



Press release: Immediate

Passenger pressure derails Southern's service proposals

The East Sussex Rail Alliance, a consortium of groups representing rail passengers across the County, welcomed Southern's decision announced on Monday that controversial proposals to change the shape of local rail services from this December will not now be implemented.

The decision means that a seven-day direct service between Brighton and Ashford is retained. The proposal to split the Coastway service at Eastbourne has been shelved following ESRA's recent campaign, and disabled passengers will not now have to change at Hampden Park or suffer long connection times at Eastbourne as Southern proposed.

Hugh Sharpe of ESRA said, "While there were many positives in the proposals there were also many drawbacks, and these far out-weighted the benefits. Southern will also be maintaining a second through service each hour between Brighton and Ore providing an all-day through service from Brighton to local stations between Eastbourne and Bexhill.

"We were also concerned that journey times to Victoria from Hastings and Bexhill would have been lengthened under the proposals, and we are also pleased that Southern has also recognised the significance of the service across Romney Marsh to connect with Eurostar at Ashford."

Nonetheless, a widely-supported proposal to restore regular services to small stations at Winchelsea and Three Oaks can still be implemented within the existing timetable.

At a Stakeholder meeting held at Gatwick on Tuesday, Southern confirmed that although the major changes affecting the service east of Lewes would not go ahead, the suburban Class 313 stock would still be used on Brighton-Lewes/Seaford shuttle service, and many of those carriages would not be refurbished until late this year. These trains lack toilets and air-conditioning and are slower than existing rolling stock.

Andrew Leach of ESRA added, "The railway is important to the local economy and the service needs to be as attractive as possible, so the news about the introduction of Class 313 is disappointing. We recognise that the 313s offer a quick solution to overcrowding, but the downside is that passengers' journey experience will definitely be worse than they are used to with the current stock.

"However it's really good that Southern have accepted the large number of objections that were made to their proposals. Too many times, consultation is not consultation at all, and we are delighted that in this instance Southern have listened to their customers and to local authorities."

Bexhill Rail Action Group, East Coastway Commuters Group based in Eastbourne, the St Leonards & Hastings Rail Improvement Programme and the Marshlink Action Group campaign for better services along the coast and into London. They are founder members of the new East Sussex Rail Alliance, an umbrella group linking organisations and pressure groups throughout the county. See www.eastsussexrail.org.uk

ENDS : *Notes for Editors overleaf*



Notes for Editors

East Sussex Rail Alliance is an umbrella group formed to campaign for better rail services throughout the county. Founder members Bexhill Rail Action Group, East Coastway Commuter Group, St Leonards & Hastings Rail Improvement Programme and Marshlink Action Group concentrate efforts on coastal services between Brighton and Ashford and into London.

Southern had proposed replacing the two-car Class 172 units (built 2003–4) and three-car Class 377/3 units (built 2001–2) with three-car Class 313 units built in 1976–7. The Class 313 units are not fitted with toilets or air-conditioning, and have a top speed of 75mph against the 100mph top speed of the more recent trains. The revised plans only replace the 2001 units currently in use between Brighton and Seaford.

Timetables are changed in May and December, with minor adjustments at other times of year.