

## TUNBRIDGE WELLS PUBLIC TRANSPORT FORUM

### Minutes of a meeting held on Tuesday 21 January 2009 at the Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells.

#### Present:

Councillor Peter Davies, TWBC (Chairman) (PD)  
 Mike Appelbe, on behalf of Hawkhurst Parish Council (MA)  
 Lene Beynon, Borough Engineering Officer, TWBC (LB)  
 David Candlin, Head of Economic Development and Regeneration, TWBC (DC)  
 Cheryl Clark, Committee Administrator, TWBC (CC)  
 Councillor Mrs Barbara Cobbold, TWBC (BC)  
 Michael Coggles, Chairman, Access Group (MC)  
 John Goodfellow, on behalf of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum (JG)  
 Daryl Jones, Economic Development & Business Liaison Officer, TWBC (DJ)  
 Martin Lewis, Chairman Tunbridge Wells & District Railway Travellers' Association (ML)  
 Murray Motley, Acting Route Enhancement Manager, Network Rail (MM)  
 Brian o'Kane, General Manager, Arriva (BoK)  
 Ian Paterson, Community Rail Project Officer, Rural Kent  
 Councillor Brian Ransley, TWBC (BR)  
 Tim Reynolds, KCC, Senior Transport Planner (TR)  
 John Spurling, Principal Planning Officer, TWBC (JS)  
 Chris Thomas, Chairman. Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum (CT)  
 Daniel Washington, Public transport Planner, KCC (DW)

#### Members of the Public in attendance:

None

#### Apologies received from:

June Bridgeman, Soroptomists International  
 Mike Gibson, Public Affairs Manager, Southeastern  
 Norman Kemp, Company Secretary, Nu-venture

**Action  
By:**

### MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

#### ACCURACY

- (1) The minutes of the last meeting held on 24 September 2009 (previously circulated) were agreed with the following amendments:
- a. Paragraphs 5, 6 & 7 were updates from Southeastern and not Network Rail.
  - b. Paragraph 8 - National Station Improvement Programme (NSIP) – It was noted that this was not principally a Network Rail initiative. But it was jointly run by Network Rail and the relevant Train Operating company through a Local Delivery Group. One of its principal aims was to draw in funding from other sources, e.g. local authorities, who then become stakeholders in the schemes that arose.
  - c. Mike Gibson should be asked to re-check the accuracy of the statements made in the final sentences of both paragraphs 5 and 6.

MG

## PRESENTATION BY IAN PATERSON, MEDWAY VALLEY COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

- (2) IP gave an outline of the set up which had been established with the assistance of local authorities, communities, business and other organisations from the area in partnership with the rail network. Regenerating stations and facilities on the line between Paddock Wood and Strood, the Partnership had helped to improve public transport links, involved communities and promoted local attractions. ML asked about funding and the customer profile. IP explained that the Partnership was part of the registered charity 'Action with Communities in Rural Kent'. In addition to basic fare income, core running costs were mainly funded by Southeastern and Kent County Council. IP's own time was also entirely dependent on the amount of funding available. Otherwise, project funding was obtained from whatever sources were available. The line was not just for tourism but provided a practical service for school children, commuters travelling to work as well as for shopping, leisure and other social aspects. BR commented that it would be useful to be able to reach the many attractions at Rochester without all the current changes and it was noted that the proposed extension of the service to Tonbridge in December 2009 would assist. In answer to MC's queries, this would also improve accessibility for the disabled, as Tonbridge was fully equipped for this purpose, otherwise IP advised there were ramps only at some of the other stations on the line. After the meeting he added a comment for the minutes that literature was available in large print but not in Braille or recorded voice versions.
- (3) For more information about the Kent Community Rail Partnership go to [www.ruralkent.org.uk](http://www.ruralkent.org.uk)

## MATTERS ARISING OR STILL OUTSTANDING

- (4) **Masterplanning**  
DC confirmed that the joint venture partnership agreement with John Laing had now been signed and the next steps would be to feed into the Town Centre Area Action Plans. Engagement with stakeholders would commence in February/March 2009.  
**Action: Ensure this item remains as a standing item on future agendas** **LB/CC**
- (5) **Tracker list of Actions**  
PD advised that in future a tracker list of actions would be produced for update at meetings. This would help to ensure that matters requiring update were not forgotten.  
**Action: Tracker list to be set up and brought to next meeting.** **LB/CC**

## UPDATE FROM NETWORK RAIL

- (6) **National Station Improvement Programme (NSIP):** MM advised that Tunbridge Wells was one of 28 stations included in this programme. Currently allocation of funding was being considered for Control Period 4, which was due to commence from April 2009.  
**Action: MM to update at next meeting.** **MM**

