

news



Big improvements to Medway Valley services

The new rail timetable that came into force on December 13th is part of the biggest change to Kent Rail services for around 40 years.

The Medway Valley Line now has good connections at Strood with the High Speed Service to Ebbsfleet and St Pancras offering new journey opportunities.

It is worth remembering that you can join the High Speed Service in the opposite direction to Medway Town destinations as well as to Sittingbourne and Faversham. And fares in this direction attract no surcharge as trains do not use the High Speed line over this section.

Sample Off Peak Day Return Fares from Maidstone West and Snodland to St Pancras are: £18.30 and £18.00 respectively. Typical journey times are 1 hour 4 minutes from Maidstone and 52 minutes from Snodland.

The new schedules also bring off peak and Saturday through trains to Tonbridge. This allows better changes with other services.

Finally, there is a later last train from Tonbridge to Strood on Monday



High speed train at Strood station

to Friday evenings and from Maidstone to Strood on Saturday evenings allowing a later journey home in this direction.

The new timetable booklets now include both Maidstone West and Maidstone East line services and are available from staffed stations at Maidstone West, Strood, Paddock Wood and Tonbridge.

More locally they are available from your usual local community outlet, including libraries, selected post offices and Tourist information centres.

West is best

September saw the completion of a thorough makeover of Maidstone West Station.

Most noticeable is the complete replacement of the west platform station canopy with a virtual replica in the same style but with new metalwork and glazing. The attention to detail shown is remarkable. The town side platform has also had the glazing completely replaced. These improvements, combined with the previous application of the new brighter Southeastern Railway colours throughout, has made the whole platform area very much lighter and more welcoming.

The toilets have been completely rebuilt and upgraded presenting a contemporary clean environment in contrast to the tired old facilities previously on offer!

The ticket hall has received a thorough redecoration with new wooden flooring and new Help Points complete the picture.



Assistant Station Manager Matt Fraser and CRP Officer Ian Paterson shelter under the new canopy



Paying the penalty

With most stations unmanned and no ticket machines available, the Medway Valley Line has for many years carried a number of passengers for no charge.

This situation has clear implications for profitability and for the recorded number of passengers using the service.

The line has been one of only two in Kent not to be part of the Southeastern Penalty Fare area and the Partnership had been pressing for it to be included and for better fare enforcement efforts to be made.

On October 7th Penalty fares were introduced

and as a result it is now the responsibility of passengers to ensure that before boarding a train they have either a valid rail ticket or a "Permit to Travel" obtained from the Permit machine located at each station. Failure to be able to present either when asked to do so by a Rail Enforcement Officer can result in a Penalty Fare (Minimum of £20) being charged.

The Permit machines will accept any amount towards your fare, the value of which can then be deducted from the cost of your ticket purchased (within two hours) from the train conductor or your destination station.

Ranscombe by Rail meets Railway Roundabout

Community Rail month brought a double bill to the Medway Valley Line on June 7th when a morning ramble from Cuxton Station was followed by an afternoon round trip on the line with a live commentary.

The ramble saw a party of ten leave Cuxton Station on a scenic guided walk of around 4-5 miles that incorporated the Ranscombe Farm Reserve. Led by Ben Sweeney, the Reserve Warden, participants will long remember the glorious poppy display encountered en route on this sunny morning.

The afternoon rail trip participants benefited from a live commentary by historian Bob Ratcliffe whilst travelling from Maidstone West to Paddock Wood and thence to Strood before returning to Maidstone. The Community Rail Partnership provided the real ale and refreshments now expected on such occasions.

Thanks are due to both Ben and Bob for giving up a Sunday for these events and for Southeastern for providing special rate tickets on the day. The Partnership is keen to promote guided walks from Medway Valley stations and hope to have a programme of them arranged for 2010. For updates, please watch the Community Rail Noticeboards or the Partnership Website.



Historian – Bob Ratcliffe

Green Wagon seeks green fingers

An unexpected bonus under the Maidstone West refurbishment was the restoration of an old wagon that has sat unused in a bay platform at the station.

The wagon (a "grampus" open truck) sustained a hot axle box whilst on an engineering train nearly 40 years ago and was detached and parked at the station, never to move again.

