



campaigning
by the
Railway Development
Society Limited

London & South East

South Eastern Franchise Replacement Sponsor
Department for Transport
Zone 3/15 Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Please Reply to:

26 Millway,
Mill Hill,
London
NW7 3RB

Tel: (020) 8959 7147
E-Mail: keith.dyall@railfuture.org.uk

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Dear Sirs,

Response to South Eastern Franchise Consultation

Introduction

Railfuture is long established and increasingly recognised as the UK's leading independent railway development organisation campaigning for better rail services for both passengers and freight. Our local branches and volunteers campaign to get stations and lines opened for the benefit of the community, economy and environment. We have had a major part in getting over 370 new and reopened stations and over 500 miles of route to join the network over the past half century.

This document sets out our response to the South Eastern Franchise Consultation and was compiled by the London & South East Branch.

Schemes, stakeholders and other initiatives

Q.1 What improvements do stakeholders believe could be made to the franchise through partnership working between Network Rail and the new operator?

Some of the main issues expressed by our members and affiliated bodies were the improvement in line speed and connectivity.

There is a concern that timetables have been padded to avoid penalty payments (and examples of long dwell times at stations to lose this padding and leave right-time) and lack of line speed improvements through improved technology (e.g. improved rolling stock and signalling) has been slow to follow significant investment – some journey times being slower than Victorian times through additional stops as well as lack of speed improvements – even Highspeed trains are limited to the existing line speed on the classic routes (off HS1) and offer little time advantage to passengers from North and East Kent.

Given the level of redundancy in the network where alternative routes are possible between most stations, Network Rail and the franchisee should schedule blockades to minimise the use of rail replacement buses - particularly since one destination can face service disruption caused by works on different sections of line.

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There are still too many infrastructure failures and work needs to be done to improve on this. Disruption around the London Termini is especially problematic and the infrastructure needs to be hardened and simplified where there is little disruption to existing services (we recognise that the significant investment at London Bridge will go a long way to help achieve this).

Other initiatives - Crossrail programme

Q.2 What, if any, changes to South Eastern services need to be made given the likely changes in demand that could result from Crossrail?

Connectivity at Abbey Wood will be key in the short to medium term for Crossrail, but access to this station is limited from many points of the franchise network. Early plans will need to be made to extend this to at least Dartford and to Ebbsfleet/Gravesend or preferably through the Medway Towns (ideally to a terminus at Rainham, but if not possible, at least to Rochester which has additional platforms that could be used – and designed into any Rochester Station replacement).

Other local aspirations

Q.3 Are consultees aware of any other rail or non-rail development schemes that might affect the new franchise?

There is still considerable housing and commercial development planned for the franchise area (Ebbsfleet, Ashford, Lodge Hill etc.) and travel plans that include the rail network will need to be developed for these.

Q.4 What increments or decrements to the specification would stakeholders wish to see and how would these be funded?

There are key enhancements (in some cases restoration of) services mentioned in other responses, which would generally be funded by additional revenue generation – but developer contributions and identifying other sources of third party contributions will be required in some cases. The main theme is to make best use of the infrastructure we have – the only additions, both however beyond the scope of this franchise, would be Crossrail and the journey possibilities that an HS1/HS2 connection should bring to the domestic Highspeed network.

- Services to Gatwick Airport – there are two possible alternatives – a restoration of services from the Medway Towns via the Medway Valley Line, Tonbridge & Redhill or Ashford via Tonbridge & Redhill. Such a service would need to be at least hourly and therefore it is probably not practical to serve both destinations. It is felt that on balance an extension to the Medway Valley Line services would be preferable.
- Extension of Highspeed services via Deal/Sandwich and significant improvements to connectivity at Dover or Ramsgate.

The franchise specification

Q.5 Which aspects of the specification, in addition to those services operating on the HS1 network, would stakeholders wish to see mandated and which aspects of the specification could be left to the discretion of the operator?

A general equally spaced service provision should be established with the vast majority being half-hourly or under (especially Metro and Peak). Hourly services may be justified in special circumstances, but two hourly and longer should be reviewed.