- (7) **Siding work:** MM advised that the previously identified problems in this respect had been overcome by means of 'derogation'. This was a term used by Network Rail giving a dispensation from otherwise necessary standards associated with the installation of new rail track. Consequently there was no need to undertake such disruptive excavations as had been proposed and the costs had reduced accordingly. Consultation with local residents would now follow and the project was back on track for completion by December 2009 to fit in with the new rail timetable. In answer to questions, MM also advised that he believed the existing footbridge would remain and there was no intention of using the old track to TW West.
- (8) **Kent Route Utilisation Strategy:** DC asked for information and timescales. MM responded that this was a long term strategic document to consider issues for Kent over the next 30 years. DC advised that consultation was due to commence in March/April and it would be important to feed in the views of Forum members.  
**Action: DC to check the deadline for consultation and liaise with LB if the next meeting date needed to be changed to incorporate consultation in this respect.**

DC/LB

#### UPDATE FROM SOUTHEASTERN

- (9) As he was unable to attend this meeting, MG had submitted a statement, which is appended to these minutes (Appendix 1) and updated the Forum on the following matters:
- December 2009 Timetable
  - Stakeholder Forum
  - Train Length
  - Tunbridge Wells Station
  - Paddock Wood Car Park
- MM quoted from this document in respect of the works at Tunbridge Wells Station and from his own perspective that the Paddock Wood Station Car Park seemed to be fully complete and in use.

#### QUALITY BUS PARTNERSHIP FOR TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND SOUTHBOROUGH

- (10) **Service Issues:** Councillor Mrs Barbara Cobbold (BC) attended the Forum to bring forward a number of local public transport issues collated as a result of discussions with fellow Borough Councillors. These were as follows:
- **Input from Councillor John Smith, Frittenden & Sissinghurst –** Sissinghurst was quite well served but Frittenden was probably the only parish in the Borough without a bus service. There was an informal car share scheme, operated by community minded private individuals, which took non-drivers or those without a car to the shops/doctors etc. There was a Co-Op run bus to Cranbrook. Whilst realistically there might not be sufficient demand for a daily service, it was thought that a bus once a week on Saturdays or to link in with local markets might be reasonable. Another alternative that might be considered was for KCC funding towards a privately operated village hopper-minibus, which might be more cost effective. The need for a bus service was raised during the Ward Walk at Frittenden, where with an ageing population, public transport for the village would become increasingly important. It was commented that there was no point in having a bus pass if there were no buses to use.
  - **Input from Councillor Mrs June Crowhurst, Pembury –** There should have been more consultation with Pembury residents about the change to the routes of Sherwood buses, which ran via Pembury and to the Lower Green, which was poorly served.

- **Input from Councillor Mrs Lesley Herriott, St John's** – There had been a lot of publicity about new bus services, and these were a vast improvement for the disabled but unfortunately they only served Rusthall, Sherwood and High Brooms. Others had to use buses that were not yet DDA compliant and had worse services than before: greater frequency was suggested for North Farm services. On daily tickets some of the boundaries seemed impractical for example those at Blackhurst Lane and also at Knights Park. A suggestion was made to move the boundary to the new hospital to save bus users up to £4 and the need for 2 separate tickets. Members of the Public Transport Forum should perhaps try using buses for work, leisure and for trips to hospital before commenting on service levels themselves.
- **Input from Councillor Mrs Cobbold, Broadwater** - Ramslye used to have an excellent bus service but now only the 285 ran once per hour from 9.15am until 2.15pm, outside the school run. There was no Saturday or Sunday service, except for Brighton buses along the Eridge Road, but this was too far to walk for many of the elderly on the estate. It was also suggested that a bus should link Ramslye to the Showfields estate as this would facilitate access to a doctors' surgery, the Library and the Number One Community Centre. It was reported that the Crowborough Service sometimes went straight down Eridge Road without picking up passengers from the Showfields estate. Other recent changes had impacted on the ability to gain direct access from Sainsburys at the south end of town through to St John's road and Tonbridge. This would be particularly inconvenient when the building works at the new medical centre between NatWest and BT in St John's Road were completed as many GPs including those from the practice in Clanricarde Gardens would move to St John's. There was also a discrepancy between the time of the advertised service of 10.14am from Showfields and the time at the bus stop of 10.19am, which caused passengers to miss the bus.
- In summary Cllr Mrs Barbara Cobbold felt that if the public were to be encouraged to use cars less, there was a need for a better public transport system. As a non-driver and a regular bus user she felt best placed to comment.

