

## REGIONAL REVIEW

### COVID-19

With increasing numbers of staff suffering from the Omicron variation of Covid-19 or having to self-isolate, it became increasingly difficult for train companies to operate the advertised timetable. There were a large number of short-notice cancellations in December. With New Year celebrations cancelled, as a Covid precaution, the usual overnight train services did not operate.

**Southeastern** introduced a revised timetable, with 7% fewer trains, on 10 January. Services withdrawn are Cannon Street roundabout via Bexleyheath and Charing Cross to Hayes off-peak. Some trains between Charing Cross and the Sidcup line no longer run. The Canterbury East line is served by a shuttle between Faversham and Dover and the service from Charing Cross to Ashford is reduced to hourly. Reductions are made in main line and high-speed peak services. The full timetable is to be restored on 31 January.

**Southern** should have resumed running services to Victoria on 4 January, following renewal of Pouparts Junction, but continued operating the service that had applied since 27 December. There were insufficient people and not enough time to plan and implement an alternative reduced timetable. Main line trains continued to be diverted to London Bridge, but ran largely to the normal frequency and service pattern. Most suburban services terminated and started at Balham, but Horsham and Dorking trains run to London Bridge, non-stop from Mitcham Eastfields. The only trains from Caterham and Tattenham Corner are to London Bridge via Tulse Hill and the stopping service between London Bridge and East Croydon via Forest Hill was withdrawn. Services not running include Gatwick Express and trains to Watford and Milton Keynes. Reigate is served by extension of Tonbridge services and Uckfield trains run to and from East Croydon. Somewhat surprisingly amid all these cuts, trains between London Bridge and Beckenham Junction via Crystal Palace run half-hourly. Victoria services resumed on 10 January, but to a very limited extent. Trains run half-hourly all stations to Epsom via Mitcham Junction and to South Croydon via Selhurst. There are four trains each hour to Clapham Junction, Streatham Common and East Croydon only, running alternately ten and twenty minutes apart. Epsom Downs and Sutton via Crystal Palace services continued to start and terminate at Balham.

A relatively normal service operated from Victoria over the weekend of 15 and 16 January. Since the week commencing 17 January suburban services no longer turn back at Balham, and Portsmouth and Southampton trains run to Victoria.

**Thameslink's** Sutton service was revised from 27 December to run half-hourly between Luton and Sutton via Mitcham Junction and between Blackfriars and Sutton via Wimbledon, instead of from St Albans via both routes.

**South Western Railway** introduced a revised timetable on 17 January, but until then the service was subject to short-notice cancellations. Exeter and Weymouth are served by shuttles from Salisbury and Bournemouth respectively. This avoids employing a shunter and platform staff to assist with attaching and detaching units on through trains. Weymouth has trains hourly, but Exeter is every two hours. Shepperton, Alton and Basingstoke stopping trains are reduced to hourly and there are some cuts on the Portsmouth Direct line. Additional peak services from Shepperton are provided by a shuttle to Kingston. The Hounslow loop service, which had been reduced to peak hours only, is entirely withdrawn.

### SOUTH WESTERN SUBURBAN

South Western Railway still refuses to accept class 701 into service from Alstom, claiming that the trains do not meet the specification. The remaining problems are all software related and only when they are resolved will SWR start staff training. The cab issues have been sorted out, with modifications initially at Widnes but thereafter at Bournemouth. The mileage accumulation runs that continue from Eastleigh are operated by GB Railfreight.

All class 456 units were withdrawn on 17 January. The last class 456 passenger working was 456009+011 and 5871 on the 23:32 Dorking to Waterloo on 15 January. Units 5726 and 5847 were moved by road from Wimbledon Depot to

Long Marston in December. Units 5704, 5736 and 456003 were hauled from Wimbledon to Long Marston on 18 January, followed by 458507 on 21 January and 458517 on 24 January. Other units stored out of service include 5708/34/40, 5848/49/55, 5910/13 and 458504-06/18/22/29/34/35.

SWR is to retain twelve class 707 units, 707014-24/30, until August. Many main line trains worked by class 450 units have been reduced in length, to release stock for outer-suburban workings, principally to Windsor and Weybridge.

Most main line suburban services are worked by class 455 units. Class 458 continues to operate mainly on Reading services, but works some Chertsey and Kingston Loop trains. Class 707 is used mainly on Shepperton and Kingston Loop workings, but also on a few Weybridge via Chertsey turns. They have also appeared occasionally at Woking.

