

Alton Line News March 2017

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

43 years serving users of Alton, Bentley, Farnham, Aldershot and Ash Vale stations

Enquiries: John Eddleston, Secretary secretary@altonlineusers.com.

Membership applications to the Treasurer

Annual membership: £4 due 1 March (to be sent to the Treasurer)

STOP PRESS! – 27 March 2017

We learnt today that Stagecoach has lost the South West Trains franchise. It will now be run by First Group for seven years from this August. The Department for Transport said First Group would invest £1.2bn in improvements and would add 22,000 extra seats into London Waterloo each morning peak and 30,000 extra seats each evening peak. 90 new trains have been promised, providing more space for passengers on Reading, Windsor and London routes. Transport secretary Chris Grayling claimed it would mark "a new era in joined up working between train operators and Network Rail". ALUA understand that there will be direct Farnham to Guildford trains. We will also be asking that some of the investments is used to improve the inadequate and slow services on the Alton Line.

The Last Oil train



The last oil train for Holybourne sidings at Alton Station

When ALUA learnt that the Holybourne oil trains were to stop running we asked SWT if the midday gap in the passenger timetable could be filled by

the train which currently terminates at Farnham. But we were told that although there will be no more oil trains for the foreseeable future the path would be retained in case they run again

Increases in the cost of Weekend Fares

In February ALUA wrote to Craig Leaper, SWT's Senior Service and Pricing Manager strongly objecting to the revised Saturday and Sunday cheap fare restrictions, introduced in January.

"It is not acceptable to disallow the use of super off-peak tickets (which are in fact all other rail companies' normal off-peak tickets) during so-called 'peak periods' on weekends and bank holidays.

"Moreover, these restrictions are in different time periods from the weekday cheap tickets and add "an unnecessary complication at a time when fare structures are meant to be clarified and simplified.

"There have been no announcements nor posters to advise passengers about these changes, except for a misleading section on SWT website which refers to a 15% fare saving, when it is in fact a substantial increase. Even your own staff are not happy with these changes. We believe that these new fares and restrictions should be removed forthwith.

"Additionally, between Christmas and New Year, when SWT was running only a Saturday service, full peak hour fares were charged, but without the proper peak hour services. The number of

passengers was very much reduced, so that there was no justification for charging peak fares in the circumstances.

“Our members have also expressed concern regarding the poor Sunday services on the Alton line. Services start much later than on most other routes and are often reduced to hourly or less even when there is engineering elsewhere.

“ALUA has communicated with the Campaign for Better Transport and Transport Focus in connection with these matters.

Whilst the reply from SWT referenced all the points we made we do not think it answered our concerns. Indeed we believe the statement *“In certain hours, however, we have seen that even with the extra capacity we provided some services are still oversubscribed. To this end, a time restriction on our cheapest weekend fares for travel from short and medium distance stations has been developed in the busiest hours of the day on Saturdays and Sundays to encourage travel during quieter periods.”* clearly shows that the introduction of a more complicated and expensive fare system was done mainly if not solely for commercial reasons

And when SWT reply that *“Our passengers now have the choice of Off Peak fares, which can be used on any train at weekends, or Super Off Peak fares which are available on selected trains at weekends”* they do not seem to care that this adds an unnecessary complication and worry to people travelling at weekends who often do not know when they wish to return.

As to Sunday services on the Alton route SWT have offered to review this in light of our comments but when they state *“the increased journey times leading to a higher than usual train crew consumption”* it does suggest they need to employ more staff to do the job?

Farnham Station Car Park

ALUA wishes to thank everyone for their thanks for our commitment to the new decked carpark and to the SWT staff who managed the work. We requested this over 9 years ago but received negative answers, but now we have it. Most users

are pleased with the result. Some signage problems need to be sorted, and we hope the ugly hoarding will be removed to make the entrance safer and clearer for users. The number of Blue Badge Bays have increased and one user has said *“that at last I am, able to travel knowing that with some certainty I will be able to Park and not have to cancel arrangements and the ability to pay by Ringo without having to walk to and from a machine makes it easier to travel”*

Farnham station waiting room

We are still monitoring the situation regarding the regular opening of the waiting room on Platform 2. We were told this would be redecorated in spring 2015 and reopened in June 2015. For reasons unclear to us and possibly SWT managers this waiting room is rarely opened by station staff. Please let us know if you find it closed.

The Wrecclesham Landslip

In April 2016 a landslip at Wrecclesham closed the Alton line for several weeks with a replacement bus service from Farnham to Bentley & Alton while repairs took place. By May train services restarted but at a very slow speed with the slewing of the line away from the main slip. Network Rail rebuilt the embankment and



Temporary work site next to the landslip

completed it in March 2017 with trains running virtually as normal. Although this could have had major repercussions for a long period everything was handled extremely well by Network Rail and SWT and praise must go to all the staff involved.

A railway for Bordon

Since 1905 passenger train ran from Bentley to Bordon. This was heavily used in both Wars, but by 1957 passenger services ceased and the branch closed in 1966.