(11) BoK responded on behalf of Arriva but was unable to comment on the services of any other provider such as Griffin. He commented that the 297 east /west service across the Borough was entirely funded by KCC and although Arriva would be willing to look at a routing for Frittenden, it had to be appreciated that without additional financial support, any route would have to be commercially viable. BoK understood that changes to the 287 Pembury service routed via Sherwood had been made at the request of the public and had been effected following discussions with both the MP and KCC. It was suggested, however, that consultation might have been less with the Parish of Pembury than Sherwood residents. BC also mentioned that according to Pembury residents, notices were only placed on buses on the Saturday advising of changes effective Monday. BoK accepted that with difficulties experienced by Arriva in meeting the 56 day registration period, in hindsight, late notice may have been given to residents. BoK explained that there had been changes to a number of services, which turned at Tunbridge Wells station instead of Sainsburys and BR asked for clarification on which services ran from the southern end of town via St John's Road and Tonbridge. BoK indicated the 402, 7 and 77 but suggested that Arriva be advised of the opening date of the new medical centre so the situation could be reviewed.

**Action: PD and JS to check with Planning regarding any 106 agreement for the new medical centre. KCC and Arriva to liaise on matters raised by BC. All to be updated at the next meeting.**

DW/TR/  
BoK  
PD/JS

- (12) **Kent & Medway Public Transport Map** – DW advised that this map had been reissued dated January 2009. Copies were now available.
- (13) **Knights Park Service** – ML asked KCC to look at improving this service and BoK suggested that Richard Lewis at Arriva in Maidstone be kept in the loop.  
**KCC to update at next meeting.** DW/TR
- (14) **Bus stops** – DW advised that new bus stops from Trueform were being rolled out and new facilities would be provided for maps in the shelters to help show stops for connecting services. MA applauded the new stops that had already been installed at Hawkhurst and DW confirmed that plans had been drawn up for the new stop at Sandhurst.

### MEADOW ROAD BUS STOP

- (15) **MC** commented that he had noticed that drivers used the stop at Meadow Road for breaks that did not appear to be long enough for proper rest breaks. BoK advised that these would not be his drivers so he could not comment. He suggested these might be drivers from other operators using the stop as a turning point.
- (16) **LB** – advised that a proposal had been made to change the Meadow Road Bus Stop to a drop-off only stop in view of the difficulties of siting a shelter on the pavement and to set up an additional bus stop to pick up passengers on Mount Pleasant. There was some opposition to this being directly outside Gateway and BoK advised the need for a survey of buses currently using Meadow Road before taking this further.  
**Action: KCC to arrange survey and update at a future meeting** DW

### URGENT ITEM: PRESS RELEASE FROM GREG CLARK, MP

- (17) **Increase in fares and reduced number of carriages on peak services** - A copy of the press release (as attached appendix 2) was circulated for Members of the Forum's consideration. LB advised that she had been asked to forward the views of this Forum to Greg Clark MP. ML welcomed Greg Clark's support on this issue and considered the situation wholly unacceptable. BR commented that reduced rolling stock would not affect TW commuters as they should all still be able to find a seat on trains starting at TW. When returning he suggested they use the 5.38 from Cannon Street as this still had a full set of coaches. ML advised that those joining the train at Sevenoaks and Chelsfield going up to London often had to stand. There was excessive overcrowding and there was no evidence that numbers of passengers were falling especially from Charing Cross.  
**Action: PD suggested that LB respond to Greg Clark MP, in support of the protest and indicating concern over the sudden change without prior consultation. He also suggested that Southeastern be asked to provide evidence of a reduction in demand or other rationale behind the cuts.** LB

**Subsequent to the meeting a further press release was received from Greg Clark's office (appendix 3) on 26 January advising that Southeastern had agreed to reinstate carriages on four of the peak service trains.**

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

- (18) **Terms of Reference: LB** circulated draft new terms of reference (as attached appendix 4). These had been updated and simplified. Any amendments should be advised to her by email but in the absence of comments within 2 weeks of the meeting, she would assume no amendments were considered necessary and would post them on the Council's Website.  
**Action: In the absence of any amendments since the meeting LB to post on website.**

LB

## FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- (19) PD asked for Forum Members to advise of any items they wished to be considered at future meetings and the following were noted.
- Link to new hospital at Pembury
  - Knights Park, transport access & impact on Public Transport Route Utilisation Strategy – see also above
- Action: Any further agenda items for the next meeting should be submitted to the Chairman by 09/01/08 and copied to LB.**

