



SwaleRail

June 2004—First edition
(possible future collectors-item?)

The Newsletter of the Kent
Community Rail Partnership
Working on the Sheerness Branch

**Kent Community Rail
Partnership
Contact us**

A partnership between the people of Swale, the
Countryside Agency, Kent County Council, Swale
Borough Council, South Eastern Trains, Network
Rail, Amicus and other interested parties

Save our trains!

One of the first tasks facing the Partnership has been making a response to the Strategic Rail Authority's Integrated Kent Franchise. This proposed to cut services on the Sheerness line by half as well as impose vast service level reductions on a number of rural stations in Kent. The programme looks ahead to 2007 when the Channel Tunnel Rail Link domestic services will be introduced.

In its response to the proposals for the Sheerness branch the KCRP demonstrated an existing demand (thanks to a one day passenger count) and a potential demand (allied to Swale Borough Council's Local Plan), in both cases inappropriate to service reductions.

We will see!



A 249

**AVOID THE ROAD-
WORKS ON THE A249**

GO BY TRAIN

Making Tracks....

It's (nearly) new

Months in the planning, the Kent Community Rail Partnership is now fully operational, with a dedicated lead officer, Peter Chegwidan. Peter started work in February and his remit is to take the original Action Plan forward, continually adding new projects as time goes by.

Community Rail Partnerships? Who they?

There are now over 40 in the country, some having been established several years ago. The aim is to provide railway regeneration on lines, often rural in nature, that are unlikely to attract substantial resources from the industry. In one case a partnership saved a line from closure. The Kent Community Rail Partnership aims to provide social, economic and environmental benefits to the people of Swale and Sheppey in particular, by engaging the community the line

serves in rejuvenation projects.

Is it necessary?

Look at your branch line. What do you think about the stations and trains, about the level of information, about service standards, and so on? When the Partnership was being formed a number of public displays, exhibitions and surveys were undertaken in the area so we know what those who use the trains, and those who don't (but might) ,want from their local railway.

Who are the partners?

YOU. Yes, you. All of us in fact. The Partnership involves input from the Countryside Agency, Kent County Council, Swale Borough Council, Network Rail, South Eastern Trains, Amicus, Queenborough Town Council and many more. It's not just about money. When the Partnership talks about finding

"resources" it can also mean:

- *Volunteer time*
- *Knowledge*
- *Skills and expertise*
- *A helping hand*
- *Experience*
- *Opinions*

.....and so on

It may be that you can help us, it may be that your business, school, community group, club, etc., can help us, and in so doing help to make YOUR branch line something worth having.

Improving the line and the services and facilities offered can enhance so many things, for example it can boost tourism which in its turn boosts the economy of the area. Read about what's happening and think about whether or not you might like to

"Ding-ding and away" Getting it started

Having asked people about the line the Partnership drew up an initial Action Plan. In response to public opinion we considered the following points to be of paramount importance when launching the scheme:

Station décor

Litter at stations and on trains

Provision of information

Safety: the role of CCTV

The Community Rail Partnership Officer (CRPO) has already started tackling a number of these matters in conjunction

with other members of the Partnership. There has been a station audit, two schools and a college are involved in station enhancement programmes, and a CCTV survey is to be carried out shortly to identify the best way forward. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. Check overleaf for more information

Pride in Our Line

Introducing our campaign to try and reduce litter, and make travel more enjoyable. Special thanks to **South Eastern Trains** who will be putting more resources into internal train cleaning. And providing more litter facilities on platforms. Staff already work hard to keep stations clean but they can't be there all the time. Please take papers with you and recycle them. Swale Borough Council provides a

kerbside collection from most properties and there are plenty of recycling bring-sites. These also take cans and bottles.

Do your bit for the environment and a huge chunk for your fellow travellers!

HELP

We're looking for "Friends of the Line" who might be able to help us with projects. For example, just as an experi-

ment, we'd like to run a "Clean Station Day" with volunteers helping to keep the branch clean all day and offering assistance to travellers.

Any offers ??????

A little bit of information...

Safety First: litter on the track can prove dangerous. Also, for it to be cleared up the current has to be switched off. That limits the time available. Please avoid letting anything get on the track.

Footnote: Pleez don't put yer feets on the seats! Ta.



SO WHAT'S HAPPENING? DOESN'T LOOK ANY DIFFERENT TO ME! IS THERE ANYTHING TO SEE?

Probably not just yet. That's mainly because the scheme is so new. However, behind the scenes the groundwork is being established to get any number of projects up and running.

