

Agenda Item No: 13
Report To: Cabinet
Date of Meeting: 11th May 2017
Report Title: Response to the South Eastern Rail Franchise Consultation
Report Author & Job Title: Andrew Osborne, Economic Development Manager
Portfolio Holder Cllr Brad Bradford
Portfolio Holder for: Portfolio Holder for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety



Summary:

This report sets out the Council's proposed response to the South Eastern Rail Franchise Consultation document, which will inform the Department for Transport's procurement of a new rail operator for the new franchise between December 2018 and 2025-28. This report also sets out the details for the South East Route: Kent Area Route Study consultation by Network Rail.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- I. Note the summary of the South Eastern Rail Franchise Public Consultation and agree the responses as set out in this report and Appendix A, to form the basis for a response back to the Department for Transport by the consultation deadline of 23rd May 2017.**
- II. Grant delegated authority to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety and the Economic Development Manager to finalise the response to government for the South Eastern Rail Franchise consultation.**
- III. Grant delegated authority to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety and the Economic Development Manager to finalise the response to Network Rail for the Kent Area Route Study consultation.**

Policy Overview:

Financial Implications: There are no financial implications for Ashford Borough Council.

Legal Implications	There are no legal implications for Ashford Borough Council.
Equalities Impact Assessment	Not Required
Other Material Implications:	
Exempt from Publication:	NO
Background Papers:	South Eastern Rail Franchise Public Consultation – Shaping the Future – March 2017 <u>https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-south-eastern-rail-services</u>
	South East Route: Kent Area Route Study – Draft for Consultation – March 2017 <u>https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Kent-Route-Study-Draft-for-Consultation.pdf</u>
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Report Title: Response to the South Eastern Rail Franchise Consultation

Introduction and Background

1. The Department for Transport published their “South Eastern Rail Franchise Public Consultation” document in March 2017, requesting responses by 23rd May 2017. The results of this consultation will then inform a tender document that will start the process in the autumn 2017 of procuring a new franchise operator. The new franchise operator will commence operations at the expiry of the current franchise in December 2018. Alongside this consultation, Network Rail have also published their consultation document for the long term planning for the “South East Route: Kent Area Route Study”, which includes proposed track, signalling and station improvements on this network.
2. The current franchise has been in place since April 2006 and was extended in 2014 to enable Southeastern to draw on its experiences of running services during the significant rebuilding works at London Bridge. These works will be completed in January 2018. The Department for Transport (DfT) are currently planning to run the new franchise for a period of 7 to 10 years, from 2018 until 2025-28.
3. This consultation only relates to the south eastern franchise covering all services currently operated by Southeastern trains. These include the High Speed services, as well as mainline services on the Tonbridge line, and Maidstone East line, servicing Pluckley, Charing, Ashford International, Wye and Chilham within the Borough. This consultation does not relate to existing Southern services on the Marshlink service, but does pick up the proposals to run High Speed services from Bexhill, Hastings and Rye, through Ashford International to St Pancras.

Proposal/Current Position

4. The Consultation document sets out the Department for Transport’s proposals to improve the south eastern train services and asks a series of 24 questions seeking views from partners and the public. The Council’s proposed responses to these 24 questions are set out in Appendix A to this report.
5. The consultation document sets out the challenges in operating the south eastern services, which include:
 - Routes accessing more than one London Station, resulting in crossing complex junctions creating the source of some delays on the network;
 - Overcrowding of services on a number of routes, especially at peak times;
 - The challenge of running trains on some of the oldest lines in the country, and the requirement to maintain and improve infrastructure;

- The capacity on infrastructure into London and its stations providing constraints on the length and frequency of services;
- The requirement for increased depot capacity with the introduction of any new trains and rolling stock;
- The capacity of stations across the south eastern network; and
- The longer term growth in housing and employment across Kent

6. The Department for Transport set out their priorities for improvements through the new franchise, these are:

- Making trains run on time.
- Providing more space for passengers – to cater for an increasing demand for rail travel, with more and more people wanting to use trains within Greater London and on High Speed routes in particular.
- Improving passenger satisfaction on Mainline and Metro services.
- Limiting the number of late-running or cancelled trains.
- Improving communications for passengers, particularly when things go wrong.
- Optimising current and planned infrastructure to add services, lengthen trains and reduce journey times where possible.
- Taking full advantage of the new Elizabeth Line (previously known as Crossrail) and Thameslink routes to provide more capacity, and revise service patterns.

