

Modernisation in Southern Region

FAST diesel-electric services to Hastings *via* Tunbridge Wells will be among the first benefits of the railway modernisation and re-equipment plan to affect the public travelling in the Southern Region of British Railways. It is proposed to introduce trains on this route which will resemble electric trains in most respects, except that they will carry their own diesel generators.

The trains will be of multiple-unit type and made up, on express services, of two six-car sets with corridor access throughout each set. The performance is expected virtually to equal that of electric trains and will make the long-desired 90-min. journey time possible between Hastings and London. The first stage, to be inaugurated by the summer of 1957, will be limited to a comparatively small number of services, but the second stage, which will cover the whole of the Hastings services by this route, will follow as quickly as possible.

In the Hampshire area, multiple-unit diesel-electric services are to be introduced, and services to the Kent Coast will be improved by the extension of electrification from Gillingham, Maidstone and Sevenoaks. The first stage of this work will be from Gillingham to Ramsgate and Dover.

In London, platforms at Cannon Street Station are to be lengthened to accommodate ten-car trains. The number of these running at present on the Eastern Section is limited by the fact that only one terminal, Charing Cross, is available in London. Other work in London will include a new parcels office at London Bridge to replace the one destroyed by enemy action during the last war.

Signalling projects do not form a prominent part of the early stages of the Southern Region programme, but there is an economy scheme for the concentration of the work of two signalboxes, one installed by the former Great Western Railway, at the west end of Salisbury Station. Extensive alterations to the permanent way will be made at the same time. A proposal to improve block controls involves the substitution of three-position block instruments for two-position instruments on various sections of the line; this will enable an indication

to be given of approaching rail traffic at intermediate level crossings which are not block posts.

Platforms are to be lengthened at Bournemouth West, where it is desired to accommodate longer trains, particularly those working from the Midlands over the Somerset & Dorset line, and other platform lengthening is to be carried out at Redhill, Merstham, Coulsdon South, and Purley. The longer trains which will be able to use the latter stations will ease the overcrowding brought about by the housing developments at Crawley, Merstham, and so on. The new satellite town of Crawley, which is to have a population of 60,000, will require improved freight-handling arrangements, and a new goods yard for the town is a feature of the programme.

Work at passenger stations includes the provision of two 950-ft. platforms at Weymouth. This will enable trains to be accepted more freely at busy periods and will be the first stage of the improvement scheme for the station. Chichester Station, admittedly old and dilapidated, is to be reconstructed and modernised.

Gatwick Airport Station is to be closed and passenger traffic is to be dealt with by the adaptation of Gatwick Racecourse Station to enable airport portions to be detached from and attached to the London-Brighton semi-fast trains. This scheme is being planned in conjunction with the Ministry of Transport & Civil Aviation.

Attention is being given to the cleanliness of rolling stock in the programme by the installation of carriage washing machines at Bournemouth West and Ramsgate, and the proposed modernisation of the goods depot at Southampton Terminus will bring about an improvement in handling and in staff accommodation.

Three reversible escalators are to be provided at Bank Station, where the platforms of the Waterloo & City tube of the Southern Region are linked with the street by a long inclined subway interspersed with short flights of steps. This is a development of a scheme proposed in the 1930s. New tunnels will have to be driven, and it will probably be about three years before the escalators are working.