



Promoting Britain's
Railway
for Passengers
and Freight

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South Eastern Rail Franchise – Public Consultation

Railfuture is a national voluntary organisation structured in England as twelve regional branches, and two national branches in Wales and Scotland. Within the London and South East Branch there is a division responsible for the Kent Division. Nationally passenger issues are co-ordinated by the Passenger Group – Head of Passenger Group is Allison Cosgrove, email allison.cosgrove@railfuturescotland.org.uk. We are completely independent of all political parties, trades unions and commercial interests, funded entirely from our membership. We campaign for improved rail services for passengers and freight. Whilst pro-rail, we are not anti-car or aviation.

Input for the consultation response was gathered at a number of meetings, open to members and supporters at the national (Railfuture Policy Groups), regional (London and South East Branch) and local (Kent Division). Responses were coordinated by the Southeastern TOC liaison and Kent Division Co-ordinator Chris Fribbins.

We welcome the opportunity to take part in this review and would be keen to engage further as necessary.

1. Do our priorities correctly reflect your views?

Generally, the priorities are supported, but with an implied emphasis on peak time travel there is a need to further promote off-peak travel opportunities to assist the franchise in 'paying its way' and making better use of the rolling stock and significant infrastructure investments.

2. Do you agree that more space is needed for passengers at the busiest times of the day?

Peak time travel remains an unpleasant experience from many stations, with recommended standing times regularly exceeded from parts of the Metro and Mainline routes. Even Highspeed is now having capacity issues between London St Pancras and Ebbsfleet or even Ashford on some 12 car trains.

3. What comments, if any, do you have on options for providing more space through:

a) Longer trains;

Network Rail have completed the majority of platform lengthening in the franchise area, but train lengths remain variable and do not make use of the very significant investment. Additional rolling stock is now required to allow existing stock to be combined in longer combinations for trains to and from London destinations, however the age and complexity of fitting selective door opening does mean that new trains will be required on some routes to allow existing stations to be served by these longer trains.

and

b) Metro style carriages with larger entrances and more standing room and handholds?

Metro style trains do extend to stations such as Gravesend/Dartford and Sevenoaks (and currently Gillingham), these style of trains are generally unsuitable for the longer routes where seating is required. Larger entrances and more standing room and (suitable) handholds are only suitable for shorter distance journeys – although it is also recognised that disruption often extends the time people can be left standing. Reliability of the service is key to being able to use these Metro style carriages –

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levels of reliability regularly reported by London Overground are rarely experienced on the Southeastern network.

4. Would you support removing First Class seating on the busiest routes to provide more space?

The allocation of dedicated space for first class may be welcome for a minority of passengers, but the example of Highspeed services that have never had first class seating shows that this is a luxury that is no longer sustainable. In place of first class, seating for people with mobility issues etc. should be consistently provided and enforced (Priority Seating).

5. What comments, if any, do you have on our plans to improve customer service and the overall passenger experience?

The service provided online, on the phone, at the station, supporting the journey to & from the station as well as pre and post-journey support is important.

6. Do you have any other ideas or priorities for improving customer service?

Information at stations requires a radical upgrade (station wi-fi and display terminals that can be used for information on the passenger's journey). The basic LED platform indicators are no longer fit for purpose and are very limited in the information that can be displayed – especially when there is disruption. Ideally there should be staff at the station to help during hours of train service, but an option to link to somebody visually and audibly needs to be an option on the station information screen.

7. What changes to the fares structure would be of benefit to you?

The provision of Smart Ticketing (e.g. carnet style/part time ticketing for both peak and off-peak services) would help increase passenger loyalty and encourage travel by rail rather than road.

8. What else could be done to improve the way tickets are sold and provided?

Increasing the ability to purchase tickets is welcome, but the number of passengers without access to online services (by choice, or lack of access – (a poor phone/wifi signal, insufficient power) is still significant and passengers with no payment card still need to be catered for (card only TVMs are becoming common).