7. In responding to the consultation the main priorities set out in the proposed Council response are:

- The provision of greater capacity (on both the High Speed and Mainline services), to cater for increasing demand and the growth of the town, as well as dealing with current poorer standards of satisfaction through passengers standing for unacceptably long periods of journeys.
- Delivering higher quality and additional rolling stock (on both the High Speed and mainline services) will help to provide a better quality, more reliable service, and help deliver greater capacity.
- Retention of services and frequency at more rural stations to ensure accessibility and the vitality of these villages and towns.
- Commitment for access to Wi Fi and mobile phone connectivity across the network, enabling passengers to be more productive on their journeys, and therefore reducing some of the requirement to speed up services, but also enabling better means of communication with passengers.
- Improving punctuality / reliability of service provision and response to disruption
- A reduction in journey times, where this doesn't impact on services at more rural stations.
- Improving connectivity to destinations within and beyond the county, including partnership working to support connectivity to International Services through Ashford International, and delivery of the proposed extension of High Speed services to Hastings and Bexhill via Ashford International and Rye.
- Improving the stations and their facilities, especially parking and accessibility at both busy and rural stations, where these have not yet

been delivered, working with local planning authorities feeding into Local Plans

- The inclusion of a new Park Farm Station on the Marshlink line, subject to the conclusions of the current report into the economic viability of this project.
 - Willingness to work in partnership with stakeholders and engage in Community Rail Partnerships.
 - Commitment to Smart Ticketing.
 - Commitment to smart pricing, driving greater numbers of passengers onto under-capacity services through incentivised pricing.
 - Roll out of unified communications to passengers, especially in periods of disruption.
 - Delivery of services at competitive prices, with the examination of regulated fare levels on all Kent's rail services
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8. As well as potential for increased capacity on existing lines from the Borough, the document also sets out the potential to investigate new services from Ashford International, which include high speed services to Rye, Bexhill and Hastings, and the potential incorporation of this service in the south eastern franchise, but also the potential introduction of Orbital services, connecting Ashford International via the Tonbridge Line to Redhill and Reading.
 9. One potential risk identified within the consultation document is that proposals to speed up longer distance journeys refers to the exploration of various options for the mainline services between Hastings to Charing Cross via Tonbridge, by reducing the number of stops on some services at lesser well used stations. The document also goes on to suggest that this could also be adopted on other routes, such as Tonbridge to Ashford, which could affect lesser well used services at Pluckley, Headcorn and Staplehurst, which serve areas of the Borough.
 10. The Council's proposed response to the consultation is set out in Appendix A, and this report welcomes any additional comments from the Cabinet and other members to be incorporated within the response before finalising this and submitting it to the Department for Transport on the 23rd May 2017.

South East Route: Kent Area Route Study – Draft for Consultation

11. As stated in the introduction to this report, Network Rail have also published their consultation document on proposed improvements to the rail network by 2024 and projects to be developed for delivery between 2024 and 2044. These include the following proposals which directly impact on the Borough:
 - Marshlink
 - i. New connection at Ashford International that allows trains from HS1 to access the Marshlink line
 - ii. Electrification of the MarshLink line from Ashford to Ore
 - iii. Journey time improvements and/or redoubling of the route.
 - North Kent to South Kent – A longer-term option to build a spur line between the Ashford to Canterbury West line and the Faversham to Canterbury East line in the Chartham area.

