

Alton Line News SUMMER 2012

Newsletter of the Alton Line Users' Association www.altonlineusers.com

38 years serving users of Alton, Bentley, Farnham, Aldershot and Ash Vale stations
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Membership applications to the Treasurer

Annual membership: £4 (or £3 by Standing Order) due 1 March (to be sent to the Treasurer)

New committee members urgently required

ALUA's committee carries out the work of the association. However, several committee members no longer travel regularly by train and wish to be replaced. Therefore we need new members to take on their roles. If you would like to join the committee please contact one of the existing members, so that your name can be put forward at the AGM. In particular we need a new Secretary and representatives for Alton and especially Bentley station. **Without the input from members ALUA will not survive.**

AGM – Tuesday 16th Oct

We encourage all members to attend our AGM at 7.30pm at the United Reformed Church Hall, South Street, Farnham. We hope to have a local manager from both SWT and Network Rail at the meeting to answer your questions.

Engineering works

On 26 August and 23 September buses replace trains from Alton to Aldershot. On 30 September there are no trains from Alton to Brookwood until early afternoon with a bus service from Farnborough to Alton. See the SWT website for further details.

Press coverage

Whilst most newsworthy events affecting the Alton line affect passengers at all our stations from Alton to Ash Vale it would appear that the local press often think otherwise as many articles appear in the Alton but not the Farnham Herald. The reason for this appears to defy logic. Why do Alton readers want to know about extra carriages or problems on the Alton line but Farnham readers do not? It is not as if trains departing or arriving at Alton station do not pass through Farnham. We hope the Farnham Herald will improve its coverage of news relating to Farnham's train services.

Punctuality

New tighter punctuality statistics have been published by Network Rail, in which trains are described as 'on time' if they are less than one minute late at their final destination. So far this has only been published by sector, but we hope SWT will agree to this new standard in due course. The new figures reveal that 69.8% of passenger trains arrived less than a minute late in 2011-12. The comparable figure under the previous measurement, which was no more than five minutes late for commuter trains and ten for long distance, was 91.6%. With many passengers relying on trains to get to work and to make connections with other trains every minute of delay is important. Arrival time at a station should be recorded when the guard opens the doors not when the train is approaching the platform. Is it

too much to ask that a train's punctuality is recorded at all stations and that arrival time records when the guard opens the doors?

Overcrowding on the Jubilee Pageant, 3rd June

The service on the Alton Line was the usual Sunday one 4-coach hourly train. I caught the 1041 from Ash Vale this morning, which was absolutely wedged when it arrived, to the point where the guard told the large numbers of passengers on the platform that they probably weren't going to be able to get on.

As a hardened commuter I squeezed on but many people, including families with young children, were left behind. The next train was not for an hour and was probably equally busy!

The guard informed us we'd be attaching to another 8 coaches at Woking (the ex-Basingstoke portion) and passengers would be able to get off and join them. However, I heard from my brother who was on that train that it was equally packed. The train left people behind at Woking as well. After Woking, because it was now a 12 coach train, the Alton portion couldn't fit in the platforms at Wimbledon and Clapham, and as there was no way that passengers could move through the crowded train they were told to change at Surbiton for these stations.

Apparently there were some additional trains to London from Basingstoke, but that's not much comfort to those stuck at Ash Vale!
I hope SWT will take a long hard look at how they handle major events in London on a Sunday, especially with the Olympics coming up. We really needed a minimum of a Saturday service with either 8 car trains or a half-hourly service throughout the day! Also, because it was a Sunday, half the stations were unstaffed, or minimally staffed, which meant that there were loads of infrequent travellers trying to figure out how to use the ticket machines!
When I returned at 8pm, it was better.
Daniel Hill

Around the stations

Alton

We welcome the development of Waitrose next to Alton station as this should be most convenient for rail users. However, we will monitor what effect this has on parking at the station. We hope that the two long promised and very overdue 20 minute drop-off bays will be restored by the time the work on Waitrose is finished.

Although it was announced some time ago that money had been allocated to install lifts at both Alton and Aldershot stations to provide disabled access to all the platforms we have not yet heard when this work will be carried out.

Bentley

We now understand from the Transport Secretary that Bentley's ticket office will not close, but we will monitor the situation. The platforms are due to be extended next year to accommodate longer trains.

Farnham

We are concerned about the safety of pedestrians walking down the station approach road to access the station. In January we asked Network Rail to look at this with the possibility of pedestrian access through the car park nearer to Firgrove Hill, but we are waiting for the promised site meeting. We continue to press for this serious safety issue to be resolved.

SWT are looking to improve the signage in the station forecourt to make it clearer for all users. Also the down car park needs to have clear markings to stop confusion and indicate clearly who has right of way.

