

Rail firm reveals changes to service

Major timetable alterations welcomed by action group

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Upcoming changes to Southern's East Coastway timetable have been welcomed by rail passenger groups this week.

The new timetable - which was revealed by GTR this week - will see major changes to the service when it comes into force on May 20.

The changes have been welcomed by Bexhill Rail Action Group (BRAG).

BRAG chairman Hugh Sharp said: "The new timetable has come about after a lengthy dialogue between local rail user groups and GTR/Southern, and we are extremely grateful for the spirit in which they approached this process. It is fair to say that BRAG and our

sister groups in Hastings and Rye were aghast at the original plans, which would have seen all passengers having to change trains at Hastings, effectively creating a 'Berlin Wall' across the tracks.

"I am pleased to say that both GTR and the DfT listened to this concern, and adopted a radical new proposal by the national campaign group Railfuture, which provides longer, faster and more regular trains from Brighton to Hastings, while also retaining a through service between Eastbourne and Ashford. The result will be a more frequent timetable on the whole route, effectively creating a 'turn-up-and-go' service at the main stations between Hastings and Eastbourne."

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Under the new timetable Bexhill will be served by hourly services to Victoria, Brighton and Ashford International - resulting in four trains per hour going between Hastings and Eastbourne rather than the

three that currently operate.

This will include an additional hourly direct service between Eastbourne and Ashford International. Improved connectivity with services at Ashford International will see journey times between Bexhill and London St Pancras reduced to 99 minutes from 117 minutes. In addition, passengers from Cooden Beach and Collington

will be able to travel direct to Ashford International on the new service.

The changes have also be welcomed by Bexhill and Battle MP Huw Merriman, who said: "It is fantastic news for local residents that the rail services between Hastings and Eastbourne will increase to four per hour. This builds far more resilience into the rail network that links our towns

and connect us to London, Ashford International, Brighton and beyond.

"It will also alleviate pressure on the over-crowded fast service to Ashford. I want to place on record my congratulations to our local rail user groups and especially the Bexhill Rail Action Group (BRAG) who put forward the innovative proposals to increase the number of

services between Hastings and Eastbourne. Residents of Normans Bay will also be pleased to see additional services in the new timetable and, for the first time, a Sunday service.

"GTR has demonstrated that this was a genuine consultation, they listened to their passengers and stakeholders and have achieved real improvements

for our East Coastway rail service. This consultation exercise has been a brilliant example of local and national organisations and elected representatives working together for the benefit of local residents and business."

Details of some of the changed services are already available on the National Rail Journey Planner website ahead of the May timetable.