies on trains because most toilets are locked out-of-use because the water has been exhausted. Actual good condition of toilet cubicle also now paramount.

Announcements: New announcement guide issued for staff when informing passengers – policy of informing **at once** if train delayed, even if the crew doesn't know what's wrong.

**Q & A answers**: If train skips stations to recover service, even if on time on arrival at terminus, that service is still classed as a failure.

Smartcard to be launched in the autumn between Brighton and Seaford as a trial. Smartcard to be integrated with Oyster by end of 2012 (ITSO? - GAF).

New Brighton Line centralised map being launched with lots of colours, e.g. purple for Metro services, i.e. the Brighton Line will appear as the trunk and everything else run off/connecting with it.

Plan to introduce some/more intermediate block signalling to increase capacity on West Coastway, thus hopefully to reintroduce Southern's Brighton – Southampton service.

## **LUNCH!**

**Superintendent Andy Ball**, of British Transport Police kicked off the afternoon by requesting volunteers to join the Special Constabulary and then accompany him afterwards up to South Bermondsey to deal with the Millwall – QPR football derby crowds and 'territorial problems'!

He gave a useful insight into the function of the BTP and was pleased to note that a slow but sure mutual sharing of information on the ground with other police forces is being achieved, especially the Metropolitan Police Force (MP), who have produced much animosity and reluctance to co-operate in the past. Andy Ball naturally and understandably held out the BTP to be much more knowledgeable when it came to dealing with incidents on the railways than the MP. Results are coming through that train delays and disruptions caused by the MP are being reduced by more co-ordination with the BTP. Indeed with the London tube bombings, the MP is (most) reluctantly admitting that response time would have been quicker if the BTP had been permitted to act. This also includes dealing with delays caused by suicides etc.

For the Southern, the main base is at East Croydon, with posts elsewhere.

Top stations for recorded crime: Brighton, Worthing, Eastbourne, East Croydon, Epsom, Peckham Rye, East Dulwich.

**Jeremy Thair**, Head of Project Delivery, then spoke, followed by **Tim Sparrow**, Sussex Community Rail Partnership Chairman. No notes. For the first, we were handed out paper copies of the slide presentation. A request was made to provide attendees with electronic copies (not yet received).

**David Walker**, Head of Train Specification and Planning, spoke on timetable changes in May 2011.

Mostly minor. 16.15 ex-Victoria to Haywards Heath to terminate at Gatwick Airport.

Many minor changes in Horsham area to optimise a.m. peak performance.

Last Class 460's (the 'Varda-nosed' Gatwick Express trains) will run at end of April/beginning of May. Then Gatwick Express will be entirely Class 442.

December 2011 timetable change will make more use of Class 313's and 442's. Class 313's to move to shorter routes.

Further work being done especially on the East Coastway route, with a general review embracing services to Rye (in Sussex), Tattenham Corner, Milton Keynes and Tonbridge. Some will be faster, some slower.

The overcrowding trend throughout the Southern is becoming lower because of service improvements.

Ticket machines are now being enhanced so that on-screen timetable/availability restrictions for the ticket being purchased (shown on the "i" information page on the screen) can now be printed off to accompany the ticket. The idea is that the passenger can walk off with ticket + information to read it to avoid holding up passengers in the ticket machine queue. [Let's hope the passenger has actually purchased the correct ticket for his purpose! – GAF]. The machines have to be retrofitted with new printers for this facility.

**Q & A answers:** There is an admitted uncomfortable peak load on the 07.35 Wivesfield to London Bridge (06.32 ex-Littlehampton). No present solution – already 12-car and before the service was swapped with another, it was the Hove passengers complaining!

Brighton – Ashford: There is no case to lengthen the present 2-car diesels but admission that overcrowding has been witnessed. A survey suggested that passengers from the Lewes/Brighton end did not want to change trains at Eastbourne for an Ashford service starting there, so difficult to know what to do.

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Plenty of chance afterwards to speak to directors and managers (apart from Superintendent Ball, who was Millwall-bound). Most notable was the absence of time-wasting questions from the audience and the general overall confidence and competence of the speakers. Only the Network Rail team in attendance seemed to be less confident of what they were telling us. I wonder if Southern get the same impression. Inevitably, time sadly precluded all questions being answered during the sessions, and indeed everything being presented that Southern wanted to, but ample opportunity was given to place such questions in writing for subsequent attention and answering by Southern. It was a most rewarding day and many thanks to Southern Railway.

**Area stalls:**

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| 1. Retailing (Riz Wahid)                                  | 2. Accessibility (Kirsty Monk)                        |
| 3. Timetabling (David Walker)                             | 4. Area Managers                                      |
| 5. Our environment plan (Judith Ward)                     | 6. Community Rail (Tim Sparrow, Sam Bryant, Amy Owen) |
| 7. Network Rail (Paul Thomas, Mac Andrade, Simon Chapman) |   |

**Reported by Graham A. Feakins** – Herne Hill  
27<sup>th</sup> March, 2011