

## “ONTRACK”

WALTON ON THE NAZE, FRINTON ON SEA, KIRBY CROSS & THORPE LE SOKEN RAIL USERS ASSOCIATION  
(SERVING THE CLACTON & WALTON LINES)

### HEADCOUNT OF PASSENGERS BOARDING/ ALIGHTING & CHANGING TRAINS AT THORPE LE SOKEN STATION WEDNESDAY 25<sup>th</sup>. JUNE 2014

#### 1. INTROUCTION

**1.1 “ONTRACK” Rail Users Association** carried out a headcount of all the passengers boarding and alighting from all trains calling at **THORPE LE SOKEN STATION** on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2014.

- This count **included** the very first trains and last trains of the day.
- The results of this headcount are shown in **Appendices 1 & 2**, Appendix 1 is a consolidated summary with the column headed “Wednesday 25/06/14”,
- *Showing that a total of 1,119 passengers boarded trains while 1,075 alighted from trains,*
- *Giving a total footfall for the day of 2,194.*
- **Deducting the aggregated number of entries (201 entries) and exits (184 exits)** over the whole day from the previous grand total arrives **at the net numbers purely changing trains of 2,010.**
- **Appendix 2** shows the summarised Office for Rail Regulation (ORR) official estimates for the period to 2012/ 2013.

**1.2 “ONTRACK” RUA** thanks all the volunteers from the Association, plus the members of local community stakeholder groups such as the Frinton Residents Association, Frinton & Walton Heritage Trust, Frinton in Bloom, Frinton Free Church, Tendring District Council’s apprentices and also local Tendring District and Essex County councillors who gave up their time to help run the census on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

**1.3** Initial analysis suggests that compared with the official Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) data the actual usage, on not necessarily the busiest commuting day of the week or the busiest commuting period of the year with some of the university/further education students already into their summer recess, indicates that the actual net interchange could be two to three time greater than the daily average of the ORR data. Conversely the actual number of entries and exits at Thorpe-le-Soken in respect of actual journeys starting or ending there was much lower than the ORR estimates.

**1.4** The reason for undertaking this exercise is, to quote the article in **RAIL Issue 738** *<that spending of money on improving rail services is tied to current and forecast passenger numbers and revenue, and to the prediction of future increases if that spending is committed. However the passenger numbers published by the Office of Rail Regulation can sometimes be inaccurate, owing to shortcomings in the railway’s data capture rather than those who analyse data.*

*Inaccuracies can appear as a result of ticketless travel..... and on routes where there are few staffed stations and no automatic barriers... dishonest passengers soon realise this omission>*

In addition to this there is the possibility that for season tickets bought through employer’s corporate travel agents, or outside the area, and conductor guards banking receipts at a remote base station, that accounting systems may not always accurately

point the credits for fares through to the appropriate station/cost centre. This may be compounded by the practice of conductor guards/revenue enforcement teams working from e.g. the rear carriage on leaving Walton when often it has been observed by members do not reach the passengers in the front two coaches of a 4-car emu until on the final approach to Thorpe-le-Soken (the junction), which means tickets issued might be credited to Thorpe-le-Soken. But even this does not explain the differences in numbers exposed whereby the whole process of the headcount exercise has tended to understate rather than overstate numbers.

**1.5** The Association has been aware services do not match traffic demands or travel patterns with the village junction station of Thorpe-le-Soken being one of the busiest interchange stations outside of Norwich Thorpe station or Colchester (North), requiring many passengers to change trains 5 miles or so into their journey or towards the end of it. This has created a lot of passenger dissatisfaction due to the problems created by missed connections arising from late running trains and long waits with often minimal facilities available on an “island platform” for the next hourly service.

**1.6** Timetable changes over the last 25 years have resulted in the gradual deterioration in the standard of the service to Liverpool Street. This has included the withdrawal of main-line style electric multiple units as well as the gradual increase in journey times due to the introduction of additional intermediate stops. The latter is most noticeable in the evening peak departures from Liverpool Street where the fastest service in 2014 is slower than the slowest service in 1984.