## STOCK NOTES

**Classes 313 and 387:** With over 45 years' service, the end appears at last in sight for class 313. New trains for Greater Anglia are expected to release class 379 to Great Northern, which would allow transfer of more 387s to Southern. That would enable class 313 to be withdrawn, though they would not necessarily be replaced directly by class 387. Classes 377 and 387 may work in multiple, but not in passenger service. However the extra class 387s are deployed, careful diagramming will be needed.

**Class 442:** One of the cabs from unit 442424 left Eastleigh by lorry on 19 January. It is thought to have gone to the Cab Yard in South Wales.

**Class 455:** Following the withdrawal of class 456, Southern's class 455 units are the last in TOC service to be powered by EE507 traction motors. The EE507 has been in use on the Southern for over seventy years and once powered the vast majority of the fleet.

**Class 701:** Unit 701034 was delivered from Derby to Eastleigh on 29 December, followed by 701017 on 5 January. Unit 701040 was hauled from Derby to Worksop for storage on 25 January.

## TIMETABLES AND DIAGRAMS

**Isle of Wight:** A half-hourly service operated at peak times from 20 December.

## INTERESTING WORKINGS

**Eurostar** was operating trips between St Pancras and Ashford in January, using a pair of class 373 power cars. These were scheduled at 11:31 and 13:51 from St Pancras on Wednesdays and Fridays, but were sometimes cancelled. The purpose of these workings is not known.

**Class 37:** 37611 hauled a rake of Mark 4 carriages from Doncaster to Eastleigh Works via Kew East on 15 January.

**Class 43:** The Locomotive Services HST, with power cars 43046 and 43055, worked an Eastleigh to Carlisle excursion on 22 January.

**Class 73:** 73969 was included in the 21:17 Eastleigh to Scunthorpe infrastructure train on 20 December, as the first stage of its return north following repairs at Eastleigh Works.

**Class 201:** On 8 January unit 1001 worked a Hastings to Chichester and Portsmouth Harbour excursion, via Tonbridge, Redhill and Horsham.

**Class 319:** Most Orion parcels workings between Willesden and Shieldmuir have continued to be locomotive-hauled, but 319373+768001 ran under their own power for the first time on 5 January. That was followed by 319373 working on its own on the next two days, before there was a reversion to diesel-haulage.

**Class 455:** On 23 January units 5735+5906 worked the 07:59 Richmond to Reading and 09:24 to Waterloo.

**Class 769:** Units 769922+932 ran from Reading to Eastleigh Works on 19 January and 769938+769949 returned from Eastleigh to Reading. Units continue to operate staff training trips between Reading and Gatwick Airport.

**Farnborough to Basingstoke:** An engineering blockade at Woking on 27 and 28 December resulted in there being hourly services from Farnborough Main to Weymouth and to Portsmouth Harbour via Winchester. These trains called at all stations between Farnborough and Basingstoke. Fleet, Winchfield and Hook are normally served by stopping trains to Basingstoke, formed of class 450 units, though a few Portsmouth trains call at peak times. Trains to the coast throughout the day, worked by class 444 units, were a great improvement.

## RAILWAY BUSINESS

**Govia Thameslink Railway** is in negotiation with the Department for Transport to enter into a new operating contract starting on 1 April. Parent company Go Ahead has delayed publication of its annual accounts for 2020/21 because of the financial problems at Southeastern. If these are not published before the end of March it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the Government to enter into a new contract with GTR. The alternative would be for the Department for Transport to transfer operation to a publicly owned company, but there is understood to be reluctance to take direct control of such a large and complicated undertaking.

## PERFORMANCE and INCIDENTS

Figures show the percentage of trains arriving within 59 seconds of scheduled time, at all monitored stations. The ranking of the companies within the 24 passenger train operators is shown. Eurostar is not included, but open access operators are. MAA = moving annual average.

	14 Nov to 13 Dec	MAA to 13 Dec
All TOCs	63.7%	75.1%
SWR	64.5% (9 <sup>th</sup> )	76.8% (7 <sup>th</sup> )
GTR	69.2% (7 <sup>th</sup> )	76.1% (8 <sup>th</sup> )
SE	61.0% (12 <sup>th</sup> )	73.3% (12 <sup>th</sup> )

**Wednesday 22 December:** A points failure at Otford resulted in Thameslink services to and from Sevenoaks being diverted via Orpington throughout the morning. Up trains via Greenwich were diverted via Lewisham for 1½ hours from 06:20, because of a points failure at Charlton.

