



# **Rail Issues in Tandridge**

**18 March 2005**

## **KEY ISSUE**

Update on rail issues affecting Tandridge.

## **SUMMARY**

Although train services and stations are not directly the responsibility of the County Council, both Passenger Transport Group and Tandridge Local Transportation Service have worked to deliver improvements where possible.

This report details the main developments in both train services and facilities at train stations over the last financial year and expected work for the coming one.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee is invited to comment on the content of the report.

## **INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND**

1. Train services in Tandridge are provided mainly by train operator Southern, which is also responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of the stations it serves, which it leases from Network Rail. Only Nutfield and Godstone stations, on the Redhill-Tonbridge line are not operated by Southern; these are operated by South Eastern Trains. There are 11 stations in Tandridge out of the 84 in Surrey as a whole.
2. Surrey County Council has no direct responsibility for planning train services or improving stations. Any work the County Council desires to see in these areas must be undertaken in partnership with the train operators concerned.

## **ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY**

### ***New trains***

3. Over the last year, new trains have been introduced on all lines in Tandridge. Electrostars (an electrically-powered train) have entered service on the East Grinstead line. There are likely to be some “short formations” (trains formed of fewer carriages than they ought to be) while the new trains settle in and until they are all delivered, which should be no later than summer 2005. Inevitably, at first the new trains will not be as reliable as the older trains until drivers and maintenance staff get better experienced and learn how best to make them work reliably. Due to the radically different technologies involved, the apparently simple answer of attaching a new train to an old train to make a full-length train is not technically possible. Meanwhile, new diesel-powered Turbostar trains have entered service on the London-Oxted-Uckfield line.
4. In addition to the temporary problems with short formations, new trains have fewer seats than the current ones. This is because they have disabled-accessible toilets (which are larger than the old non-accessible toilets) and spaces for wheelchairs. This improvement in accessibility is welcome, but there is an inevitable trade-off in seat numbers. The new trains have many other advantages over the old slam-door trains, such as on-board real time information, clear audible announcements which are made automatically, CCTV and air-conditioning. The new trains are an improvement that should encourage more use of trains, and less use of cars, and therefore contribute to a sustainable Surrey. It may be of use to note that the number of standard class seats available on new trains is only very slightly fewer than on the old trains – it is first class where the total seat reduction is significant. Given the almost complete lack of use of first class seating during off-peak hours, which represents wasted space, Passenger Transport Group holds the view that this is an appropriate decision.

### ***Longer trains and overcrowding issues***

5. Overcrowding in peak times is unlikely to vanish as an issue for the reasons outlined above, but should get better once all the new trains have arrived, are working reliably, and running at full length. However, passenger numbers of the rail network are growing year-on-year and this shows no sign of slowing down. Trains will therefore get busier and overcrowding more frequent and more severe. The train operators are well aware of this and would, in an ideal world, like to run longer trains. However, in order to do this, platforms at stations would need extending.

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6. Train operators are subsidised by the Strategic Rail Authority to run their businesses according to agreements on what enhancements will be delivered. There are no agreements with the SRA for significant platform extensions. The very high capital costs of this, and the length of time it would take to carry out, mean it would be a Government funding obligation, and not the responsibility of the train operator to carry out. However, the Strategic Rail Authority showed no inclination to provide such funding, and neither so far has the DfT (which is taking over strategic development of the rail network from the SRA, which is being wound up). More frequent trains are not an option to solve peak time overcrowding because there is no space on the tracks nearer London for them to fit in.
7. The County Council continues to lobby the SRA and Ministers whenever possible, for instance through Passenger Transport Group's meetings at the SRA, and meetings between the Executive Member for Transportation and Ministers.