With the station being refurbished this year its future looked bleak, but owner Network Rail kindly arranged for it to be painted, fitted with a new false floor and made available for some kind of floral display.

The Medway Valley Line Community Rail Partnership is now looking for individuals or a group that might be interested in using it to create a landscaping display to further brighten up this station and help restore the almost lost tradition of station floral displays.

The wagon sits in a sunny spot and with a soil depth of around only six inches will need some regular maintenance (especially in hot/dry weather) with plants that do not require too much water!

Access would be available only by arrangement with the Railway Companies and be strictly subject to railway safety requirements.

In the first instance Ian Paterson, Community Rail Project Officer, would be pleased to hear from anyone interested. Contact details are on the back page.



Station guides hit the letterbox

The Rail Partnership was pleased to be able to produce and distribute some more Station Guides for un-staffed stations this year. A bit like the proverbial buses, after a long wait, three have come along together!

In 2009 we covered Watringbury, East Farleigh and Halling Stations. These communities received door to door delivery of a bespoke glossy leaflet detailing facilities at their local station, along with sample fares, journey times, travel suggestions and useful contact information.

These latest items were kindly delivered free of charge by community organisations and a copy of the current train timetable accompanied them. We are grateful for all local assistance received.

Hopefully this exercise will encourage those residents who do not use their local rail service to give it a try. Non rail users often have little knowledge of what their local line can offer and expect fares to be higher than they actually are.



The Kent Community Rail Partnership gratefully acknowledges financial support received towards the production of the Station Guides from Network Rail, the Department for Transport and ACORP, as well as for contributions received from Southeastern, Maidstone Borough Council and Barming Council.

New Hythe – new look

Rail Users at New Hythe will doubtless be pleased to note that the graffiti that was much evident along the pedestrian path to the station has been removed.

This has been carried out as a joint exercise between the Kent Probation Service, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, the Medway Valley Community Rail Partnership and Kent County Council.

Now that the area has been cleaned we are pleased to learn that local PCSO Michael Carrano will be carrying out patrols in the area. It is hoped that a mobile CCTV can also be installed in the area.

Additionally, more station improvements are expected at this station soon including signage from the road and new seating.



East Farleigh Bus gets return ticket

In our last newsletter we were pleased to announce the return of Rail Replacement Buses to East Farleigh Station, after a period when they came no closer than Glebe Lane around half a mile away.

Unfortunately our jubilation was perhaps a little premature. On a few subsequent occasions buses haven't been able to serve the station as cars parked in the entrance to the car park have prevented the buses from turning.

As a result, Southeastern are now coning off the problem area when buses are used and are reinforcing this message by a notice-board that has been introduced nearby. By the time this newsletter appears the car park area should be marked out to prevent parking around the entrance and we are hopeful that this will prove to be the long term solution.

If you do experience any problems with Replacement Bus Services reaching the station, please do let us know.



Watringbury to be watering flowers!

Country stations traditionally evoked local pride and station staff looked to ensure that not only were they well presented but also a riot of colour in the Spring and Summer with floral displays much to the fore.

With the de-staffing of many small stations in recent decades this tradition largely disappeared.

However with the development of "station adoption schemes" green shoots are appearing again and the Rail Partnership are proud to have been able to assist the Watringbury Station Partnership to secure access to a grassed area at the station for the purpose of bulb planting.

Ownership of station land is in the hands of Network Rail, save for the areas leased by them

to Southeastern for station use. The bulb area is Network Rails and a formal Community Scheme has now been set up.

It is hoped that a similar arrangement with train operator Southeastern will shortly be completed, allowing the group to look at provision of flower planters on the platforms and installation of a mural based on a collage of designs from Watringbury Junior School pupils.

The Station Partnership is led by local resident Dave Mitchelmore, who will be assisted by Noreen Vinall and Barry Fisher. They are all seen here at the station (in their new orange jackets) having just received their safety brief from Network Rails Mike Franklin (on the left).



Destination... Tonbridge

With the extension of off peak and Saturday Medway Valley train services from Paddock Wood to Tonbridge why not enjoy the scenic views from the Medway Valley Train and take a fresh look at this riverside town and see what it has to offer?