- Canterbury Chord (Resilience) – A Longer-term term option to build a spur linking the Canterbury East and Canterbury West lines to the south-east of their present passing point, to provide resilience for any future disruption caused by extreme weather on the route between Dover and Folkestone.
 - The lengthening of trains on the High Speed services from Ashford International, and the introduction of an additional service in the peak.
 - Lengthening of the services on the Tonbridge line and one additional service to Cannon Street.
 - Power Upgrades on the network
 - Signalling upgrades and digital train management systems on parts of the network closer to London.
12. Apart from the Canterbury Chord project, these are all items that are raised in the South Eastern Rail Franchise consultation. This document also proposes no significant station improvements in the Ashford Borough during the period of the plan to 2024.
13. With the response to the Franchise consultation at Appendix A to this report providing the Council's strategic priorities and position on proposed improvements to the railway and services, it is recommended that the response to the Franchise consultation be adapted to respond to this consultation exercise, which closes on the 30th June 2017. It is also recommended that the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety, with support from the Economic Development Manager be delegated authority to adapt the response for the Kent Franchise consultation in response to the Kent Area Route Study consultation.

Implications and Risk Assessment

14. The main identified risk through the consultation document is the potential loss of some services at lesser well used stations to speed up journey times on Mainline services. This risk has been mitigated through the Council's response to this consultation.

Equalities Impact Assessment

15. Accessibility of services for all is a key area covered within the consultation on the south eastern rail franchise.

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

16. This report is in response to a consultation, which is open to the public and other organisations to respond to directly.

Other Options Considered

17. The proposed response in Appendix A has been formulated through discussion with the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Wellbeing and Safety, as well as officers within Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council, and

is considered to form the most appropriate response to the many options identified within the consultation document.

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

18. This consultation provides a great opportunity for Ashford Borough Council to put forward its priorities for an improved rail service within and beyond the borough, setting out the current challenges and required investment to improve customer satisfaction and capacity on the rail network.

Next Steps in Process

19. Following the decision by Cabinet, any proposed amendments will be incorporated by the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety, and the Economic Development Manager, and the finalised response will be submitted to the Department of Transport within the consultation period.

Conclusion

20. This consultation provides a great opportunity for Ashford Borough Council to put forward the essential improvements in quality of services and capacity that are required to make improvement for existing passengers on the south eastern network, but also to ensure services reflect the growth in passenger numbers through new development over the next 10 years.

Portfolio Holder's Views

Cllr Brad Bradford, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety

21. "With Ashford International a regional hub on the rail network, and accessibility being one of Ashford Borough's key strengths, the delivery of increased capacity and upgrades to the rail network is critical for the future vitality and growth of the Borough.
22. "These consultations propose additional improvements that are very much welcomed, which will increase the reliability, punctuality, frequency, capacity and journey environment for passengers. It is important to recognise the potential threats however to frequency of services at some rural stations and our priority to retain these at the current levels.
23. "The Council's proposed response identifies not only the importance of improvements to the rail services themselves, but also to the facilities and environment at stations within the Borough, and the requirement in particular for addition parking."