All

## ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- (20) **Works to footpath in Grosvenor Road and resulting road closures** – BoK advised that Arriva had only become aware of this because a local resident had given him a copy of a KCC notice and asked how this would affect the bus services. BoK was concerned that there had been no consultation with Arriva and this was considered very remiss in view of the serious impact of the one-way routing through Grosvenor Road during a 2 month period from the end of January through to the beginning of March. BR thought a report might have been included in a Joint Transport Board agenda and CT wondered whether there had been liaison with all the utility services to ensure co-ordination with any other proposed works.
- Action: PD & LB to take up with KCC Highways**
- (21) **Insufficient funding for bus pass** – JG asked what might be done to encourage greater funding to offset the shortfalls bus operators were experiencing as a result of concessionary fares. DW thought that Kent were aware and had made comment. PD advised this was not a Borough issue but a national matter and MC urged KCC or any other concerned parties to write to the responsible civil servant (contact details available from MC).  
**Action: PD to raise with Greg Clark MP**
- (22) **KCC meeting Arriva** – DW advised that the next bid process would commence in February 2009 and this might or might not affect Tunbridge Wells.

PD/LB

PD

## NEXT MEETING DATES

- (23) **LB** advised the next meetings were scheduled for 10 June 2009 (may change to allow consultation see paragraph 8 above), 30 September 2009 and 27 January 2010.

All

## Tunbridge Wells Borough Council transport Forum 21 January 2009. Update from Southeastern

Please accept my apologies for being unable to attend tonight as this meeting clashes with another stakeholder commitment.

I hope you find this written update helpful, but if you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact me on [mike.gibson@southeasternrailway.co.uk](mailto:mike.gibson@southeasternrailway.co.uk) or on 0207 620 5430.

### December 2009 timetable

The draft timetable should be available within the next few weeks and we will be seeking comments from stakeholders and passenger representatives. In the interim, the draft service specification showing the proposed level of service can be found on our new website [www.southeastern2009.co.uk](http://www.southeastern2009.co.uk)

Stakeholders will note that there is an increase in both peak and off-peak capacity from Tunbridge Wells.

### Stakeholder Forum

Our next stakeholder forum is on Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> February at the Union Jack Club, Sandell Street, London SE1 between 6.00PM and 8.00PM and formal invitations will be sent out shortly. There will be updates on past performance, investment proposals and the December 2009 timetable from Andrew Munden, Network Rail Director and Charles Horton, Managing Director at Southeastern.

### Train length

We have received representations from Greg Clark MP regarding our decision to adjust the length of some trains and the forum may find the following explanation helpful.

In response to passenger demand, we adjust the number of carriages on our trains. We carry out regular passenger counts and passenger loading devices fitted to some of our trains tell us when and where they are busiest. Adjusting the length of trains is frequently unpopular with commuters on the services affected but you will appreciate that we have to take a network wide view and allocate rolling stock in the interests of all passengers who use our services.

When we took over the franchise in April 2006, the economy was buoyant, passenger numbers were rising and all the forecasts suggested that this would continue for the next few years. As you know, we are primarily a commuter railway and our revenue is heavily dependent on the health of the London economy. In recent months the scale of the economic downturn has become evident affecting most sectors of the economy including our own.

To explain the position an extract from Go-Ahead's pre-close trading update statement issued on 16 December 2008 which included a statement about the outlook for the future may be helpful:

*"The second half of our financial year will be subject to an uncertain economic climate. Economic forecasts for that period have become increasingly pessimistic over the past two months and we are taking management action accordingly"*

In times such as these, any prudent business is obliged to take action and we've taken steps to reduce our cost base in response to the emerging economic position. As part of these measures we have reduced the length of around 50 trains; many of them lightly used off-peak services where passengers will notice relatively little difference. While 50 sounds a large number, this should be considered in the context of the 1700 trains we run every weekday. Included in these we have reduced the number of carriages on a small number of peak trains and those serving Tunbridge Wells which have been reduced from 10 cars to eight are:

1741	Charing Cross to Tunbridge Wells
1828	Charing Cross to Tunbridge Wells
0656	Tunbridge Wells to Charing Cross
0720	Tunbridge Wells to Charing Cross
0740	Tunbridge Wells to Charing Cross.

However in response to our assessment of the effect of these changes on crowding levels and taking account of passenger and stakeholder feedback we are actively reviewing the situation and may return some services to their previous formation where we conclude that the effect on passengers warrants this. This review process was always part of our plans for these service changes and the evaluation exercise is currently underway. We expect that this review will be concluded in the next two weeks.