**1.7** This report aims to draw attention to the mismatch between ORR data and actual passenger usage so that better matched train services in terms of frequency, capacity and service pattern can be developed. However, it is anticipated that further sampling may be necessary to improve on the overall statistical efficacy of the results obtained so far to in excess of the 95% confidence level.

## **2. Methodology**

**2.1** Teams of between two and up to five census takers at peak travel times attended Thorpe-le-Soken station between 5.15 a.m. and 12.55 a.m. covering two to three hour shifts.

- Each census taker counted independently those boarding and alighting trains running in the DOWN direction towards Walton-on-the-Naze or Clacton-on-Sea and running in the UP direction towards Colchester and/or London, recording onto the log sheets.
- Counts were also being taken also of those entering or leaving the station via the singular point of access, the footbridge to/from the sole “island” platform. The consolidated log record is reproduced in Appendix 1.
- On change-over, census teams were issued with new log sheets in order to safeguard data already collected.
- At the peak times of travel, when more than two census takers were present, especially in the evening, the priority of one or two of the census takers was the monitoring of entries and exits from the station.

**2.2** ORR figures were based on those last available for the period 2012-13 and daily averages as calculated were based on the following alternative options:

- A) On a five day working week, excluding weekends and public holidays (253 working days).
- B) On a modified 6 day week excluding Sundays and Christmas and Boxing Day.

C) Other options assuming a very low ridership on weekends based on a net of 253 working days p.a. excluding weekends and public holidays.

### 3. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

- 3.1 As already indicated the passenger census counts for Thorpe-le-Soken on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2014, show that a total of 1,119 passengers boarded trains while 1,075 alighted from trains, giving a total footfall for the day of 2,194. After eliminating the separate counts of entries and exits from the station this provides a net interchange number of 2,010.
- 3.2 The net usage of the station arising from those journeys starting or ending at Thorpe-le-Soken itself is just 385.
- 3.3 An initial comparison, ignoring Saturdays, Sundays and all Public (Bank) Holidays, which leaves one with 253 working days per year and then multiplying the counted footfall for the day of by 253 would give an total annual equivalent footfall of **555,082** and net interchange of **508,530**.
- 3.4 The Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) estimated interchange figure for Thorpe-le-Soken is 256,695 p.a. or an equivalent of 704 per day (based on a 365 day year, or 826 per day (excluding Sundays and Christmas day and Boxing Day) or 1,015 per day (based on a net 353 working days excluding weekends and public holidays).
- 3.5 The last paragraph 3.4 gives some very startling figures.
- The actual usage of Thorpe is about half that of Frinton while the main function is as an interchange station.
  - It certainly cannot be thought of in terms of a park-and-ride station for the area. But for anyone who travels regularly, it is obvious that the ORR figures in paragraph 3.4 are nowhere near accurate.
  - And you cannot exclude Sundays since ALL Walton-line passengers must then change at the junction of Thorpe Le Soken, although for the purposes about making the point about the average daily usage and interchange we have done so, which means we still understate.
  - However, such an exclusion means that there is in practice an even greater discrepancy between the ORR estimates and the Headcount figures.
- 3.6 For comparison, ORR interchange estimates p.a. for 20011-12 are 252,595 and the 2012-13 estimates represent an increase of 1.3% on that. It would appear that based on the ORR estimates alone the interchange at Thorpe Le Soken represents between 35% and 75 % of passengers travelling from Clacton On Sea or Walton Line stations.
- 3.7 The actual number of journeys actually starting or ending at Thorpe-le-Soken on June 25<sup>th</sup> 2014 was 385, the equivalent of 140,525 based on a 365 day year.
- 3.8 However, the annual equivalent headcount figures do not take into account the effect of Bank Holidays (other than Christmas), when there would be limited travel to work, Even so, none of the above takes account of the Summer holiday traffic which significantly increases loadings on certain services (see Appendix 3).
- 3.9 Overall the counted interchange figures are two to three times higher than the ORR's official figure, a very significant difference. Conversely the counted number joining or