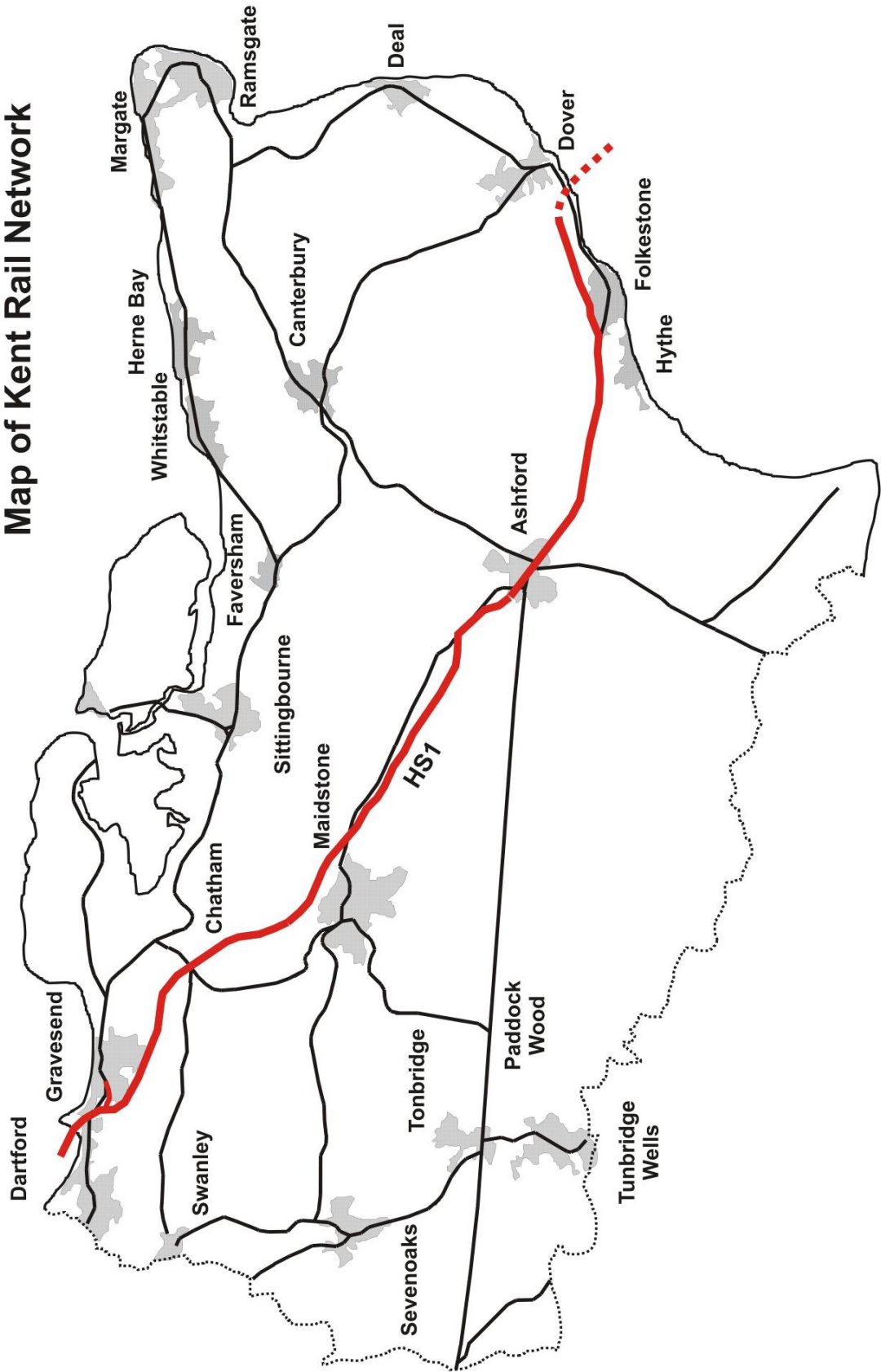
Contact and Email

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Ashford Borough Council Response to the South Eastern Rail Franchise Public Consultation

May 2017

Map of Kent Rail Network



Appendix A

Introduction

Ashford Borough Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for Transport's (DfT) public consultation on the new South Eastern Rail Franchise (SERF). Ashford rail passenger numbers have increased considerably through the current franchise period following the introduction of the High Speed services to St Pancras. With the area's continuing aspirations to grow through new housing and commercial development, we see the successful delivery of improvements to the existing services as essential in dealing with the challenges of overcrowding and efficiency for existing passengers.