Please accept our assurance that where commercially and operationally possible we will always listen to and act upon feedback from stakeholders and passengers. By way of example since taking over the franchise we have introduced over 20 additional peak and shoulder peak services (see appendix below) all in response to feedback from those who use our services.

### **Tunbridge Wells Station**

Commuters and local residents will have seen that the station is covered in scaffolding as part of our on-going dilapidation works. We apologise for any inconvenience caused but are confident that the facelift will be a real improvement.

We are committed to installing lifts at the station and negotiations are currently underway with EDF Energy with a view to upgrading the power supply. We hope to be in a position to have the lifts in operation by autumn this year.

We also propose to install automatic barriers at the station, which as well as protecting revenue will act as a deterrent against vandalism and unauthorised access. There has been some interest from local stakeholders in this proposal and full details of the scheme are below

- The downside gateline will consist of 5 automatic gates and a wide aisle gate and necessitate the removal of the existing glass coffee shop structure. A new, single window DDA compliant ticket office will be installed in this area.
- The two doors that are currently open for access to the station will be shut (available for emergency egress only) and the existing door not currently used adjacent to the lift shaft will be brought into permanent use. There will be no route through to the rear of the upside platform via the footbridge as present and new fencing will be constructed to facilitate this. The ground area around the base of the footbridge stairs will be re-cobbled and the flower seller marginally re-located.
- Plans for the lift mentioned above will, in all probability, be completed concurrent to the gateline works thus minimising customer disruption.
- The upside gateline will consist of 4 automatic gates and a wide aisle gate. It will be positioned across the existing ticket office hall. The two Ticket Vending Machines will be relocated to the unpaid side of the gateline. There will be some minor structural alterations to the doorway leading on to the platform to create a wider access/egress point.
- It is currently planned to staff the gates from 06.00 to 23.30 (Monday to Sunday) offering an improved level of safety and security.
- The external facade of the upside building is a Grade 2 listed structure and the Conservation Officer at the council has been fully consulted on our proposals. This has resulted in Southeastern having to abandon some safety enhancement proposals for widening the external doorway to improve flows. Other comments have been received some of which are valid, regarding the footbridge being a public right of way. Our research confirms it is not.
- Once issues that involve the Conservation Officer have been addressed and agreed are in hand and a suitable power supply sourced from Network Rail, the works can proceed and the barriers should be operational by September 2009.

### **Paddock Wood station car park**

Works to expand the station car park have now been completed. Capacity has now been enhanced by approximately 25%

### **Results for railway period 10**

We are slowly recovering from the poor operating and infrastructure conditions that have hit our performance over the last three periods. In partnership with network Rail, there is still a lot of work to do, but we are confident that performance will soon be back to its previous record levels. Even with the recent dip, it's perhaps worth pointing out that together with network rail we are delivering the best performance on the Southeastern network since records began.

<b>Mainlines</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Performance on average this period</b>	<b>Performance on average over past year</b>	<b>Threshold for season ticket discounts</b>
<b>Train service punctuality</b> <i>(percentage of peak hour trains arriving within five minutes of their advertised arrival time)</i>	85.0%	91.2%	91.3%	82.0%
<b>Train service reliability</b> <i>(percentage of the advertised train service actually operated)</i>	99.0%	99.4%	99.4%	98.0%
<b>Metro</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Performance on average this period</b>	<b>Performance on average over past year</b>	<b>Threshold for season ticket discounts</b>
<b>Train service punctuality</b> <i>(percentage of peak hour trains arriving within five minutes of their advertised arrival time)</i>	89.5%	90.0%	90.0.7%	86.5%
<b>Train service reliability</b> <i>(percentage of the advertised train service actually operated)</i>	99.0%	98.9%	99.2%	98.0%

Mike Gibson  
Public Affairs Manager  
Southeastern

**From: Greg Clark, M.P.**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA**

20<sup>th</sup> January, 2009

### **MP SLAMS "DOUBLE WHAMMY" FOR WEST KENT COMMUTERS**

Tunbridge Wells MP Greg Clark used a debate in the House of Commons last night (Tuesday) to demand action from the Transport Minister to reverse the decision by Southeastern trains to cut the number of carriages serving peak-time commuters from Tunbridge Wells, High Brooms and Tonbridge.

Mr Clark also protested at the injustice of the recent 10% increase in rail fares forced on local rail travellers to pay for the Channel Tunnel High Speed Rail Link - a service which does not serve anyone in West Kent.