**Thursday 23 December:** A signalling failure resulted in most trains between Weymouth and Wool being cancelled during the morning. In the afternoon Waterloo trains were able to run to and from Dorchester South, with services to Weymouth resuming with the 15:05 from Waterloo. The 08:16 Cannon Street loop service failed on its inward journey at Woolwich Arsenal and terminated there. Following trains were cancelled or diverted via Bexleyheath. A tree fell onto the line at Penshurst during the afternoon.

**Friday 24 December:** A persistent signalling failure at Bedhampton caused cancellations and delays until late afternoon, with Southern services particularly badly affected. The 15:49 Dalston Junction to Clapham Junction, unit 378213, terminated at Queens Road, Peckham, because of a burning smell. The train ran empty to Battersea Park, where a fire was found under the second coach and the fire brigade was summoned. After the fire was extinguished it was discovered that a wheel bearing had failed. The unit remained at Battersea Park until it could be moved to New Cross Gate depot on a wheel skate in the early hours of 28 December.

**Monday 27 December:** Services between Ascot and Aldershot were suspended from 11:00, other than for a few trains during the afternoon, because of a signalling failure at Frimley.

**Tuesday 28 December:** Continuing signalling problems meant that there were no trains between Ascot and Aldershot until after 17:00, apart from a few morning peak workings. Most trains via Greenwich were diverted via Lewisham for about two hours from 14:00, because of a signalling problem.

**Wednesday 29 December:** A speed restriction was imposed because of a landslip in a cutting near Crowborough. The slope was stabilised during a possession next weekend. Lines through St Denys were closed following the discovery of a body about 09:20. The main line re-opened shortly before midday, as did the Netley line for diesel trains. Electric services via Netley resumed about 17:00. A signalling fault resulted in there being no trains between Maidstone East and Ashford for about two hours during the afternoon. Services were diverted via Tonbridge.

**Thursday 30 December:** A signalling fault on the up slow line at Chislehurst required stopping trains from Sevenoaks to be diverted to the up fast, running non-stop between Orpington and Grove Park all day. The 05:20 Hastings to Ashford hit a tree near Three Oaks. The service was suspended and the first train via Rye was the 08:49 from Eastbourne. A power failure at Hever Junction caused trains to and from Uckfield to be cancelled for four hours from 09:30. The problem reoccurred during the afternoon, so very few trains ran after 16:30. The train to form the 18:08 to Balham failed at Epsom Downs, but was later able to depart empty to Selhurst Depot. Passenger services resumed with the 19:44 from Balham.

**Saturday 1 January:** Continuing signalling problems at Hever resulted in services being suspended for three hours during the middle of the day, to allow a cable to be replaced.

**Sunday 2 January:** An earth slip in a cutting south of Haywards Heath resulted in a 20 mph speed restriction being imposed on the up line from late afternoon. Work was undertaken overnight to stabilise the slope, but the speed restriction remained until repairs could be completed later in the month.

**Monday 3 January:** A power failure at Brighton caused loss of traction current at Lovers Walk Depot from 23:00 (Sunday) until 06:00, requiring trains to be stabled elsewhere. That caused the possession for work in the cutting at Haywards Heath to start and finish late, so many early morning services were cancelled or badly delayed. Thameslink services to and from Sevenoaks were diverted via Orpington during the afternoon, because of a signalling failure at Eynsford.

**Tuesday 4 January:** The down line was closed all day at Slade Green, because of a damaged rail joint. Trains were diverted via Bexleyheath or Sidcup and some services were cancelled, as a result of delays getting units out of the depot. A newly-installed set of points, which worked fine during testing, failed at Courthill Loop South Junction during the night. Some main line trains via Ashford were diverted to Victoria to ease the resulting congestion. A power failure resulted in there being no trains between Lewes and Seaford for most of the afternoon.

**Thursday 6 January:** A signalling failure prevented trains running from Blackheath to Charlton for most of the day. Services were diverted via Greenwich. The problem continued through Friday. There were no trains between Canterbury East and Dover for about four hours from 08:00, following a fatality at Kearsney. There were no trains between Eastleigh and Fareham from 20:50 until 23:30, because of a track circuit failure.

**Friday 7 January:** The 13:24 Orpington to Victoria was involved in a fatality at Bickley. The 18:11 Brighton to Seaford terminated at Lewes with a brake defect.

**Saturday 8 January:** A signalling problem at Bedhampton caused disruption from 10:00 onwards. As usual, SWR services got priority, with some Southern services cut back to Chichester or diverted to Bognor Regis. A bicycle on the track at Hilsea caused further delays. The Sheerness branch train failed, resulting in there being no trains from Sittingbourne between 13:06 and 16:06.