Cllr Brad Bradford

**Cabinet Member for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety
Ashford Borough Council**

May 2017

Section A

1. About you

We would like to know more about your interest in South Eastern railway. We are asking for this information to enable us to identify whether there are themes in the comments and questions raised by different customer and stakeholder groups.

This response is made on behalf of Ashford Borough Council.

2.1 We would also be grateful if you would provide some information on what kind of organisation you work in or volunteer for, as is most relevant to your interest in the South Eastern franchise. Please pick one of the following answers:

Local authority

2.2 Please provide a summary description of your organisation.

2.3 If we want to explore your comments in greater detail, we may like to contact you so please provide your name and the easiest contact details for you. This is entirely optional – you do not need to provide this information if you do not wish to do so. Any contact information you do provide here will be kept confidential and will not be published. Please see page 3 of the consultation document on how your information will be handled.

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2.4 If you are happy for us to know it, please tell us the name of your organisation - this is entirely optional. Please also put an X in the box if you are happy for us to list your organisation in the published outcomes report as a contributor to the consultation. Please see page 3 of the consultation document on how your information will be handled.

Organisation name: Ashford Borough Council

Can we include your organisation in a list of contributing organisations:

Yes.

2.5 How are the views of your members assembled?

This response summarises a report presented to and agreed by the Council's Cabinet as the formal response of the Borough Council. This response has also been compiled in consultation with colleagues at Kent County Council.

Section B

1. Do our priorities reflect your views?

The priorities within the South East Rail Franchise consultation document do generally reflect the Council's priorities, but they could also be extended and be more specific to ensure solutions are identified and delivered quickly. There are a number of specific priorities for Ashford which include:

- The provision of greater capacity (on both the High Speed and Mainline services), to cater for increasing demand and the growth of the town, as well as dealing with current poorer standards of satisfaction through passengers standing for unacceptably long periods of journeys.
- Delivering higher quality and additional rolling stock (on both the High Speed and mainline services) will help to provide a better quality, more reliable service, and help deliver greater capacity.
- Retention of services and frequency at more rural stations to ensure accessibility and the vitality of these villages and towns.
- Commitment for access to Wi Fi and mobile phone connectivity across the network, enabling passengers to be more productive on their journeys,

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and therefore reducing some of the requirement to speed up services, but also enabling better means of communication with passengers.

- Improving punctuality / reliability of service provision and response to disruption
- A reduction in journey times, where this doesn't impact on services at more rural stations.
- Improving connectivity to destinations within and beyond the county, including partnership working to support connectivity to International Services through Ashford International, and delivery of the proposed extension of High Speed services to Hastings and Bexhill via Ashford International and Rye.
- Improving the stations and their facilities, especially parking and accessibility at both busy and rural stations, where these have not yet been delivered, working with local planning authorities feeding into Local Plans
- The inclusion of a new Park Farm Station on the Marshlink line, subject to the conclusions of the current report into the economic viability of this project.
- Willingness to work in partnership with stakeholders and engage in Community Rail Partnerships.
- Commitment to Smart Ticketing.
- Commitment to smart pricing, driving greater numbers of passengers onto under-capacity services through incentivised pricing.
- Roll out of unified communications to passengers, especially in periods of disruption.
- Delivery of services at competitive prices, with the examination of regulated fare levels on all Kent's rail services.

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

Yes. The success of the introduction of High Speed Services at Ashford in 2009 in particular has seen considerable growth in passenger numbers, which has resulted in serious and frequent overcrowding on these trains in peak and off peak periods. So even without any additional growth in population, increased capacity is required to improve services for existing passengers in the Ashford area.

In addition, Ashford will continue to grow with the draft Local Plan proposing the allocation of land for 14,540 new homes and 12,800 new jobs between 2011 and 2031, increasing the demand for services to and from Ashford International, other stations within the borough, and other stations that service areas of the Borough (places like Headcorn and Staplehurst).