leaving at Thorpe-le-Soken is significantly less but it is very likely that the ticket data as used by the ORR may include passengers without tickets in the leading coaches as a Walton train approaches Thorpe-le-Soken who were unable or unwilling to purchase tickets until they reached Thorpe-le-Soken and who then bought tickets from a ticket machine or the booking office at Thorpe-le-Soken, or subsequently from a conductor guard on Colchester or London bound train after leaving Thorpe-le-Soken which would be credited to Thorpe-le-Soken.

**3.10** There is also need to consider the extent to which the observations of Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> June are typical of a weekday. This is difficult to answer since there does not seem to be a 'typical' day for many Clacton & Walton-line stations; to start with there are normal daily variations with a Wednesday towards the end of June having a lower number in the peak due to some college or university students who are already in Summer recess, but the Summer holiday traffic and school and language student exchanges have yet to materialise.

**3.11** As mentioned above, the summer brings large numbers of day trippers in July and August and, to a lesser extent, at half terms. Then in early July and September there are English as a Foreign Language exchange student groups of school age and above from the Continent who are using the train for visits to Colchester and further afield. Also during the actual school terms, parties of primary school children visit Colchester while those in secondary education are more likely to visit London and sometimes vice versa.

#### **3.11.1 Morning peak services**

- i) These are services that give an arrival time at Liverpool Street before 10.00 a.m. Hence they comprise departures up to and including the 08.11.
- ii). It should be noted that the 08.00 hrs. ex-Walton-on-the-Naze, the through direct fast service to London Liverpool Street, has maintained, and even increased, its loadings over the years.

Although there are not very large numbers boarding or getting off at Thorpe-le-Soken this is a key service working through from Walton-on-the-Naze at 08.11 hrs. Those that do get off often wait for the train from Clacton that arrives a few minutes later at 08.19 hrs and are largely taking advantage of the local concession for off-peak ticket holders to take a train that arrives in London just a minutes before 10 a.m. - the general default threshold for the arrival of passengers with off peak tickets. This raises the issue with the hourly frequency that currently obtains on the Clacton and Walton services is that the next departure from Walton at 09.00 or Clacton at 09.03 hrs would not deliver passengers into London Liverpool Street until over a half hour later.

A longer-term perspective of peak-hour travel may be obtained by considering the total number of passengers boarding peak-hour services; official reports (Tendring District Council/ Public Transport Plans PTP5 and PTP6.)

- iii). One should also note that in 1984 (two years after withdrawal of the through Liverpool Street to Walton-on-the-Naze service and its replacement by a shuttle connecting service to Thorpe-le-Soken), the numbers had dropped to "around 200" (*based on a verbal report from Mr. Bernard Lewis, the then ticket clerk at Frinton, who was responsible for carrying out the headcount which took place over five days*). These

figures suggest that:

- Until 1981 there was a gradually increasing number of peak-hour passengers
  - Over the two years following withdrawal of through services, there was a loss of around 30% of peak-hour passengers.
  - These figures were for Frinton alone, i.e. not including Walton or Kirby Cross.
- iv). By 1984, there was also a very large increase in the amount of car parking visibly evident at Thorpe-le-Soken and it was obvious that Walton and Frinton based commuters sought to avoid the inconvenience of changing trains and which, in far too many instances, had resulted in considerable delay due to missed connections, a very frustrating situation.
- v). Subsequent timetable changes over the succeeding 25 years have resulted in the gradual deterioration in the standard of the service to Liverpool Street. This has included the withdrawal of main-line style electric multiple units (initially offering on board refreshment and luggage storage facilities) and their replacement with outer suburban type rolling stock as well as the gradual increase in journey times due to the introduction of additional intermediate stops. The latter is most noticeable in the evening peak (departures from Liverpool Street between 17.00 and 19.00) where the fastest service in 2014 is slower than the slowest service in 1984.
- vi). The 08.00 hrs departure from Walton: In the three years since this service was introduced, patronage has steadily increased and on one recent journey earlier this year, the 4-car set was nearly full by the time the train reached Colchester (note that this service does not pick up passengers from Clacton).