### ***Service changes in Tandridge***

8. Some train service improvements in Tandridge have recently been introduced. The major one was an improvement in train service frequency from Tandridge to London. From December 2004, train services between Uckfield and Oxted were extended to run between London Uckfield and London Bridge via Oxted all day on Monday-Saturday (not just at the peak times as was previously the case). As the East Grinstead trains via Oxted run to London Victoria, this new service not only increases the number of trains to London from Oxted during the day from two per hour to three per hour, it also gives a choice of London stations.
9. Meanwhile, on Sundays, the Oxted to Uckfield service has been increased in frequency to run hourly all year round. Before December 2004 it ran every two hours on summer Sundays, and not at all on winter Sundays. The start-up costs of this Sunday service improvement were partly funded by Passenger Transport Group via Chris McCarthy's innovation fund.
10. The Strategic Rail Authority published its Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy consultation document in September 2004. This set out potential changes to the train service along the Brighton Main Line which could help address the widely recognised issues of overcrowding and poor punctuality along the line, particularly the section from Gatwick Airport station to London Victoria. The most controversial element of this plan has been the proposal to run six Gatwick Express trains per hour instead of the current four per hour, and to run them beyond the airport to the south coast, creating a Gatwick Express network. These services would also stop intermediately at key stops between Gatwick and London, allowing commuters to use them and therefore ease overcrowding by making better use of scarce track capacity. Although BAA has not been in favour of this change, Surrey County Council's Executive Member for Transportation has indicated that she is supportive of the proposals.
11. Two of the proposals outlined in the Strategy will affect train services running through Tandridge. It is proposed that the current Uckfield to London service should cease to call at some of the lightly-used stations between Edenbridge Town and Uckfield. This would give a faster journey time to London and should reduce the amount of car travel by people who live near stations on the Uckfield Line but who choose to drive to stations on the Brighton Main Line (sometimes via roads in Tandridge) to take advantage of faster journeys. The lightly-used stations on the Uckfield Line could still be served by a shuttle train running between Oxted and Uckfield.

12. The other change would take effect on the Redhill to Tonbridge section of line, which runs through Nutfield and Godstone stations in Tandridge. The current Tonbridge to Horsham trains would be withdrawn, with the document noting the low passenger numbers on the service. This would leave the current Tonbridge – Redhill – London Bridge trains serving Nutfield and Godstone at a rate of one train per hour in each direction, down from the current two trains per hour in each direction including the Tonbridge to Horsham service. The Route Utilisation Strategy says that the track capacity freed up at Redhill through this service reduction could be reallocated to a new service running between London Bridge and Reigate via Redhill. However, the SRA has now found that this is not possible to arrange operationally, and the train will instead provide a service from London Bridge to Gatwick, stopping at more of the intermediate stations than the revised Gatwick Express services.
13. The SRA hopes to implement the main line service changes outlined in the Route Utilisation Strategy in the December 2005 timetable change, though this is subject to Ministerial approval, both in terms of the nature of the changes and the timescale over which they will occur.

#### ***Station improvements in Tandridge***

14. Through the Local Transport Plan, Passenger Transport Group has access to limited capital funding to help fund improvements to station facilities, in partnership with the train operators, as does Tandridge Local Transportation Service. The LTS can also help deliver improvements in the access to stations along the highway, which cannot be undertaken by Passenger Transport Group. Good working relationships between Passenger Transport Group and LTSs are therefore essential to deliver complete packages of improvements at and around railway stations. Tandridge LTS has been particularly proactive in discussing railway station improvements with Passenger Transport Group.
15. Local Transport Plan funding is very unlikely to stretch to major station rebuilding, and so spending has been focussed on measures which improve personal security at stations (a desire expressed in the 2004 MORI survey on attitudes towards the County Council), or which improve interchange at the stations, meeting a commitment in the Local Transport Plan. Most of the improvements at stations funded by Passenger Transport Group arise as a result of deficiencies identified after undertaking an Interchange Audit, based on standards drawn up by the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport, also meeting a commitment in the Local Transport Plan.
16. It should be noted that where a train operator is not in a position to undertake partnership work on a station, it is unlikely that facilities can be enhanced. The train operator must also agree to take ownership and ongoing maintenance liabilities for any assets installed at stations, so that the County Council is not faced with an ongoing revenue commitment which cannot be serviced. Stations are private property and work can only be undertaken on them by approved railway contractors. The situation at Nutfield and Godstone stations, where facilities are clearly deficient, helps illustrate this. Because the stations are currently run by South Eastern Trains, but are expected to transfer into the Southern franchise by the end of 2005, it is impossible for South Eastern Trains to enter into an agreement to undertake works that might not be completed before the transfer, and which might also impose an unexpected cost on the new operator. Once the transfer is complete, Passenger Transport Group hopes to work with Southern to undertake partnership improvements at both these stations.