There should be a restoration of key services on Boxing Day. The previous franchise did include this but it was very limited and non-standard (e.g. services from Slade Green rather than Dartford). Boxing Day is now an important day for leisure travel and associated workers.

Q.6 What changes to services would stakeholders propose, why and would these provide economic benefit?

- Value for money services (especially after an exceptional agreement in the current franchise for RPI+3%) – additional revenue generation (prices have reached or are close to the point when passengers are being priced off the railway and onto road (car or coach) or not being able to travel at all).
- Line speed improvements - these will serve both the commuter market into London but also the viability of developments in other parts of Kent (contraflow) such as Ashford, Sandwich, East Kent, Medway Towns, Ebbsfleet and rest of Thames Gateway – part paid by developer contributions and future additional revenue generation.
- Connectivity (destinations and connectivity to other franchise and other operators' services) Specific examples are further all-day HS1 services via Deal and Sandwich; South London Lines (Peckham Rye and Denmark Hill – new London Overground interchanges – initial minimum of additional weekday with-flow peak period calls). Increased revenue from passengers to and from these destinations. Increased travel options during disruption.
- The additional Highspeed premium on fares via HS1 should be reduced or ideally removed. This is a barrier to the efficient use of the Southeastern network and the movement of passengers from more crowded Mainline services. The location of St Pancras relative to the City has proved less of a problem than anticipated and with the introduction of the Thameslink core services, connectivity to the City and indirectly to other destinations via Crossrail etc. will be improved further.
- Further Off-Peak incentives to travel (cost, advanced fares) – increase revenue and use of expensive assets (rolling stock) that lies unused outside of the morning and evening peak, also encouraging a spread of journey times where practical. The current operator does not generally provide advance fares, which does lead to certain anomalies – e.g. it is cheaper to book an advance fare from mid-Kent to Birmingham than to St Pancras International and not use the London to Birmingham portion (leading to revenue abstraction from the franchise operator).

Q.7 Do respondents feel that there are other destinations that domestic Highspeed services could serve that would support regional and national economic growth?

Improved line speed would add to the contribution that Highspeed (and Mainline) services could make to regional economic growth (with the possibility of better connectivity to London, including contraflow services).

Additional Highspeed services between Dover and Ramsgate should be added where practical, we recognise that this will need further investigation in how to deploy the existing Highspeed fleet and how to fit into current operation. In any case connectivity at Dover and Ramsgate for the East Kent Coast service and Highspeed will need to be reviewed and improved significantly.

Additional journey possibilities will be available via an HS1/HS2 connection (Heathrow, Midlands and the North, via WCML as well as HS2). It is important that the operator is involved in discussions about this connectivity.

Capacity and crowding

Q.8 How might better use be made of the capacity currently available?

We recognise that the current train fleet is stretched during the morning and evening peaks with many over-crowded trains and general lack of seats at many stations. However there are examples of inconsistent train length and of course reliability issues (especially the Networker fleet) leading to delays and cancellations that contribute to this as well. It should be a key objective to improve the reliability of the train fleet and ensure consistent train lengths are introduced. The removal of seats (Class 376) was a retrograde step and journey times on these units needs to be minimised (which is generally achieved but does lead to inflexibility in use of the fleet).

Q.9 What steps might bidders be expected to take to meet passenger demand and what might be the most appropriate mechanisms for managing demand?

There is an existing Early Starter ticket available from Gravesend and Meopham. This is a reduced price season ticket for passengers that use services before 7:00 am. Although there are some issues with managing/enforcing this ticket in normal and disrupted service – with the installation of ticket barriers at most primary stations, this could be expanded. We have also mentioned the possibility of enhancing the off-peak service and cost reductions could be made to shoulder and off-peak services to encourage some switching where possible. We would object to further fare increases on the core peak hour services, passengers that can be more flexible should be encouraged away via fare reductions.