### **3.10.2 Off-peak services (Excluding summer months)**

- i). It is understood that it has been generally assumed in the rail industry over many years that a Thursday is a typical weekday for passenger numbers. However consideration of the figures in Appendix 1 suggests that this applies only to a much more limited extent at Thorpe-le-Soken, although more data is probably needed to be quite certain of this and random test sample on other weekdays should be considered.

Where there are many retired people, the day of travel has much less significance and they are able to choose the day to suit themselves. This may equally apply to certain other types of casual leisure and business traveller. A number of organisations now support “working at home” arrangements where the only need for travel is to attend office or client meetings as might be arranged at mutually convenient times.

- ii). One would expect the summer period to result in a general increase in traffic and this does indeed seem to be the case with the earlier studies conducted on the Walton line.
- iii). As an aside, it was very surprising to find that 3 people alighted at Thorpe-le-Soken from the 00.47 hrs arrival bound for Clacton and which demonstrates that there is a demand for late evening trains. This bears out reports from taxi drivers that, before this service was reintroduced, they were regularly called out to Thorpe-le-Soken station to meet people off the late evening service to Clacton. Investigation needs to be carried out to ascertain the possible demand for a later service connecting out of the 23.18 departure from Liverpool Street. Likewise, there are those driving into Thorpe-le-Soken or Colchester because of a lack of earlier trains at the start of the working

day.

### 3.10.3 Off-peak services (summer months)

- i). Frinton-on-Sea and Walton-on-the-Naze together combine to form a significant tourist destination with continuous sandy beaches stretching nearly five miles from south of Frinton Golf Club to the Naze, north of Walton. Much of this coastline is easily accessible from Frinton and Walton stations, Walton station being particularly convenient as it is situated on the cliff top, only two minutes from the beach. Clacton station itself is only a 10 minute walk from the seafront and the pier.
- On a fine summer's day, 15,000 or more people crowd onto the Frinton and Walton beaches, most of these being day trippers.
  - Likewise there is a significant numbers visiting the amusements in Clacton. Consequently this can result in a much higher number of people than normal using the trains at this time of the year.
  - The traffic commences with the end of the GCSE and 'A' level examinations and so lasts from the beginning of July through to the beginning of September, about two months of the year.
  - However in respect of those attending evening, theatre, carnival and other events, those seeking to avail themselves of the last trains of the day from Clacton or Walton are challenged to get to the station in time from many venues.
- ii). It is understood that the Clacton Airshow, which took place at the end of the penultimate week in August, brought in over 100,000 visitors to Clacton according to Tendring District Council CCTV monitoring, benefitting extra trains being run.
- ii). At one time the railway made special provision in order to attract day trippers to travel by train with additional trains calling at intermediate stations which did not normally have a direct service.<sup>1</sup> However, this is no longer the case and passengers are expected to use the normal everyday hourly off-peak services.
- This can result in considerable inconvenience if travelling from, for example, Ilford or Romford, so that numbers are considerably below the levels seen only, say, 30 years ago.
  - In the case of travel to Frinton and Walton, there is the added deterrent of being forced to change trains additionally at Thorpe-le-Soken when travelling from main line stations.
  - Nevertheless, significant numbers do still make the journey by rail, although most now come by road causing serious traffic congestion at certain times of the day as well as parking problems.
- iii). The overall number of passengers is generally higher in summer but the exercise which the Association carried out in the summer of 2013 particularly set out to obtain an estimate of the numbers of day trippers. The main arrival time for day trippers is late morning so the 10.45 to 13.45 inclusive arrivals at Frinton were monitored on a number of days under various weather conditions, since the volume of this travel is heavily dependent upon the weather. The London trains connecting with these at Thorpe-le-Soken will also deliver more day trippers to Clacton.