Leaving the main station exit at Tonbridge turn left and then follow the road through the compact town shopping area for around half a mile to reach the river bridge over the Medway and the castle beside it.

Here you have a number of choices:

- Visit the castle – one of England's finest motte and bailey castles with a 13th century gatehouse. Open every day (except Christmas and New Year) – entry fee applies and includes audio tour
- Visit the Tourist Information Centre - stocks information on local attractions, including information on the nearby Haysden Country Park. Tel **01732 770929**
- Spend some time in the Swimming Pool complex – has indoor and outdoor pools, Health Suite, Tennis & Bowls, Crazy Golf, Bouncy Castle and Café Zest. **01732 367449**
- Take a walk in the Park – acres to explore with a children's playground and riverside walks
- Cycle to Penshurst Place – Use Cycle Path 12 from Tonbridge Castle to Penshurst Place – a 5 mile riverside ride, largely off road. Hire a bike in Tonbridge from Cycle-ops (**01732 500533**) or take your own.

And Remember... 3 or 4 travel for the price of 2 when travelling off-peak together! (Terms and conditions apply)



Travel by Train Events

We are pleased to give below a few suggestions to give you an opportunity to get out and about on your local railway line!

- 13 – 21 Feb Half Term Fun: Pirates and Princesses 01622 872068**
The Hop Farm Beltring. Alight at Paddock Wood. Then Arriva Bus 6 to Hop Farm
- 28 March New Hythe Station Walk (Free) 01732 847415**
Leave 2.15pm, arrive back around 4.30pm
A circular flat walk via riverside to Snodland, returning via Leybourne Lakes. Around 3 miles.
Leader: David Thornewell
- 1 – 3 May Sweeps Festival 01634 843666**
Mix of music, morris dance and entertainment
Alight at Strood and cross river bridge to Rochester
- 1 – 3 May Kent County Fair 01622 872068**
The Hop Farm Beltring. Family Entertainment, country pursuits/activities. Alight at Paddock Wood Station – Arriva Bus 6 to Hop Farm
- 4 – 6 June Dickens Festival 01634 843666**
Festival of music, dance, drama and street theatre. Alight at Strood and cross river bridge to Rochester.
- 6 June Cuxton Station Walk (Free) 01634 718895**
Leave 10.00am, arrive back around 12.30. (Take own drink). Optional Pub visit at end of walk (White Hart). Undulating walk over fields and through woods. Not suitable for pushchairs. Around 4.5 miles, taking in part of North Downs Way. Leader: Peter Green.

And don't forget – with Group Travel, 3 or 4 people travelling together go for the price of two! (Terms and Conditions apply).

Contact us

Medway Valley Line Community Rail Partnership

Chairman: Cllr. Mike FitzGerald - Vice Chairman: Bob Ratcliffe
email: mikefitzgerald@maidstone.gov.uk

Line Officer: Ian Paterson **07917 841005** or on **01303 813790**
email: ian.paterson@ruralkent.org.uk Website: www.ruralkent.org.uk

Partners include Southeastern, Network Rail, Kent County Council, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Medway Council, Maidstone Borough Council, the town councils for Paddock Wood and Snodland and the Parish Councils for Aylesford, Barming, Cuxton, East Farleigh, East Malling and Larkfield, Halling, Nettlestead, Yalding and Wateringbury.

The Kent Community Rail Partnership is hosted by the registered charity Action with Communities in Rural Kent, The Old Granary, Penstock Hall Farm, East Brabourne, Ashford, Kent TN25 5LL Tel: **01303 813790**. Charity No. 212796.

For more copies of this newsletter or for a larger text version, please contact Ian at the above address.

By working together we aim to encourage greater use of the line by local people and visitors and to improve the station environments and facilities on offer.

Other useful contacts

- For National Rail Enquiries call **08457 48 49 50** or visit www.nationalrail.co.uk
- For local bus information call **0871 200 2233** or visit www.traveline.org.uk
- For details of engineering works visit southeasternrailway.co.uk
- For travel facilities for disabled passengers call the Assisted Travel Line on **0800 783 4524**

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