Thameslink Service Destinations

Q.10 What destinations on the current South Eastern network do respondents think should be served by Thameslink core services and what is the rationale for them?

Any Thameslink core service must provide a half-hourly service as a minimum; so two paths in the Thameslink Core will be required (out of a maximum of 24). Currently in Southeastern, Sevenoaks/Orpington is served on a regular basis by the shared Southeastern/Thameslink franchises and we would expect that to be enhanced with more services going via the core than terminating at Blackfriars, but other destinations such as Rochester/Gillingham and Bearsted/Ashford International are served on an ad-hoc basis (replacing historic peak services that used to run to Holborn Viaduct). Recognising that any Thameslink services are more likely to be service replacement rather than service addition (for operational as well as economic reasons), there will be concerns regarding any service reductions to existing London termini (especially Cannon St and Charing Cross).

However, extended journey connectivity is an objective for Railfuture and if service pattern disruption can be minimised and operational issues at potential destination stations in Kent overcome – Dartford (via Lewisham/Charlton/Abbey Wood) would provide the best connectivity with South Eastern and other services such as Crossrail (Abbey Wood), London Overground (New Cross) and DLR. (Woolwich Arsenal & Lewisham). Services to Bearstead/Ashford and The Medway Towns could be enhanced to all day.

Other South Eastern services

Q.11 What improvements would respondents like to see made to other South Eastern services, what is the rationale for them and would these provide economic benefit?

- Services to Gatwick Airport – there are two possible alternatives – a restoration of services from the Medway Towns via the Medway Valley Line, Tonbridge & Redhill or Ashford via Tonbridge & Redhill. Such a service would need to be at least hourly and therefore it is not practical to serve both destinations. It is felt that on balance **an extension to the Medway Valley Line services** would be preferable – operationally this would extend the service that runs to Tonbridge already.
- Significant improvements to connectivity with Highspeed at Dover or Ramsgate, Strood/Highspeed/Services via Gravesend, Swaleroil/Sittingbourne and Metro services.
- Comprehensive review of current services (joint with Stakeholders) to identify journey time reductions and/or better connectivity and to fill some gaps in the timetable (e.g. early evening services from Strood on the Medway Valley line).

Folkestone Harbour branch line and station

Q.12 Do respondents feel that Folkestone Harbour branch line and station should be kept open and maintained or would the funding currently devoted to supporting this line and station be better used for other rail schemes?

While we can see a reason to keep this branch and station open and encourage the cross channel ferry operation (especially with the reduction in foot passenger services in Kent) we recognise that this would be a considerable cost

burden and does not fit in with the current service provision and service enhancements required elsewhere – so unless some other source of funding can be provided or the service operated separately by a third party, we would support the closure and/or down grading of maintenance to a basic minimum (which could lead to closure in any case).

Performance and reliability

Q.13 How would you like to see performance information published?

The current high-level view of service punctuality and cancellations is adequate in many cases although a move to right time arrival (at all stations on the journey, not just at the terminus) is welcomed and should be a franchise commitment. However many passengers feel that this is divorced from their own experience of the railway and can be biased by the inclusion of Highspeed services as an example. The breakdown of statistics at Highspeed, Mainline and Metro should be continued and be the level considered when reviewing performance – not the overall figures.

In addition the current operator did provide a daily report on all journeys that were delayed or cancelled on a daily basis. This was not publicised well and probably not spotted by the majority of passengers. This should be re-introduced and could be the basis of data to feed a smartphone app or similar to enable users to see their own journey performance on a daily basis and over time.

Q.14 How frequent should its publication be?

High level and ‘sector’ performance figures should continue to be provided on a periodic basis, Journey data should be provided on a daily basis.

Q.15 What level of disaggregation of performance do you believe is reasonable?

Highspeed, Mainline and Metro separation should be sufficient if the individual journey data is available.

Improving customer experience

Q.16 What are the priorities that respondents consider should be taken into account with providing passenger experience of using these services?

