

# Community Rail Partnership **News** Autumn 2006

## 150th Anniversary Marked at Strood & Maidstone West

Sunday June 18<sup>th</sup> 2006 saw the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the opening of the railway line between Strood and Maidstone West.

To mark this anniversary the Kent Community Rail Partnership together with new train operating company, London & South Eastern Railway (LSER) arranged for commemorative plaques to be unveiled at both Strood and Maidstone West stations and for a class 375 Electrostar train to be named in a ceremony at Maidstone West.

At Strood Station the commemorative plaque was unveiled by Councillor David Royle, Deputy Mayor of Medway who expressed his support for the Community Rail Partnership and hoped that their efforts, together with LSER would reinvigorate the Medway Valley Line.

LSER Managing Director Charles Horton said that he looked forward to improving rail services in Kent and hoped that his company's stewardship would be seen as a new golden age for railways in the County.

Around 50 invited guests, including Cllr Ann Kemp, Deputy Mayor of Tonbridge & Malling then travelled by a special, non-stop service to Maidstone West station where more guests were waiting.

At Maidstone West, Cllr Mike Fitzgerald, Mayor of Maidstone, unveiled an identical plaque and then revealed the nameplate "Medway Valley Line 1856 – 2006" on the special train, Electrostar unit 375304.

Cllr Fitzgerald who is also Chairman of Kent CRP said he was delighted that the Medway Valley Line Partnership was supported by all the local communities, with all Town & Parish Councils being actively involved.



Cllr David Royle, Charles Horton and Cllr Jane Etheridge, Vice Chairman of the MVL Partnership at Strood station.

Nigel Whitburn, Community Rail & Transport Officer added that while the days events were a celebration of the past, the Community Rail Partnership was principally concerned with the future and it's main focus would be seeking to improve the environment of the line and make it more attractive for both local people and visitors to the area.

Guests were given a small booklet outlining the history of the Medway Valley Line between Strood and Maidstone West that had been put together by Bob Ratcliffe of the Kent Federation of Amenity Societies. Further copies of the booklet are now available at the Rochester Visitor Information Centre and the Maidstone Tourist Information Centre for a modest fee.



Cllr Mike Fitzgerald performing the train naming ceremony.

## Kent Community Rail Partnership

# Say Hello!



From mid December the old, unloved Class 508 trains will disappear from the Medway Valley Line.

These units, now the oldest operated by Southeastern, will be replaced by more modern class 466 Networker units. The 466's will offer a more comfortable ride and are equipped with toilets.

However, the 466's are only 2 car units instead of three cars so we will be keeping a close watch on possible overcrowding.

## Wave Goodbye!



# Beezoo Hits Paddock Wood



April saw the opening of the new Beezoo buffet in the Paddock Wood ticket hall. This facility is one of a group run by Bridget Ktifi, with other outlets up and running at Maidstone East, West Malling and Otford. The buffet is now open for hot and cold drinks and snacks from 05.30 to 18.30 on weekdays and 07.30 to 14.30 on Saturdays.

## Ticket Sales Up!

Figures provided by Southeastern show that passenger numbers on the Medway Valley Line increased during 2005/06.

Based on ticket sales, passengers travelling to or from intermediate stations on the line increased by more than 12% compared to the previous year.

Not surprisingly the busiest station by far was Maidstone

West, with Snodland a clear second. The biggest percentage increases were achieved by Aylesford, then New Hythe. This presumably reflects the amount of new housing close to them.

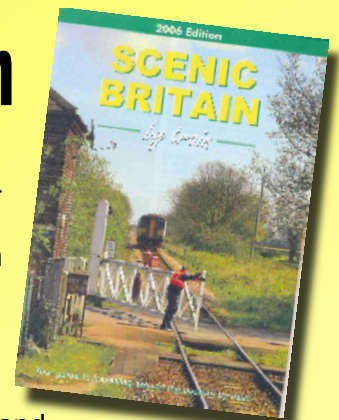
In fact all stations but one showed useful increases.