9. What further comments, if any, do you have on our plans to improve access and facilities at stations?

While supporting the plans, the majority of stations across the franchise remain remote, lonely places – some even in the peak period. Information access and support (even remote) at ALL stations is vital.

10. What more could be done to improve access and provide facilities for those with disabilities or additional needs?

It is frustrating that we will be seeing significant upgrades to the nation's rolling stock to meet disability or additional needs in the next few years, but access at many stations is often poor and these passengers will not be able to get on or/off the train, or on/off the platform. It is recognised that this is a difficult issue to address, but the funds available to support improvements is very limited. There does need to be more information about the accessibility of every station – online, at the stations and more information on the alternative options available.

11. How far do you support, or oppose, the extension of High Speed services from London St. Pancras to Hastings, Bexhill, and Rye, where this would represent value for money to the taxpayer?

This service is supported and has been something that our organisation has campaigned for in recent years. We would also include considering the possibility of reaching Eastbourne as well. The limited ability to improve the current Hastings/Tunbridge Wells service is recognised and the economic potential of reducing journey times from London and opening up further journey options at Ashford, Stratford International and St. Pancras in particular would be a major boost.

12. How far do you support, or oppose, reducing journey times to key destinations in Kent and East Sussex, by reducing stops at less well used intermediate stations to create hourly fast services?

Journey time improvements are seen as important by many passengers, but priority should be given to reducing delays and timetable 'padding'. Journey times on many key routes have degraded over recent decades. It is important to provide half-hourly services as a minimum. Skipping stations can lead to an

increase in car travel to 'rail heads' at better served locations (both in the peak and off-peak).

13. If you support this proposal, which services do you think would most benefit from this approach?

The approach is not supported.

14. Which journeys do you make today which are difficult?

a) By rail?

Highspeed services from Higham (personal) – the connection at Gravesend is 22 minutes, although via HS1 fares are applied. Members travel from locations across Kent and particular problems are experienced when changing services. Connections to Stansted and Gatwick airports, West London. Connections from much of the franchise area to HS1 services and future Thameslink, Crossrail, TfL services (e.g. London Overground, Docklands and Croydon Tramlink)

b) By road, which would be easier by rail?

London destinations, London Airports M25 journeys, especially at peak hours. North/South journeys are limited, but where available can be easier. Connectivity via Abbey Wood and Thameslink services will provide additional rail options that will be much easier than road.

15. Which additional services would you wish to see provided in the next franchise?

The service additions of Thameslink and Crossrail will open up further destinations. Further services to Abbey Wood may be required. Highspeed services via Ashford/Hastings could be provided in the next franchise. A move to, at least, ½ hourly services on the majority of routes would be supported (Metro services at 10-15 minute frequency).

16. How far do you support, or oppose, options to simplify the timetable?

Simplifying the timetable is supported. There are examples of services that have a reliable ½ hourly service in off-peak, but extended service intervals in the peak! A clock-face timetable does help passengers.

17. How far do you support, or oppose, options to reduce the choice of central London destinations served from individual stations with the aim of providing a more regular, evenly spaced timetable, and a more reliable service?

The reduction of central London destinations is understood and does give an ability to reduce conflicts amongst services and help to reduce the impact of disruption being transferred to other routes. There would need to be a lot of work to identify the stations where transfers would be necessary to reach the alternative destinations, and the impact of the increased load on crossing bridges/subways and platforms. However, the passenger preference is for point to point services (once on a train, changing introduces additional risks to the journey and further delay).

18. How far do you support, or oppose, plans for the train operator and Network Rail to form a close alliance with the aim of reducing delays and improving performance?

We would expect this to be engrained in the service already and would be very disappointing if it was not. The benefits of this would need to be proven. Further collaborations with bus operators, TfL and passenger groups should be considered.

19. What are your views on how this alliance should be incentivised and held to account for its performance?

The imposition of financial penalties does not appear to be a benefit to passengers and diverts resources away from the actual problem. Performance needs to be publicised and action plans agreed with a wider group (including passenger representatives – Transport Focus and selected passenger groups) to discuss impact and solutions.