In addition to the increased capacity on trains, consideration needs to be given to making improvements at busy stations to improve the facilities for passengers getting on and off services. A co-ordinated approach needs to be provided to increasing capacity on trains and within stations, both in Kent and in

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London. A prime example is the requirement for improvements at the busy interchange outside the domestic entrance to Ashford International Station, with parking, the movement of people, cars, buses and bikes requiring a new holistic approach to this congested environment, making the whole journey more attractive to passengers from start to finish.

3. What do you think of the options for providing more space on trains?

Ashford Borough Council supports the increased length and frequency of services to provide more capacity to stations within the Borough.

High Speed Rolling-Stock

Provision of additional Class 395 (or successor) high speed rolling stock through the new franchise to include:

- 12 new 6-car sets for uplift to Ashford / Canterbury / Dover service
- 3 new 6-car sets for new Ashford / Rye / Hastings service
- 5 new 6-car sets for uplift to Ebbsfleet service*

** this requirement reflects the need for a dedicated service to provide the additional capacity required for the planned housing development at Ebbsfleet Garden City so that this does not impact services to Ashford International and other stations further from London.*

Total: 20 new 6-car sets (includes operational spares)

Mainline Rolling-Stock

There is a requirement to invest in existing and new trains and rolling stock for the Mainline services that stop at stations within the Borough that fall within this franchise (Charing, Pluckley, Ashford International, Wye and Chilham), travelling on the Tonbridge and Maidstone East routes down through Ashford International.

Consideration through the franchise needs to be given to both increase capacity, but also passenger satisfaction by providing the appropriate rolling stock to ensure enough seating on services so passengers are not standing for lengthy periods at busy times. These improvements need to also include improved access for people with disabilities, and access to Wi-Fi and mobile phone networks.

In looking to make improvements to the network and rolling stock, Ashford Borough Council would support the removal of diesel trains from the network where possible, and the promotion of a shift to the use of more sustainable low emission trains, which would improve the air quality within the Borough and across the south east network.

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

Yes, Ashford Borough Council supports a reduction in First Class seating on busy routes, where it can be justified that this will provide more efficient use of limited train capacity and increased seating on trains for all passengers.

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

The new franchise will need to embrace new technology to support improvements in servicing customers' needs as well as supplying timely information. The infrastructure needs to be provided within stations and on trains to deliver these potential improvements including access to Wi-Fi networks, but the quality and level of face to face contact within stations should be maintained and improved to ensure greater customer service and passengers feeling safe.

The new service should be delivered to provide:

- Improved accessibility through improvements to Parking, Cycling, signposting, ticket machines, cafes, shops, toilets and waiting areas within and around stations, especially at the busiest stations such as Ashford International.
- Improvements to the overall environment within stations to ensure passengers feel safe and happy within that environment.
- A more responsive solution to peak time ticket purchasing requirements through moving staff to cater for demand as well as promoting use and speed of technology, ensuring passengers are not delayed resulting in missed trains. This is specifically an issue at Ashford International with the requirement for additional machines or new solutions.
- Better links to onward journeys through joint ticketing and partnership working with other rail operators and other modes of transport (bus services).
- Easier access to information and online booking, but specifically in relation to planned and unplanned disruptions.
- An improved and responsive complaints handling process that results in action and improvements to persistent complaints.
- A variable pricing strategy to maximise rail use and returns for the operator – e.g. services running largely empty into Ashford could cater for traffic from East Kent to Ashford with competitive fares and make best use of space.

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

Any further ideas provided above in answer to question 5.

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

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The SERF should be a catalyst for a step-change in the Government's directed fares policy. At present, regulated fares rise by RPI + 0% in January each year, as determined by the measurement of RPI the previous July. As the increase in almost every other cost or benefit is determined by the generally slightly lower CPI, this should become the new measure of annual regulated fares, i.e. CPI + 0%.

The Department of Transport should also look at how the Franchisee can be incentivised into reinvesting in improvements for customers, especially where customer satisfaction is lower than annual performance targets. This will ensure that the company and its shareholders are more responsive to rail passenger needs throughout the franchise period.

