

A full day of presentations by Southeaster Rail and Network Rail that demonstrated they are planning for upgrade and growth and getting closer to the local communities all along the Kent and Sussex Railways. The targeted growth areas are Medway and Hastings lines. The subjects covered were:

- Revenue and Targets

Revenue in 2020 was £900M. This dropped considerably during the COVID years but is now recovering and they are forecasting £750M this year. Passenger numbers in 2020 was 180M, in 2023/24 in was 135M and they are targeting 175M in 2025. So, they are planning for growth.

- Ticket Office Closures

This was the elephant in the room. They had plans for closures but the government instruction not to close took them by surprise and they are revising there plans around **no** ticket office closers. One planning factor they will use is the cost of ticket sales. Small stations who only sell say 10 tickets a day will have a ticket cost of sale of say £10 each. If the ticket office sells 100 tickets the cost of ticket sales drops to 1penny, hence they are rolling out ticket machines, which logically, will reduce the number of tickets sold at the window, so the demise of ticket offices is signalled. So, the role of the Station Master will change over time to one of assistance around the station rather than stationary at the window. *I give this as one business planning measure they will use, there are others.*

- Network Rail

There is now joint leadership between Network Rail who are responsible for the track and buildings and Southeastern who operate the trains. They have aligned business plans and share all their data to work towards common goals. *Not sure what they did before.*

- Ticketing

The customer satisfaction surveys show that travellers are becoming more satisfied and actual journey numbers are increasing. *Not sure if this is because the customers are returning to offices or the service they offer, which, I am having trouble identifying.*

They are actively recruiting mobile assist staff to help passengers wherever they can and increasing the e ticket types that are available, such as Digital Railcard and Flexi Season Tickets.

- Timetables

They are programming for more trains at shorter intervals based on current usage and predictable specific events. An example of this is there is a marked increase in nighttime computer returning to Peckham Rye from London, so they are either putting on more nighttime trains or increasing the number of carriages. *Big brother is watching you, but if it gets you to where you want to be on time then so be it.*

- Network Rail

Short term targets for improvement are Lewisham, Faversham, Tunbridge Wells to Hastings. My information is that the Robertsbridge Station masters House will become a regional office for Network Rail. *Not sure what that means in detail, but we have seen embankment and bridge repairs already on our line.*

- Safety

This a collaboration with British Rail Police, Network Rail and Southeastern. The measures have seen a reduction in ticketless travel from 6.8% in 2022 to 2.8% in 2023. They are also dealing with Antisocial behaviour and Trespass. A big target for them is to reduce the numbers of suicides in and around the rail network. All operatives wear body worn video cameras. They have seen a 50% improvement in diffusing issues before they become major events. They have the power to take out private prosecutions against offenders as part of there move to remove the unwanted passengers that repeat offend.

- Engineering

They have three types of trains that operate on the Kent and Sussex lines, 350 in total. Metro, Mainline and High Speed. The average age of the stock is 21 years. They have a procurement plan in place to replace these over time. In the meantime, they will refurbish the older stock to keep it going until new vehicles arrive. All the refurbishments will include as a minimum Interior decoration, Power plugs, CCTV, LED Lighting, Passenger information, Exterior decoration.

- Sustainability

There target is to be net zero carbon emissions by 2050. They will do this by addressing Climate resilience, LED Lighting rollout on all stations, Reduce gas, oil, and diesel usage. They are developing a biodiversity action plan.

- People

They employ 4500 people throughout the area and are actively looking to recruit more and are offering 500 apprenticeships. They are partnering the Princess Trust, Schools, and Armed Forces to fill these vacancies. They have developed a Mental Health Charter to support present and future employees.

- Rail Investment

HS1 Implementation which will include Ebbsfleet, Ashford, Thanet, East Kent.

There is a strategic investment plan for the Southeast which will include Local Authorities taking responsibility for local needs. *Not sure what that means for Rother but sounds interesting.*

A21 corridor is seen as a prime candidate for this strategic development. *Can't find anything on this on the Network Rail web site I was directed to, but I will keep digging to find out what this means.*

- Questions and Answers

AI investment which will revolve around machine learning for repetitive and analytical tasks.

Suicide reduction will involve Security, NHS, Coaching operatives.

WIFI will be kept and improved on all rolling stock.

Continually monitoring passenger numbers identify hot spots and developing trends.

500 Toilets are inspected daily, and improvements made as soon as possible to reduce the out of action facilities.

Carbon reduction of road fleet will mean implementing Electric Vehicles across the stable of road vehicles, which is not that great compared to rolling stock.

Hydrogen trains are being developed and will be used in the appropriate situations.

Defibrillators where necessary will be re-positioned outside the ticket office for passengers and communities to use.

Peckham Rye, nighttime rush hour will be addressed.

Nunhead station narrow stairs will be addressed.

Third Rail technology will be reviewed and changed if appropriate and feasible. This rail presents a suicide opportunity especially in the stations.

Hasting station is shabby and needs improvement.

Community Rail Partnership funding has been approved.

Lewisham improvements include crossover to Transport for London services.

The future will include partnerships with local communities.

A lot of information given out as you can see from each synopsis. For me the message I am getting is that Southeastern Rail are taking improvement and growth very seriously and are utilising all the present and future technology to make it happen, rather than just putting up prices. Local partnerships are one element they want to develop. I believe we should be part of that development as our village grows and commuters and tourists visit to take advantage of our housing, walks, parks, amenities and the RVR when it starts to operate.