Speaking in the House of Commons debate, Mr Clark said:

*"Commuters in Tunbridge Wells suffered a double whammy at the beginning of the year because they faced fare increases of 10 per cent., while capacity on some of the peak services has been reduced by 20 per cent. It is as if they are subject to a bizarre game of musical chairs in which they pay more for a seat and it then gets taken away from them."*

He cited constituents who had written to him with daily tales of the standing-room only peak trains and with evidence that train travel from the Tunbridge Wells area is now slower and more expensive than for many towns of similar distance from the capital.

Calling for action from the Transport Minister, Paul Clark MP, who was at the dispatch box, Greg Clark said:

*"Of the five trains between 6.56 and 7.56 in the morning that link Tunbridge Wells and Charing Cross, three have had their carriage numbers reduced from 10 to eight. I hope the Minister will be able to exert his influence on Southeastern. I hope that Charles Horton and his staff at that company hear my constituents' stories and learn of the situation that they face, and so review the decision to cut peak-time capacity."*

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Speaking after the debate, Greg Clark said

*"Many of my constituents start or end their day with a commute to London and there is nothing more miserable than having to stand all the way - especially if the cost of your ticket has gone through the roof.*

*"The Transport Minister heard loud and clear the protests of my constituents against this insane decision to cut capacity on our very busiest trains by 20%. After the debate the Minister told me that he had got the message and would take the matter up immediately with Southeastern. I will hold him to this promise and will look for this decision to be reversed without delay. "*

## NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. Further information from Rachel Godfrey on 0207 219 1773 or 07908 367421

2. Full text of Greg Clark MP's Speech in Hansard is as follows:

### **+9.21 pm**

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker) on securing this important debate. Commuters in Tunbridge Wells suffered a double whammy at the beginning of the year because they faced fare increases of 10 per cent., while capacity on some of the peak services has been reduced by 20 per cent. It is as if they are subject to a bizarre game of musical chairs in which they pay more for a seat and it then gets taken away from them. I shall address both of those points in turn.

As my hon. Friend eloquently said, we face fare increases well above inflation. The increase is 10 per cent. in Tunbridge Wells this year, following one of 7.9 per cent. the previous year. We can look forward to increases for a further two years, all because the Government, in the tendering document, required Southeastern customers to pay for the costs of the channel tunnel rail link. On the Hastings line, from Sevenoaks right down to Hastings, none of our constituents would benefit from the high-speed line. It is fantastic that it is going ahead, and those who can benefit from it clearly have cause for celebration, but no one in Tunbridge Wells, High Brooms, Tonbridge or any of the stations used by my constituents will benefit. Indeed, we actively disbenefit in the following way.

Journey times from Ashford, which now last 83 minutes on average, will fall to 36 minutes. In so far as there is competition between our towns, Ashford will be more attractive in commuting terms than Tunbridge Wells. We think we have manifest charms that might make up for that, and we are confident that we can hold our own, but nevertheless it is galling for my constituents that they will have no reduction in journey time, while paying the same or more than commuters in Ashford.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, in Hastings the situation is even worse. MPs representing constituents along the A21 and the line from Sevenoaks to Hastings have come together with the district and county councils in the area to create a reference group to promote the importance of improving transport links in the region. One of the consequences of the fare increases and the new high-speed rail line is that Hastings will be more isolated in transport terms than it has been to date. Ramsgate will have a high-speed rail link, and people will be able to get to London much faster; train services from Brighton to London are much better than they are from Hastings; and the relative position of a town such as Hastings, which needs all the help it can get to regenerate itself and is making great efforts in that regard, will be relatively disadvantaged. We can add to that continuing problems with congestion on the A21, which desperately needs an upgrade in the form of a dual carriageway between Tonbridge and Pembury, and between Kippings Cross and Lamberhurst. Until we get that improvement, and as a result of the fare increases, Hastings will be further disadvantaged by the changes.

I shall deal with overcrowding, although I am disappointed to have to raise the issue. It is important that we get value for money. My constituents feel that the service provided by Southeastern over the past few years was much better than that provided under the Connex South Eastern franchise; there was an improvement. There have been improvements to stations, too – they have been painted and brought up to date. The service has deteriorated recently, but up until then, the service was more reliable than in the past. Given that background, it disappoints me that without any fanfare – without any publicity at all, as far as I can see – the decision was taken to reduce capacity from 10 carriages to eight on five peak-time trains servicing Tunbridge Wells. The reason that Southeastern gives for that is that it needed to react to deteriorating economic conditions.

Southeastern is implying a radical cut of 20 per cent. in the number of commuters – a cut that I am certain has not taken place, because the consequence of the move made in recent weeks is that peak-time trains have become even more crowded. Of the five trains between 6.56 and 7.56 in the morning that link Tunbridge Wells and Charing Cross, three have had their carriage numbers reduced from 10 to eight. Let me share some of the consequences with the House.

