

New services hope to return people to railways

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Rail operator Southeastern says it wants to win back passengers to the railways with a raft of new services – encouraging them from their cars and back into greener, electric train travel.

It said that, with 90% of leisure travellers having returned to the railway at weekends and during the half-term holiday, the economy in the south-east has had a boost. By contrast, it says around 40% of commuters have returned to rail for regular work journeys so far.

To encourage more people to take a train, Southeastern said it is making a number of improvements, including:

- The re-instatement of off-peak Highspeed trains between Ramsgate and Dover, with better connections timed between Highspeed trains and Mainline trains.
- The re-introduction of trains leaving Charing Cross after midnight to south-east London and west Kent, making weeknights out in London's West End easier and more convenient.
- A new Saturday late-night service departing Hastings at 23:30 for Tonbridge – allowing people in East Sussex and West Kent to make the most of the town's nightlife and boosting the evening economy.

It added that a small number of additional trains will also be introduced during the daytime between Maidstone East and London.

From Monday February 21 2022, Southeastern will introduce new off-peak services on weekdays between Kent's county town and Blackfriars, all of which will call at West Malling, Borough Green & Wrotham Otford, Swanley, Bromley South and Elephant & Castle.

In addition, Class 707 City Beam trains new to Southeastern will continue to be rolled out across the London area routes.

Steve White, Southeastern's managing director, said: "Our number one priority is to win back our customers and reverse the shift from public transport to cars that occurred during the pandemic. Rail is the greener way to travel and we want to make our service an easy and compelling choice for people to make.

"We've listened to our passengers and stakeholders and we're pleased to be able to respond with a timetable that adds in extra late-night services, with 92% of our pre-Covid capacity available, allowing passengers to enjoy theatre, restaurants and bars, boosting the night-time economy.

"The timetable is another step in our plan to win back customers. We'll continue to increase the number of services to match demand and we'll be delivering more improvements for our customers."