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

The new SERF should develop Smart and Mobile forms of ticketing with a 'best price' promise across all ticket media.

The new franchise operator should be required to continue the development of the Smart Ticketing initiative developed by the current operator, and to extend it to cover individual as well as season tickets.

This Smartcard scheme should also incorporate an option for flexible ticketing, whereby commuters can choose to travel on fewer days of the week, reflecting modern office / home working practices.

As stated above a variable pricing strategy to maximise rail use and returns for the operator should also be promoted – e.g. services running largely empty into Ashford could cater for traffic from East Kent to Ashford with competitive fares and make best use of space.

The new franchise operator should also commit to a collaborative approach with Kent County Council and Ashford Borough Council, so that when technology enables it a new 'Kent Smartcard' scheme would be delivered to incorporate travel by bus and rail services across the county and into London.

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

Ashford Borough Council welcomes the proposed upgrading of facilities in all stations on the network.

Accessible affordable parking is currently a challenge in both some rural stations as well as at Ashford International station, where the increased passenger numbers through this station have driven up demand for parking, which is now very scarce in affordable accessible locations. The impact of not providing affordable accessible parking is that commuters will park in residential

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areas around the station causing issues for local residents. Assessment could be made of the existing provision in the International multi-storey car park adjoining the Station in HS1 ownership and its affordability for domestic commuters.

Ashford Borough Council supports the proposal to better use existing land and buildings for Commercial and Community purposes, where these are supported by the Local Plan and successful planning applications. However, plans should always provide greater facilities and accessibility at that station, rather than impact on its accessibility or facilities.

As stated in response to question 5, there is also a specific requirement for more ticket machines at Ashford International Station to deal with existing queuing and the increasing number of passengers in peak periods.

Ashford Borough Council would also welcome the requirement for the new franchise operator to consult with parish councils, rail partnerships, local authorities and local users on detailed improvements needed at all stations.

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

Access for All

While good progress has been made at many stations in Kent, there are still improvements that can be made at rural stations within the Borough that fall within this franchise, such as Pluckley, Charing, Wye and Chilham. The new SERF specification should include a requirement for the new operator to commit to further significant investment in Access for All facilities at stations, to work towards an entirely accessible rail network in the Borough of Ashford.

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?

Ashford Borough Council strongly supports the proposed extension of High Speed services to Hastings and Bexhill via Ashford and Rye. The principal reasons for this strong support are:

- To generate growth in East Kent and East Sussex (as part of a wider increase in High Speed service levels across the new SERF network)
- To deliver additional High Speed capacity to Ashford, as well as to Rye, Hastings and Bexhill in East Sussex
- To relieve capacity constraints on the Tonbridge – Hastings route

This option is supported through the proposals set out in the draft Kent Route Study recently published by Network Rail for Control Period 6 (CP6: 2019-2024).

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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?

Ashford Borough Council does not support unacceptable reductions in services at intermediate stations within the Borough as these all service existing demand within the rural areas of the Borough. Careful planning should be undertaken to maximise local trade through rural stations by positively investing in appropriate parking and other facilities as well as providing quality and reliable services. This is also extended to stations that fall just outside the Borough, such as Staplehurst and Headcorn, but which provide vital services for existing residents of this Borough.

There needs to be a careful balance struck between the needs of rural communities and their hinterland, ensuring services support the continued vitality of these communities, alongside the careful evaluation of where it is possible to reduce the journey time between some stations and London by operating both fast and slow services with suitable timetabled connections.

Any change in stopping patterns should maintain an equivalent level of services for stations within the borough.

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

The Ashford to London via Tonbridge service and Ashford to London via Maidstone East service would need to retain its current stopping pattern, to reflect the growth in demand at intermediate stations on these routes. As Ashford and most East Kent stations already have a High Speed service, there is less imperative to speed up these Mainline routes.