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My constituent Philip Ashworth wrote to me on the issue. Again, he was not informed of the policy decision. He says:

"Monday 5th Jan...8 carriages rather than 10...commuters pack in the carriages like Sardines!

Tuesday 6th...8 carriages rather than 10...standing all the way to London...Wednesday 7th, short rail stock – train packed.

Thursday 8th short rail stock – train packed".

And so it continues on Friday 9 January and beyond. We have a deteriorating service, but the price has rocketed.

My constituent Chris Comorford has done calculations that show that however one looks at it – whether we base the calculation on distance travelled or the speed of the service – Tunbridge Wells is becoming one of the most expensive places in the south-east to commute from, mile for mile or minute for minute. For example, commuters travel an additional 4 miles to get to Reading, but they do so at more than twice the average speed. The journey from Tunbridge Wells to London is twice as expensive. We are paying more money and getting a poorer service. We need to address that before measures to ensure sustainable transport are affected in the wrong way. We want people on the rails, not the roads. The Tunbridge Wells and District Railway Travellers Association, led by Martin Lewis, shares my concerns and those of my constituents on the issue.

I close by putting to the Minister a suggestion made by my constituent, Mr. Ashworth:

"Can I suggest that we are able to buy 3rd class tickets, standing room only at half current price, perhaps commuters would not feel so grieved!"

I hope it will not come to that. I hope the Minister will be able to exert his influence on Southeastern. I hope that Charles Horton and his staff at that company hear my constituents' stories and learn of the situation that they face, and so review the decision to cut peak-time capacity. The company has promised us extra trains by December 2009 – two extra trains from Tunbridge Wells to London – so it seems perverse to squeeze capacity now only to increase it later. I hope the Minister can use his good offices to influence the company, and I hope the company listens to constituents and returns to the high levels of service that, until recent months, we had come to expect from it.

ENDS

**From: Greg Clark, M.P.**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA**

26 January 2009

**CLARK: COMMON SENSE WINS THE DAY ON TRAIN DECISION**

Tunbridge Wells MP Greg Clark welcomed the decision by Southeastern to reinstate carriages on four trains serving peak-time West Kent commuters as a victory for common sense.

Mr Clark said:

*"My constituents will be delighted at this U-turn – common sense has prevailed. However, why Southeastern ever decided to reduce the length of these overcrowded trains in the first place is beyond me.*

*"Following my speech in the House of Commons last Tuesday, I spoke to Southeastern's Managing Director Charles Horton on Friday and reiterated my protest.*

*"I am glad that Charles Horton and his staff have finally listened to my constituents. Although, he could have saved himself a lot of time and trouble if he had consulted with his passengers in the first place."*

Mr Clark is disappointed that Southeastern has refused to reverse the decision on one of the train services, 0656 from Tunbridge Wells to Charing Cross:

*"I cannot understand why Southeastern has upheld its decision on just one of the trains and will continue to press for this to be reinstated to its original length as soon as possible. My constituents, who have suffered a massive increase in their rail fares, deserve a better service than this."*

Last Tuesday (20 January 2009), Greg Clark used a debate in the House of Commons to demand action from the Transport Minister on Southeastern's decision to cut the number of carriages serving peak-time commuters from Tunbridge Wells, High Brooms and Tonbridge.

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Mr Clark also protested at the injustice of the recent 10% increase in rail fares forced on local rail travellers to pay for the Channel Tunnel High Speed Rail Link - a service which does not serve anyone in West Kent.

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### NOTES FOR EDITORS

2. Further information from Rachel Godfrey on 0207 219 1773 or 07908 367421
3. Southeastern cut the number of carriages from ten to eight on the following trains:

0656, 07.20, 07.40 – Tunbridge Wells to Charing Cross  
1741 & 1828 – Charing Cross to Tunbridge Wells

All of these trains will be reinstated back to their original length from Monday 2 February, apart from the 0656 Tunbridge Wells to Charing Cross.

4. Full text of Greg Clark MP's Speech (Tuesday 20 January 2009) in Hansard is as follows:

**+9.21 pm**

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker) on securing this important debate. Commuters in Tunbridge Wells suffered a double whammy at the beginning of the year because they faced fare increases of 10 per cent., while capacity on some of the peak services has been reduced by 20 per cent. It is as if they are subject to a bizarre game of musical chairs in which they pay more for a seat and it then gets taken away from them. I shall address both of those points in turn.