Gradually you'll start to see improvements, notably at Queenborough first.

But first let's take you behind those scenes:

Carrying out a station audit might seem like discovering the obvious where the Sheerness branch is concerned. In fact carrying out such as exercise and producing a report shows that you have done your homework. The report becomes a vital tool not only for identifying projects that need attention but also as evidence when applying for funding for projects.

The station audit examined all station facilities. Needless to say, where our line is concerned, the report showed the only way is up!

The CCTV survey has helped identify the best ways in which cameras can be used in the fight against crime, and opened up other avenues towards increasing security and safety.

Please report incidents involving vandalism and so on to the British Transport Police:

Telephone 0800 40 50 40

The more genuine reports the more likely greater police resources will be allocated to the line. If incidents go unreported then the statistics do not show a problem. Please help us to address this issue. Thanks.

EDUCATION EDUCATION EDUCATION

We're working on a project to provide schools with an educational "Day Out On The Line". In fact arrangements can be tailor-made to suit requirements. Local commerce, for example, has been very helpful in offering assistance in preparing an "Industrial Heritage" day out. Visits to the docks at Sheerness and Ridham can be organised (thanks to Medway Ports and Brett Aggregates respectively) and of course there are the paper mills at Kemsley and Sittingbourne.

A very rich heritage that has helped shape the development and economy of the area and contributed to its considerable history. So much to learn!

Other themes could focus more on the historical or natural aspects, etc. And there is the railway itself, rapidly approaching its 150th birthday.

What we would like to do is work with local schools on the initiation, format and presentation of these projects. There are on-going and allied possibilities that require pupil research, such as a young persons tourist guide to Sheppey. We are keen to hear from schools that might like to be involved in the preparation of these schemes. Already West Minster Primary School has shown an enthusiastic interest in ways in which pupils can benefit from such involvement, and we have the Headteacher, Alan Bayford, to thank for suggesting these courses of action.

Pupils taking part in any programme development will be honoured as "Line Ambassadors" and ultimately we may be able to persuade South Eastern Trains to name carriages after individual schools!

Wright Writes: a message from the working group chairman, Councillor John Wright

A big welcome to everyone to Swale-Rail's newsletter and information sheet.

I was pleased to be able to join the new Kent Community Rail Partnership, earlier this year, in its work trying to improve facilities and service along the Sheerness to Sittingbourne branch.

The Partnership is a formation of interested agencies, bodies and community groups as well as the train and rail operators. The aim of the Working Group (within that Partnership) is to look at all issues that impact and affect all those that use and live around the line, and from these studies and information help try and resolve some of the negative matters, both large and small.

A new start

Peter Chegwiddden is the co-ordinating rail partnership officer and his job is to liaise with community groups, the rail companies, schools, working groups and agencies within the partnership in order to get things moving. He has had to hit the ground running as he came into the post just as the Strategic Rail Authority published its consultation on the future of rail services in Kent which proposed to halve services on the Sheerness branch, with only one train a week due to call at Swale!

Peter has had to gather detailed data, carry out research and then put the information into a cohesive response. We hope the SRA will listen.

In the beginning

To date, as a group, we have conducted a line audit that identifies areas that can be improved such as station décor, security, litter, toilets, information provision, seats, fencing, to mention a few.

Some of these require large amounts of money to resolve and have therefore been referred to Network Rail, South Eastern Trains and the SRA. This pressure and dialogue will continue. Other issues have been or are going to be resolved, such as new seating at Queenborough, non-slip flooring in the booking hall Sheerness, but many more remain to be tackled.

Community

Community involvement is and will be vital to the regeneration of this line. Some Sheppey schools have become involved in projects relating to posters, information provision and decoration that have needed research and design based on local history and heritage. **We would dearly like more**

schools to be involved.

Queenborough in Bloom and Queenborough Town Council have been actively involved in station enhancement programmes.

This is just a start and by involving the community that use, or might use, the railway we hope they will look after and take pride in their branch. This may even discourage vandalism.

Can you help? Please?

Therefore I ask you if you have some particular skill, whether it be painting, gardening, whatever, or just some free time and would like to help, to get in touch. Contact Peter on 01795 585617, e-mail: peterchegwiddden@swale.gov.uk or write to him at SBC District Office, Trinity Road, Sheerness ME12 2PG.

If you intend calling in person do phone first as Peter is often out meeting people and groups.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ellie John Wright

Chairman SwaleRail Community Rail Partnership Working Group.



On the left two views of Kemsley Station.