20. How would you prefer the next South Eastern operator to engage with you:

a) As an individual?

Use of email/twitter/facebook etc is welcome as well as regular stakeholder briefings.

b) As an organisation (if appropriate)?

Stakeholder bulletins, availability of staff to meet and discuss issues with individual and groups of passenger groups would be welcomed.

21. What approaches to customer service in other companies could be adopted by the next South

Eastern train operator?

Automatic payment of delay/repay.

More publicity and expansion of advance ticketing to help address the high concern with value for money.

Expanded Smart Ticketing (Oyster/Contactless Card).

The incoming franchise should be committed to TfL levels of customer service, on the Metro routes – staff on stations – ‘virtual’ integration with TfL services, station and train standards and reliability.

22. Where do you think private sector investment would be of most benefit to the railway?

Upgrade of Information Technology/Passenger Information/App development.

23. Should we consider using the more lightly used sections of the railway in a different way? If so, how should this be done?

More investment could be made in Community Rail or ‘Community Rail-Lite’ to market and promote the lines for both peak and off-peak travel – publicising the attractions on the line (walks, cycle routes, places of interest).

24. Looking to future, beyond this franchise, what, if any, benefits do you consider there would be for passengers from a franchise with a different geographical boundary?

The removal of Marshlink (Ashford/Hastings) and Tonbridge/Redhill from the franchise area has limited current service provision and journey options.

Inclusion of the current freight line between Hoo Junction and Grain is likely to be necessary to support the number of new homes likely in the emerging Medway Local Plan – especially as road access to the core Hoo Peninsula is limited to one road only. A service from Strood (shared platform 3) could serve the area via Higham and a chord at Hoo junction.

General Comments

Railfuture would like to see further support for the existing Community Rail across the route and the benefits of station adoption could be advertised further. Kent Community Rail currently covers the Strood to Tonbridge and Sittingbourne to Sheerness lines. Railfuture did consult previously with parish councils in the East Kent area and there was general support for expansion of community rail between Faversham and Dover and the East Kent coast.

New Routes

6.13 The current franchise had proposed a third hourly service from the Medway Towns to Abbey Wood for connection to Crossrail in a recent consultation. This has been lost in the transfer to Thameslink – this may be necessary as people divert via Abbey Wood.

6.14 Ashford to Tonbridge/Redhill & Reading – support the idea of rail services providing an orbital service, although consideration should be given to the Medway Towns as an alternative to Ashford due to population size.

6.15 Consideration should be given to an extension to Eastbourne.

6.16 Until extension of HS1 services from Ashford to Hastings and beyond, this upgrade of Marshlink services would be supported.

The premium charged for use of HS1 services generates a number of anomalies and confusion for passengers using TVM on online ticket purchase (a ticket office is more likely to be able to advise or question the passenger before the sale). A reduction or removal of this premium would be supported and would help to improve the distribution of passengers to London and beyond (London termini and cross London tube).

Car Parking at stations remains an issue for many. The cost of parking is a significant uplift to the fare paid and is often full very early during the week. Few, if any, spaces are available to the off-peak passengers, generating further car journeys. Car parking provision does need to be reviewed with suitable locations at stations (not just town centres, considered).

Connectivity with other lines and the opening up further journey options is going to be a feature of the next franchise, with alternative routes through London (Thameslink/Crossrail).

The challenges facing an incoming south eastern franchise are significant. The National Rail Passenger Survey (from Travel Focus) and Which, in particular show how passengers feel about past franchise services. The gap in level of service that is achieved by London Overground and some others needs to be closed.

It is clear from some stakeholder forums that handling disruption by the current operator has been a priority for some time, but there is still a disconnect between that work and the passengers. There does need to be more work to improve and explain this work to increase understanding.

Railfuture would welcome the opportunity to work more closely with the new franchise, at the earliest stages to help improve the service

Yours Faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Fribbins', written over a faint dotted line.

Chris Fribbins

Railfuture
Kent Division Co-ordinator