**Monday 10 January:** The line was closed for about five hours from 16:00, following a fatality between Walmer and Martin Mill. Trains were cut back to Dover or diverted via Canterbury West.

**Tuesday 11 January:** A signalling failure resulted in some morning peak trains between London Bridge and Beckenham Junction being cut back to Birkbeck or Crystal Palace. A points failure at Portsmouth Harbour put platforms 4 and 5 out of use during the afternoon and early evening. Some trains had to be cancelled or cut back to Portsmouth & Southsea.

**Thursday 13 January:** Locomotive 66103 became derailed while propelling a freight train out of Hoo Junction yard during the night. This left the wagons blocking the down line until another locomotive could be found to move them about 08:45. The 12:09 Waterloo to Portsmouth Harbour was involved in a fatality at Raynes Park, resulting in all lines being blocked for about 1½ hours. Some trains were diverted via Chertsey.

**Friday 14 January:** No trains could call at Peckham Rye throughout the day, because the station was inside a police cordon while a serious crime was investigated.

**Saturday 15 January:** A Tallington to Grain freight train failed near Gravesend about 04:45, blocking the line for almost two hours. A points failure at Tunbridge Wells about 09:00 prevented trains running to and from Hastings for 1½ hours.

**Sunday 16 January:** The 17:10 Victoria to Gillingham was involved in a fatality at a foot crossing between Sole Street and Rochester Bridge Junction. The line was closed until 20:00, with some trains diverted via Dartford.

**Monday 17 January:** A signal failure prevented operation of trains on the Sheerness branch after 18:40.

**Tuesday 18 January:** The up lines through Farnborough were closed from 11:20 to 16:10 because a distressed person had climbed onto a signal gantry. Trains were cancelled, terminated short or diverted via Havant.

**Wednesday 19 January:** A burst water main flooded the up fast Bournemouth line at Clapham Junction during the evening.

**Thursday 20 January:** A power failure prevented trains using the up Netley line for about 2½ hours from midday. Trains were diverted via Eastleigh.

**Friday 21 January:** The 05:42 Reading to Waterloo, units 458510+519, lost numerous collector shoes on a defective conductor rail and became stranded at Virginia Water, blocking the line from Reading. The 06:50 from Waterloo terminated at Egham and the units, 458530+531, were used to provide assistance. Initially it had been possible for trains via Chertsey to continue running, but not after the assisting train had been coupled onto the front of the failure. There was a considerable delay before the brakes could be released on the twenty coach train, allowing it to proceed to Staines up goods loop. Train services through Virginia Water did not resume until after 13:00, but there was some disruption for most of the afternoon. The 16:48 Gravesend to Charing Cross failed at Mottingham. Following trains were diverted via Bexleyheath or Woolwich until 18:40.

**Saturday 22 January:** Planned engineering work resulted in road transport being provided between Tonbridge and Wadhurst. A lineside equipment failure prevented operation of the shuttle between Hastings and Wadhurst from 05:30 until after 08:00.

**Monday 24 January:** There were few Thameslink services through Wimbledon during the morning, because of a points failure. Trains were diverted via Mitcham Junction.

## AROUND THE REGION

**Chartham:** Network Rail intends to convert the manually-operated, gated level crossing to a barrier crossing operated from Canterbury Wye Area Control Centre.

**Crystal Palace:** Planning permission has been granted for renovation of the ornate subway under Crystal Palace Parade that linked the Crystal Palace with the high level station. Grant funding of £2.8m has been secured for the work.

**Crawley:** The station entrance and booking office are being refurbished. The station is located in the ground floor of an office block, much of which is to be converted into flats.

**Feltham Area Resignalling:** The Windsor branch is closed from 21 to 27 February, principally for resignalling work. In addition, maintenance of bridges, track and the electric power supply will be carried out, together with litter clearance and removal of graffiti. New signals are to be brought into use between Virginia Water and Ascot at Easter, 15 to 18 April. Further planned closures for signalling work are Barnes to Richmond 1 to 4 May and Barnes to Feltham 13 to 16 August.

**Portsmouth:** Further work to renovate Landport Viaduct resulted in the line through Portsmouth & Southsea high level platforms being closed from 15 to 23 January. During this period trains terminated and started at the low level platforms or Fratton. Ten spans of the viaduct were renovated in January 2021 and the recent work was to the remaining seven spans.

## **LOST PROPERTY**

Staff at London Bridge had to deal with an unusual item of lost property on Friday 7 January. A tarantula was discovered on a train, fortunately contained within a plastic box. It was taken to South Essex Wildlife Hospital.

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