This has all the appearance of having been left un-guarded! It is possible CCTV will be installed here to help try and reduce the risk of vandalsim.



Then projects to smarten up the station and to provide improved facilities can get under way.

Help us to put Kemsley station back on the map. Over 400 passenger journeys start or finish here every day!



Approach to Queenborough station

An opportunity for landscaping and for improving the appearance of the station building (eg with floral hanging baskets and decorative paintings). Cheyne Middle School are preparing paintings for the upstairs windows entitled "Reflections of Queenborough"

Kent Community Rail Partnership Contact us

SBC Sheerness Office
Trinity Road
Sheerness
Kent
ME12 2PG

Phone: 01795 585617

Fax: 01795 669097

Email: peterchegwidden@swale.gov.uk

WALKING AND CYCLING BY TRAIN

It's easy and simple to take your bike on the branch. But we want to use the railway to open up new horizons for leisure travel. We are in the early stages of working with various partners to provide route and tourist information, and that includes working with Swale Borough Council on their new long term footpaths and cycleways strategy. The latter is essential in providing a sustainable alternative to car travel, and of course public transport should be closely allied to that. The possibility of varied guided walks from branch stations is in the foreseeable future. In all probability cycle-hire at stations may be introduced. Probably call it Branchbike. Hmmmm.....

Steam and Sail

Steam returns to Sheerness on the 5th September as part of the Faversham Hop Festival. That makes the Sunday an ideal target date for completion of the first stage of cheering up Sheerness station. Here's a few ideas:

Welcome signs - improvement to décor including some floral decorations - direction and tourist information signs - litter and cleaning improvements - more information on other local transport.

In 2005 we'll be celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar. Nelson's life ended shortly before he would have been able to travel from Sheerness by train (well, 55 years actually) but we are confident the great man, being an adventurer, would have willingly left his ship behind for a journey on this wonderful branch! Whatever special celebrations take place on Sheppey you'll be able to travel by train to take part.

For details of the Steam Train and for bookings contact Shepherd Neame on 01795 542016

FACING POINTS

WHEELS AND THINGS

Have you noticed how convenient travel interchange at Sheerness stations is? All on one level, everything to hand. Trains, buses, taxis, yet they meet by little more than coincidence. There may be a stream of taxis waiting for you most of the day, but how about at 10 p.m.? If you're unfamiliar with the area which bus stop do you need for your destination?

One of the Partnership's targets is to work towards bringing this more together. We need to work in close co-operation with service providers. Bus and taxi companies, like the train operator, are businesses and all proposals have to be viable propositions.

But we can make a start. Better provision of interchange information is a short term "quick-fix" and is therefore on the immediate agenda. Swale Borough Council is looking at how real-time bus information can be displayed at main stops and on the station. We are currently examining changes to the laws that affect the provision of inter-modal transport (e.g. combined bus and train travel). It may be easier to encourage the development of useful connections and through service provision.

OPEN DAY & OTHER DAYS

All kinds of things are planned under the

loose heading of "tourism". We are hoping to organise an open day on the line when there will be events/attractions at most stations and perhaps something on the trains themselves. This may well be tied in with an existing Sheppey event.

Tourist line-guides and other publicity material will be in the pipeline and we are exploring ways of producing literature-guided walks from certain stations. Peter is expecting to work with Shepherd Neame on a number of allied "themed" walks.

FLOWERS AND NICE TOUCHES

In Queenborough judging for the South East in Bloom takes place on Tuesday 13th July about 3 p.m. and will last around one and a half hours. The station will form part of the route and by then will be bedecked by floral hanging baskets and maybe additional features. Queenborough in Bloom would like to ask is one or two volunteers could just keep an eye on the station forecourt around that time to keep litter and other detractions away. Contact Peter as above.

SHEPPEY THINK TANK

The Rural Projects Manager, Nash Thakker, has been busy formulating a Sheppey "think tank" covering all aspects of the is-

land's economy including tourism. His simple question is "Who speaks for Sheppey?"

He has been trying to bring together businesses and community representatives on the island in order to forge ahead with a regeneration programme that suits the people of Sheppey. A working forum that speaks for Sheppey, that makes sure the island's voice is heard. The Rail Partnership is obviously working closely with Nash.

For more information on the "think tank" contact Nash on 01795 585622 or e-mail:

avinashthakker@swale.gov.uk

TRAILING POINTS

- We offer FREE talks to groups, clubs, schools, etc. Call Peter.
- The Strategic Rail Authority has a current consultation on cycles—you may wish to read and respond—it is important. See the website www.sra.gov.uk