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17. In the last year, the following work has been carried out at railway stations in Tandridge, in partnership between Southern, Passenger Transport Group and/or Tandridge LTS:
- a. Whyteleafe: installation of cycle lockers
  - b. Oxted: installation of cycle lockers and new “interchange” bus stops (the first of their kind in the country to be licensed by the DfT for use, they feature a National Rail double-arrow logo and the name of the station above the normal bus stop flag, helping bus users to find interchange opportunities between non-car transport modes)
  - c. Hurst Green: installation of cycle lockers, with extra lighting and CCTV cameras to oversee these facilities, and also improve personal security at the front of the station
  - d. Lingfield: replacement of substandard cycle shelter with larger, brighter cycle shelter
  - e. Upper Warlingham: Extra lights and new CCTV cameras in car park, construction of new cycle shelter. In recognition of the partnership working between Surrey County Council and Southern, the latter agreed to a request that the substandard car park at Upper Warlingham station be resurfaced and that step-free access to platform 1 be provided through the “night gate” which is used when the ticket office is not open.
  - f. By the end of this financial year, most stations in Tandridge operated by Southern should have gained posters giving information on the local bus network operating from the station. These have been developed by Southern, and financially supported by the County Council.
  - g. In the coming 2005/06 financial year, partnership schemes are expected to be carried out at the following Tandridge stations:
  - h. Hurst Green: Improved lighting on eastern side of the station, new CCTV cameras on platform 2 (the platform for trains towards East Grinstead). Interchange bus stops.
  - i. Woldingham: Resurfacing of station car park, extra lighting and new CCTV cameras to enhance personal security in the car park. Improved lighting and pavement works on Church Road outside the station. Interchange bus stops. If funding allows, on-platform real time information displays might be installed.
  - j. Interchange bus stops at Caterham, Whyteleafe, Upper Warlingham and Lingfield.
  - k. At all stations where interchange bus stops have been installed, pedestrian signs guiding travellers from the station to the correct bus stop should be erected.

**Longer term issues:**

**Train services**

18. The long-delayed Thameslink 2000 might, in the longer term, take over services on the East Grinstead line. This would not deliver longer trains, as no significant platform extensions are currently proposed, but would provide new journey opportunities through central London and to the north of London. However, the scheme is currently in limbo while it seeks planning permission for the changes necessary in central London. Even if it is successful in securing these, it is far from clear how the project would be funded. The DfT's current preference appears to be for Crossrail (the east-west rail link across London) and it seems extremely unlikely that funding will be found simultaneously for two major capital projects to improve London's railway network.
19. The County Council remains supportive of Thameslink 2000, and is a member of the Thameslink 2000 Consortium, a grouping of local authorities that promotes the advantages of the scheme and tries to maintain its public profile.

**Stations**

20. The County Council is currently progressing the opportunities for taking more responsibility for railway stations across the whole county, through a "Pathfinder" scheme promoted by the Department for Transport and the Local Government Association. Several local authorities have been shortlisted to investigate Pathfinder schemes which would use new freedoms to deliver improvements that meet various Government objectives.
21. Surrey County Council has requested the freedom to take on the responsibility for new stations in an attempt to improve the ambience of Surrey's stations, many of which are neglected because train operators do not have long enough contracts to undertake major works there, and because Network Rail does not have sufficient interest in developing small stations. If the Pathfinder project proceeds, the County Council would take on the lease of some or all of Surrey's stations on a long-term basis, taking on all the revenue streams currently coming into the stations and ensuring that they remained ring-fenced for use at Surrey's stations (rather than being spent elsewhere on the rail network). The County Council would try to maximise the use of currently redundant station buildings, possibly by relocating community services such as libraries into the buildings. This would make such services easily accessible, create savings through no longer having to rent commercial properties which could be reinvested in the stations, and provide a human presence on the station for longer hours than at present, hopefully deterring vandalism and antisocial behaviour.
22. The next stage of the project is to commission a consultant to determine whether a satisfactory business case exists for such a project, and a cross-departmental board set up by the Executive Director for Sustainable Development will oversee this process.

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