In 2009 reopening of the Bordon line was considered due to the proposed Bordon ECO housing on MOD land. However the Local Councils did not seem to have much interest and dismissed reopening of the Line, preferring roads instead. This decision will probably lead to a large increase of road traffic In Bordon and through Wrecclesham to Farnham. The former branch line from Bentley to Bordon should be reopened to serve the rapidly expanding Bordon Eco-Town and relieve the inadequate road system. What is needed is much more ambition on the part of the local authorities as the solutions supporting the development at Bordon have little merit. Before traffic levels become even more intolerable the issue should be revisited as it would curtail some of the “Rat Runs” that will become more apparent as traffic levels increase.

The Slow train now departing....

For many years the Alton line has suffered from slow services. This used not to be the case as a these examples will show. In 2001 the 1034 departure from Alton took 59 minutes whilst now the 1014 departure takes 73 minutes. Fourteen minutes slower. In 2001 the 1420 Waterloo to Alton train took 63 minutes but now the 1423 from Waterloo takes 76 minutes. Sunday services are even slower. We will be asking whoever wins the new franchise to speed up services to something much closer to what they used to be.

News from Friends of Alton Station

Saving Alton's heritage footbridge: The imminent threat

Until 2013 Alton station's historic wooden footbridge was the access to platforms 2 and 3.

Network Rail (NR) then built a new, much needed 'Access for All' footbridge with lift. What wasn't realised was that Network Rail planned to remove the old bridge. This decision was unpopular as the 1892 footbridge was the most direct route to and from Platforms 2 and 3. In 2014 a group - now Friends of Alton Station (FoAS) - formed to save the footbridge.



The comparative silence has been because FoAS have never been in a position to make a clear-cut statement, waiting for information, and then the moment has gone. Things are now changing with NR threatening to remove the bridge imminently.

At first FoAS wanted NR to save the footbridge and this was agreed in 2014. Crucially, NR agreed to offer the demolition budget of £250k towards the restoration. FoAS applied unsuccessfully to get the whole station listed; then applied again unsuccessfully just for the footbridge. FoAS await the results of a review. Contractors started in July 2015, and identified more deterioration than initially thought and the bridge was closed. After a second start, work stopped again and NR engineers recommended removal, so FoAS asked for a period to raise funds, finding enough to commission their own engineering report. FoAS now have a better understanding of the problems, but NR now require FoAS to take on ownership of the bridge and make it safe or they will remove it. FoAS then received a considerable pledge in the 10s of thousands of pounds, and realised that maybe they could save the footbridge after all. FoAS also have the original £250k pledge from NR which we are seeking to reaffirm.

FoAS is to become a charity so it can reclaim Gift Aid and take legal ownership of the bridge. They

hope to run a national campaign to raise funds to restore the bridge. They need more donation pledges and for someone experienced at marketing (especially social media and crowdfunding); a treasurer, and a membership secretary. Finally, FoAS need you to spread the word, to help raise funds and to build-up numbers who can lend their support to save the bridge. Please see their website where you can read about the history of the footbridge and download the joining form. The membership subscription is small, but it provides funds to help the cause. Stephen Lewis, Chair of Friends of Alton Station stephen.lewis@friendsofaltonstation.org.uk www.friendsofaltonstation.org.uk
STOP PRESS: ALUA have just learnt that NR have given FoAS a deadline of April 2018 for raising funds otherwise the footbridge will be removed.

Rolling Stock

The new 5 car class 707s will soon come into service mainly on the Windsor Lines. The Class 458s will then be used on the Reading lines with First Class added. The remaining 450s will replace older class 456s on the Guildford Ascot line and also lengthen trains on the Alton - Basingstoke lines. Many of these changes will occur in August.

Alton Station

We learnt from SWT that one of the reasons for cutting down all the trees in the carpark at Alton was to save staff having to sweep the leaves.

ALUA Committee

ALTON

Chris Campbell
 Graham Titterington

BENTLEY

John Stock

FARNHAM

David Jones – Chairman
 Jonathan Riddell

Simon Parton

ALDERSHOT

Mike Roberts
 Barry Jones - Treasurer barry-jones@ntlworld.com
 John Eddleston - secretary@altonline users.com.

ASH VALE

Vacant

**Alton Line Users Association
 Membership Application and Standing Order
 Form**

Please return the form below to: Barry Jones, 96
 Somerset Road, Farnborough, GU14 6DS

I enclose a cheque for £4 payable to the Alton Line Users Association	I enclose a Standing Order Mandate
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Name			
Address			Postcode
Phone	Signature		
email			

Information from ALUA will be by email unless requested otherwise.

I use

Alton	Bentley	Farnham	Aldershot	Ash Vale
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I use the Alton Line for commuting business leisure

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.

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

(If you wish to keep your bank details confidential, you can send the Standing Order Instruction direct to your bank, or instruct them using online or telephone banking with the details below.)

Standing Order Instruction: To the manager

Bank			
Address			Postcode

Please pay **Santander Business Banking** Sort code: **09-01-55** for the credit of **Alton Line Users Association**
 A/C no.: **4 956 8204**

£4.00 (Four 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.....