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<sup>1</sup> Such additional summer services ran from Liverpool Street to Walton-on-the Naze until 1981 but were later reinstated, finally being withdrawn when National Express took over operation of the franchise from First Great Eastern some 10 years ago.

- iv). To investigate the effect that these summer visitors will require further exercises to be carried out but the high level of interchange at Thorpe-le-Soken suggests higher number are using both Frinton and Walton-on-the-Naze and also perhaps travelling between Clacton and Colchester.
- vi). On the one day when all four services were monitored, weather conditions were not particularly bad, and there were no major disruptions to the local or mainline services.
- vii). As previously noted, the summer traffic at Frinton and Walton extends from the beginning of July until the start of the schools' Autumn term in September, a duration of 10 weeks. Neglecting Sundays, this period covers 60 days, so that the contribution that the summer day trippers make to the annual passenger numbers needs to be factored in.
- viii). An interesting observation was made in 2013 that on the second day of the Clacton Airshow, no less than about 85 passengers alighted from the 11.45 arrival at Frinton (retimed to 11.48); together with the passengers for Walton, the total on the train leaving Thorpe-le-Soken would have been nearly 200, virtually all of whom would have changed trains there since the service originated at Clacton (Airshow service). Clearly, a very significant number of people were not going to the Airshow, but were simply coming down for a day out on the beach. It might then be considered that improved frequency and customised services attract patronage.

#### 4. Analysis and Conclusion

- 4.1 The number of passengers changing trains vastly exceeds the ORR estimate on not even one of the busiest days of the year or of a working week.
- 4.2 For peak-hour services there are 253 working days per year, allowing for weekends and Bank Holidays, so that an initial comparison, ignoring Saturdays, Sundays and all Public (Bank) Holidays, would give an total annual equivalent footfall of 555,082 and net interchange of 508,530 **and given that alternate ways of calculating the annual equivalent indicates that the numbers changing trains are two to three times higher than the ORR estimates.**
- 4.3 The net usage of the station arising from those journeys starting or ending at Thorpe le Soken itself is just 385.
- 4.4 *That a total of 1,119 passengers boarded trains while 1,075 alighted from trains, giving a total footfall for the day of 2,194. Deducting the aggregated number of entries(201 entries) and exits (184 exits) over the whole day from the previous grand total arrives at the net numbers purely changing trains of 2,010.*
- 4.5 *Bank holidays have been treated as a normal weekday with off-peak passengers only. It is difficult to be precise regarding variations due to these days, as some will be busier than a normal day while others will be less busy, hence no adjustment can be made without further evidence.*
- 4.6 *Regrettably no ORR evidence is currently available for Sunday usage so that no definite conclusion can be reached. But if one assumes even a very modest footfall of say 100 on a Sunday just for Frinton there is an uplift. with a suggested a figure of 100 for Sundays at Frinton - but at Thorpe Le Soken ALL Walton-line passengers will have to change trains on a Sunday.. However, we now believe the 100 is too modest a figure so that the interchange figure for Thorpe will be considerable greater.*
- 4.7 *No attempt was made to positively identify which train those alighting at Thorpe Le Soken subsequently boarded although some broad assumptions might infer that off-peak passengers boarded the connecting service. However in the morning and evening peak travel periods there is some local commuting between Clacton and*

*Walton Line Stations as there are no buses operating on most routes before 7 a.m. or commercially after 7 p.m.. where a very Spartan Essex County supported service operates.*

**4.8** *It is believed that this total obtained is a very conservative figure and that the true figure is somewhat higher due to various factors, particularly the lower than normal number of peak-hour passengers; also no attempt has been made to include group travel. Clearly further work is required to be able to refine these results.*

*“ONTRACK” RUA.*

<http://www.ontrackrailusers.org.uk/>

**SEE APPENDICES ATTACHED**