As my hon. Friend eloquently said, we face fare increases well above inflation. The increase is 10 per cent. in Tunbridge Wells this year, following one of 7.9 per cent. the previous year. We can look forward to increases for a further two years, all because the Government, in the tendering document, required Southeastern customers to pay for the costs of the channel tunnel rail link. On the Hastings line, from Sevenoaks right down to Hastings, none of our constituents would benefit from the high-speed line. It is fantastic that it is going ahead, and those who can benefit from it clearly have cause for celebration, but no one in Tunbridge Wells, High Brooms, Tonbridge or any of the stations used by my constituents will benefit. Indeed, we actively disbenefit in the following way.

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Journey times from Ashford, which now last 83 minutes on average, will fall to 36 minutes. In so far as there is competition between our towns, Ashford will be more attractive in commuting terms than Tunbridge Wells. We think we have manifest charms that might make up for that, and we are confident that we can hold our own, but nevertheless it is galling for my constituents that they will have no reduction in journey time, while paying the same or more than commuters in Ashford.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, in Hastings the situation is even worse. MPs representing constituents along the A21 and the line from Sevenoaks to Hastings have come together with the district and county councils in the area to create a reference group to promote the importance of improving transport links in the region. One of the consequences of the fare increases and the new high-speed rail line is that Hastings will be more isolated in transport terms than it has been to date. Ramsgate will have a high-speed rail link, and people will be able to get to London much faster; train services from Brighton to London are much better than they are from Hastings; and the relative position of a town such as Hastings, which needs all the help it can get to regenerate itself and is making great efforts in that regard, will be relatively disadvantaged. We can add to that continuing problems with congestion on the A21, which desperately needs an upgrade in the form of a dual carriageway between Tonbridge and Pembury, and between Kippings Cross and Lamberhurst. Until we get that improvement, and as a result of the fare increases, Hastings will be further disadvantaged by the changes.

I shall deal with overcrowding, although I am disappointed to have to raise the issue. It is important that we get value for money. My constituents feel that the service provided by Southeastern over the past few years was much better than that provided under the Connex South Eastern franchise; there was an improvement. There have been improvements to stations, too – they have been painted and brought up to date. The service has deteriorated recently, but up until then, the service was more reliable than in the past. Given that background, it disappoints me that without any fanfare – without any publicity at all, as far as I can see – the decision was taken to reduce capacity from 10 carriages to eight on five peak-time trains servicing Tunbridge Wells. The reason that Southeastern gives for that is that it needed to react to deteriorating economic conditions.

Southeastern is implying a radical cut of 20 per cent. in the number of commuters – a cut that I am certain has not taken place, because the consequence of the move made in recent weeks is that peak-time trains have become even more crowded. Of the five trains between 6.56 and 7.56 in the morning that link Tunbridge Wells and Charing Cross, three have had their carriage numbers reduced from 10 to eight. Let me share some of the consequences with the House.

My constituent Philip Ashworth wrote to me on the issue. Again, he was not informed of the policy decision. He says:

"Monday 5th Jan...8 carriages rather than 10...commuters pack in the carriages like Sardines!

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Tuesday 6th...8 carriages rather than 10...standing all the way to London...Wednesday 7th, short rail stock – train packed.

Thursday 8th short rail stock – train packed".

And so it continues on Friday 9 January and beyond. We have a deteriorating service, but the price has rocketed.

My constituent Chris Comorford has done calculations that show that however one looks at it – whether we base the calculation on distance travelled or the speed of the service – Tunbridge Wells is becoming one of the most expensive places in the south-east to commute from, mile for mile or minute for minute. For example, commuters travel an additional 4 miles to get to Reading, but they do so at more than twice the average speed. The journey from Tunbridge Wells to London is twice as expensive. We are paying more money and getting a poorer service. We need to address that before measures to ensure sustainable transport are affected in the wrong way. We want people on the rails, not the roads. The Tunbridge Wells and District Railway Travellers Association, led by Martin Lewis, shares my concerns and those of my constituents on the issue.

I close by putting to the Minister a suggestion made by my constituent, Mr. Ashworth:

"Can I suggest that we are able to buy 3rd class tickets, standing room only at half current price, perhaps commuters would not feel so grieved!"

I hope it will not come to that. I hope the Minister will be able to exert his influence on Southeastern. I hope that Charles Horton and his staff at that company hear my constituents' stories and learn of the situation that they face, and so review the decision to cut peak-time capacity. The company has promised us extra trains by December 2009 – two extra trains from Tunbridge Wells to London – so it seems perverse to squeeze capacity now only to increase it later. I hope the Minister can use his good offices to influence the company, and I hope the company listens to constituents and returns to the high levels of service that, until recent months, we had come to expect from it.

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