The exception? East Farleigh, which saw a slight decrease of 3.8%.

## Scenic Britain By Train

The Kent Community Rail Partnership has funded an entry into this year's "Scenic Britain By Train" booklet. The book promotes lines throughout the UK and also passes on enquiries.

We have received dozens of such enquiries from all over the country asking for information on our two lines (Medway Valley and SwaleRail) together with details of tourist attractions in the area. We have sent out packs of literature to all enquirers so hopefully this will encourage more visitors to our area.



Copies of the booklet are available from the Station Supervisors Office at Maidstone West, Tourist Information Offices at Rochester and Maidstone, or direct from the Line Partnership.

# Our First Music Train Hits Right Note

Passengers travelling on the Medway Valley Line on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> August were able to enjoy music, beer and other refreshments as the Medway Valley Line Partnership organised its first Music Train

“The Very Big Penguin Band” provided the music. Richard Dray on Piano Accordion and Peter Cook on Soprano Sax and vocals performed a selection of light jazz and 1920’s numbers which kept feet tapping.

Meanwhile Community Rail Partnership Officers Ian Paterson and Nigel Whitburn dispensed refreshments including real ale provided by local Maidstone brewers, “Goachers”.

Mayor of Maidstone, Cllr Mike Fitzgerald (who is also Chairman of the Rail Partnership) said “This has been a really good, enjoyable event. Those who came along specially weren’t disappointed and passengers who happened upon



the music train were surprised and amused. It brought a smile to their faces.”

Nigel added, “This was a successful event and we are grateful to Southeastern railway for allowing us to run the Music Train. I hope we will be able to run similar events in the future.”

**Above:** The Very Big Penguin Band.

**Left:** Passengers enjoying the ride and the music.

## Focus on Yalding

Yalding Station has now been repainted - and much smarter it looks too. This was the last station on the line to still show traces of Network South East colours.

However, the canopy has not been repainted. Such work cannot be done for safety reasons unless the line is closed to rail traffic. We will continue to press for this area to receive attention when practicable.

**The Mower firm that occupied the old station building for a number of years has now moved to a new location. We hear that a new tenant has been found by Network Rail’s Agents.**

Copies of the Partnerships Yalding Timetable and newsletters are normally available at Yalding Library and Yalding Post Office.



**On a historical note, have any readers a photograph of the old Camping Coach that was parked at the station until the 1960s? If so we would greatly appreciate an opportunity to photocopy it.**

# Back To Nature

The Medway Valley Line provides great access to the River Medway. Riverside and country walks, wildlife reserves and conservation areas are all within easy reach of many of the stations along the line.

South of Allington Lock, The Medway Valley Countryside Partnership helps communities and landowners care for and improve the local environment. North of Allington the Kent Wildlife Trust do a similar job and are seeking funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for a new Medway Gap project.

The Community Rail Partnership and these two other bodies have recognised that we share a number of common goals and we will be working with each other to encourage people to visit the river valley by sustainable public transport and particularly the Medway Valley Line.

Websites for both the Kent Wildlife Trust and the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership are shown below.

## Sorry

Plans for a major event to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the opening of the Medway Valley Line between Strood and Maidstone West have had to be deferred. Attempts by the Kent Community Rail Partnership to obtain sufficient funding to run the event proved unsuccessful which left no option but to decide not to run the event on the August Bank Holiday weekend.

However, fundraising efforts will continue and if sponsorship can be secured then an event will be run in the late spring of 2007 which will of course still be within the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

Our apologies to all those who were disappointed that this event did not take place.

### Useful Websites

**Southeastern Railway:**

**National Rail Enquiries:**

**Kent Community Rail Partnership:**

**Association of Community Rail Partnerships:**

**Traveline Public Transport Information:**

**Nu-Venture Coaches:**

**Arriva Buses Southern Counties:**

**Medway Valley Countryside Partnership:**

**Kent Wildlife Trust:**

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