Although there has been a marked improvement in CIS provision, it is still unreliable at some stations and poor in communicating problems when they occur. More information can be provided to mobile devices at stations via the Internet, but signal coverage is poor at many stations (primarily, but not exclusively rural, which contributes to the reliability of CIS). Consideration should be given to enhancing Mobile Phone or WLAN access at these stations. We are aware of attempts to get more operational information to the station staff (and passengers via Twitter etc.) but there are still gaps. Managing disruption remains a major issue – and this will be expected to increase during London Bridge re-build and possibly Abbey Wood.

We note that the provision of WLAN access was a current franchise commitment, which has not been delivered. Even with the improvement in technical solutions, their passengers still appreciate a human face (or voice) during normal as well as disrupted operations.

The new franchise should mandate, with graded penalties for degrees of under-achievement, specific targets to improve customer satisfaction levels progressively across the franchise term, as recorded in Passenger Focus’s twice-yearly NPS scores, in this consistently poor-performing franchise area.

Q.17 What do stakeholders see as the most important factors in improving security (actual or perceived) and addressing any gap between the two?

As mentioned previously there should be staff at all stations during operational service hours (as provided on London

Overground), for the purposes of station security, customer assistance and revenue protection this does need to be increased. However we appreciate that this will not be possible across the entire franchise but steps need to be taken to improve 'ad-hoc' visits by staff and provide communication facilities to nearby bigger stations (not remote call centres).

Good quality lighting, Help Points, long-line public address, and monitored, not just recorded, CCTV aid the perceived view of security at a station as well as a quick response to vandalism and graffiti when it occurs. Mobility of staff to be able to get to more remote stations on an ad-hoc basis and in response to operational or security incidents is also required.

Better stations and better connections

Q.18 What is important to stakeholders in the future use and improvements in stations?

It has taken a long time for basic facilities to be provided at many stations (especially where unstaffed), Train/Customer Information Systems and Emergency/Help Points must be provided (and maintained) at all stations. Our preference would still be for a regular staff presence across the service operating hours, but until this is practical a better level of contact must be provided via Help Points (ideally with a visual element) and monitored CCTV. Stations with more than two operational platforms still lack all-service summary CIS on each platform, for interchanging passengers eg Tonbridge; this must be an early priority for the new franchisee to address.

All stations should have at least one shelter and seat provided on each platform – there are still many gaps.

The level of staff cover at stations provided by London Overground is the benchmark to be achieved, primarily at London Metro and other major stations in the franchise area.

Connectivity to stations needs to be reviewed in cooperation with relevant local authorities through travel plans and priorities identified for better public transport connectivity.

Access to the rail network with good connectivity with other services is a key objective of Railfuture. Too often connection times are poor or non-existent. There is a tendency to focus on Kent to London Termini (point to point) journey times and connectivity into other networks has been neglected. Examples of this in the franchise area are: Croydon Tramlink & London Overground – these provide attractive alternative destinations that can provide additional flexibility to commuters, job seekers, Too often entire journeys are made by car because of this. It is acknowledged that this can be at the cost of end-to-end journey time. Wherever possible we would expect the franchise operator to review and seek to improve connectivity between their own and other services at connecting stations and especially from stations that are skipped by services.

Car parking and cycling facilities

Q.19 What priorities would respondents give to car parking and cycling facilities at locations where these are fully used?

There has been a significant expansion of cycle facilities at stations in cooperation with Kent County Council. We would like to see this extended to further stations in Kent and especially the Medway Unitary Authority area.

Car park provision is a significant part of the end-to-end journeys of many passengers. There has been some improvement of facilities (surfacing/lighting) at many stations over the last decade, but the increase in cost to the passengers has been significant (especially when taken alongside rail fare increases of RPI + 3%). However there is still a mix of demand with some car parks under used (cost is a factor here) and some still full in the morning peak (even where high costs are borne by the passenger to use the connectivity and service provided at the stations) – with a lack of provision for off peak passengers (where growth would be welcome to assist the sustainability of the service). There is scope for some further car park provision at some stations – although this should be part of a wider transport and travel plan process for stations, which should be carried out with the relevant local authorities.