It is hoped that more covered cycle racks can be provided on the platforms. We believe covered racks are preferable to bike lockers as surveys by one of our members at local stations have shown many frequently remain out of use by those who have been allocated them, thus preventing others from using them. They are also more expensive so less can be provided for the same cost.

Aldershot

ALUA is still pressing SWT to refurbish Aldershot station which has been looking shabby for some time. The situation is made much worse by the infestation of pigeons which we have asked SWT to remove. This is not a new problem so we hope SWT will find a solution to it before long.

Ash Vale

With the de-staffing of Ash Vale on Sundays and limited staffing for the rest of the week, the station often looks unkempt, with rubbish strewn around and bins unemptied.

Vandalism is a problem. Recently the ticket machine screen was smashed putting it out of action for several days. Even when vandals haven't damaged it, it is often out of order in the evenings and Sundays, with passengers unable to buy tickets except from the guard on the train if he has a working ticket machine.

Since the nearby and quieter North Camp station has two Ticket machines, cannot a second one be provided at Ash Vale to provide some extra cover? One piece of positive news is that the long-promised Zebra Crossing has been installed in Vale Road outside the station exit, providing easier access to North Camp station and the Avondale estate. But it was not until late June that the belisha beacons were made to work – a delay of several months. The road markings are already starting to wear off.

SWT Stakeholder Conference – March 2012

Tim Shoveller, the new Managing Director of SWT, told us he hopes to get out to see the network himself. Rob Simmons, Network Rail Manager, Wessex, and Nick Dorey, SWT's Planning and Performance Manager gave an overview of the SWT / Network Rail alliance for our area with details of the recovery plan during disruption to the service.

It is our view that ALUA's suggestion of a shuttle between Woking and Alton is very successful during times of disruption. Information still needs to be improved, especially at weekends, and when

things go wrong. All staff should be given accurate information and not use guesswork.

Christine Ruth (Engineering Director) spoke on capacity issues and SWT are getting extra coaches to lengthen trains in many cases to 10 cars. These will be integrated into the existing fleet on the suburban lines. The Gatwick stock will be revamped and used to lengthen the 458 stock to 5 cars which will then release 450 stock back to our line increasing some trains to 12 coaches. This is urgently needed to cope with the forecast 6% passenger growth.

Right time railway group

It is useful to have a representative on this group, which aims to keep the trains running on time, as we can contribute our views and point out problems. The Guildford / Alton Group has now been enlarged to include Basingstoke and the main lines from Woking to Waterloo. This is sensible because of the overlap and integration of services, particularly at weekends. We hope the new group, will be as successful in keeping the award for the best time starts in the Wessex Area.

On-train announcements

SWT appears to have changed some of their on-train announcements on the Class 444 and 450 'Desiro' trains. Unfortunately, this appears to have caused more problems than it has solved:

- There is now no pause between sections of the announcement (eg between "This station is X" and "This train is for Y"). This means the announcement seems rushed and makes it harder to follow.
- The announcer now says "Please mind the gap between the train and the platform" twice during the "We are now approaching Ash Vale" announcements.
- The point at which the "We are now approaching Waterloo" announcement is triggered has been changed, so that it is before the last signal instead of at the station throat. Therefore passengers get up and stand by the doors for 5 minutes while the train waits to enter Waterloo.

ALUA Committee

ALTON

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Alton Line Users Association Membership Application and Standing Order Form

To join the Association, please fill out the form below, and return it to:

Barry Jones
96 Somerset Road
Farnborough
Hampshire
GU14 6DS

(You can send the Standing Order Instruction direct to your bank if you wish to keep your bank details confidential.)

The information provided on the membership form (except bank account details) will be held on computer to facilitate addressing correspondence etc. Any person who objects to this should notify the Hon. Treasurer in writing. No information will be divulged to a third party without prior agreement.

You can cancel the standing order immediately at any time by contacting your bank or building society.

I wish to join the Alton Line Users Association.

I enclose a cheque for £4 payable to Alton Line Users Association I enclose a Standing Order Mandate I have sent the Standing Order Mandate to my Bank

Name			
Address			
Postcode	Signature		
e-mail		Phone	

I prefer to receive information from the association by post by email

I use Alton Bentley Farnham Aldershot Ash Vale station(s)

I use the Alton Line for commuting business leisure journeys.

Standing Order Instruction

To the manager

Bank			
Address			
		Postcode	

Please pay for the credit of

Santander Business Banking
Alton Line Users Association

Sort code: **09-01-55**
 A/C no.: **4 956 8204**

The sum of **£3.00 (three pounds only)**, commencing _____ (date of first payment) and thereafter every year until you receive further notice from me/us in writing, and debit the account below accordingly.

Account name			
Account number	Bank sort code		

Please cancel any previous standing order or direct debit in favour of the beneficiary named above.

Signature(s) _____ Date _____

Name			
Address			
		Postcode	