Fares, retailing and Smartcards

Q.20 What sort of ticketing products and services would you expect to see delivered through 'smart' technology on this franchise?

There are still issues regarding revenue protection and ability for passengers to buy tickets. Limited opening (or lack of) ticket offices does contribute to this currently, but despite this we would welcome better coverage of staff at stations and an extension of ticket purchasing options (smart ticketing, local outlets for common journeys/smart card top-up etc.) – most especially in the Metro area (Driver Only Operation) where a Guard/Train Manager is not available (although a Guard is not as effective during peak crowding).

Bespoke ticketing can be introduced with smart ticketing – e.g. Carnet, Job Seeker, and an expansion of off peak special deals to encourage more use of lightly off peak services – which are a major cost to the franchise.

We assume that the South East Flexible Ticketing (SEFT) initiative will provide for the extension of a flexible, robust, transparent and customer friendly system, with full flexibility and integration with the TfL Oyster card to the Southeastern area.

Equality Act 2010

Q.21 What local accessibility and mobility issues do stakeholders see and how they might be addressed?

Steady but slow progress has been made to provide lifts at a number of stations, but there is still a long way to go to make the franchisee's operation more accessible to people at other stations. Sometimes the disabilities can seem minor but steps and height between train and platform can be a barrier to accessing the system. Increased provision of induction loops and wheelchair-level ticket office windows are also important targets. Priority should be given to the stations with the most passengers, but special cases should also be allowed for.

Improving the environmental performance of the railway

Q.22 What environmental targets would stakeholders like to see within the franchise specification?

We would expect to see an annual corporate sustainability report along the lines of Network Rail, looking at four key areas of the business:

- **Environmental stewardship:** how we're aiming to increase energy efficiency, manage our waste better and work with our suppliers to procure in a sustainable, ethical way
- **Improving communities:** how we're supporting charities across Britain, striving to improve community safety, and building relationships with our line side neighbours
- **Looking after our people:** how we're working to get everyone home safe, every day, investing in employee health and wellbeing, and development and training
- **Prioritising passengers:** how we're aiming to improve accessibility and to better meet our passengers' needs

We would expect much of this information to be available already, just published to all stakeholders via the Internet. We would also seek assurance that the successful franchisee ensure the fitting of electric traction metering to all the electric fleet and opting for On Train Metering so that the true cost of electricity is charged and the benefit of efficiencies is passed back to the operator.

Additional Comments

We appreciate that the main role of the new franchise operator will be the management of the service disruption during the London Bridge Station Re-Build and the separation of Southeastern/Thameslink joint services. However there is still a lot to be done with the rest of the operation. Historically the Southeastern franchise has lagged behind the other Southern Region operators (South Central and South West) and there are still some elements of that now.

There is real concern about the reliability and operation of the Metro services and we have mentioned our requirements match those specified by TfL and delivered by London Overground. There is a case to be made that these services could be transferred to TfL in the future and should be if the operator cannot deliver that level of service and improving levels of passenger satisfaction. This however, must not be to the detriment of Kent Mainline and Highspeed services.

We would want the new operator to continue and enhance the relationships with stakeholders through the stakeholder board and regular forums. Support with information, attendance at meetings as appropriate of Rail User Groups, Local Authorities and other stakeholders in the area. There will also be a growing demand for communication with passengers and groups via social media (Twitter/Facebook etc.). This has improved further in recent years.

We would like to see the Community Rail Partnership (Medway Valley Line CRP) supported and core funding agreed and provided by the operator. Further support, including financial, is required for the Sittingbourne to Sheerness (SWALERAIL) line and potential station adoptions in the franchise area – encouragement and support should be provided to local communities to help manage and maintain local stations (and help the operator achieve some of our security and customer experience requirements in a cost effective manner).

We were also involved and contributed to the Rail Action Plan for Kent. We generally support those proposals, although there is some difference of priority and detail in our submission.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "KDyall".

Keith Dyall
Chairman
Railfuture – London & South East