14. Which journeys do you take today which are difficult:

By rail?

By road, which would be easier by rail?

This question is not applicable, as this response is submitted on behalf of Ashford Borough Council.

However, although routes through Kent from London are good, routes across Kent from Ashford to Faversham, Sittingbourne and the Medway towns are difficult as they require transfer from either Canterbury East to Canterbury West, or Maidstone East to Maidstone Barracks / Maidstone West and then via Strood. The new proposal within the draft Kent Route Study recently published by Network Rail for Control Period 6 (CP6: 2019-2024), suggesting the longer-term development of a new spur line between the Ashford and Canterbury West line would improve rail connectivity between these areas.

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

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From all stations within the Borough of Ashford, the Council would like to see increased capacity on peak services through the lengthening of trains and increased frequency where possible.

Significant increased capacity on the High Speed services from Ashford International are critical to delivering improvements to this overcrowded service, both in the peak and off peak periods. This should include lengthening trains as well as introducing new trains to increase the frequency of services.

The new plans also look to introduce High Speed services from Hastings via Ashford which is very much welcomed. As part of these proposals, the Council support the full electrification of this line between Ashford and Ore, which would also have the benefit of reducing the use of diesel trains on the network, improving air quality within the Borough. Through this new delivery, Ashford Borough Council would like to see a similar level of service maintained both in terms of frequency and quality for stations such as Ham Street and Appledore which will not be covered by these new High Speed routes. Although potentially not part of this franchise, impacts and solutions should be considered to ensure a positive outcome for these stations and communities, through the careful planning and integration of High Speed and Mainline services on this route.

Again although not part of this franchise, the inclusion of a new Park Farm Station on the Marshlink line should be included in the “South East Route: Kent Area Route Study” and be reflected within this franchise consultation, subject to the conclusions of the current report being investigated into the schemes economic viability.

Speed line improvements should be considered where possible on both the Tonbridge and Maidstone East lines where these do not impact on the frequency of stops at stations within the Borough.

Improvements to journeys across Kent are also welcomed where these provide better and quicker routes between other main towns and Ashford International. Examples of this would be improvements to routes between Ashford International and the Medway towns and North Kent line.

Ashford Borough Council also welcomes the investigation of new routes from Ashford International via Tonbridge to Redhill, Gatwick, Guildford and Reading. This service would enable a more direct connection for International passengers between Gatwick Airport and Eurostar services at Ashford International, as well as supporting circular routes south of London. It would also help to boost tourism in Ashford and the wider East Kent area.

Sandwich Open Golf Tournament

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An additional temporary service will also be required to serve the Open Golf tournament at Sandwich in 2020. It is proposed that this event will be served by a dedicated High Speed operation to/from London St Pancras, which will need to be included as a franchise requirement. There is a planned extension of both platforms at Sandwich to facilitate 12-car High Speed operation for the duration of this event from 12-19 July 2020. These services should all stop at Ashford International, connecting services to the International Eurostar passengers as well as increasing the ability of Kent and East Sussex residents of attending the event by train.

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

Ashford Borough Council do not feel it appropriate to provide a view on Metro route services that do not have an impact on services to stations within the borough.

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?

Ashford Borough Council strongly opposes the use of a single London terminal for the Mainline services from stations in Kent. The total of these is fewer in number than on the Metro network, and there remains a distinct demand for Cannon Street and Blackfriars services, and services to a number of London termini from Kent (and East Sussex) especially in the peak periods

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?

Ashford Borough Council strongly supports plans for the train operator and Network Rail to form a greater partnership to reduce delays and improve performance, giving passengers a more reliable and punctual service.

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

There should be joint accountability for the delivery of actions and performance through the partnership.

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

- (a) As an individual? - Not applicable.
- (b) As an organisation? - Yes.

The new operator should engage through regularly updating the Ashford Joint Transport Board, a joint Board of Ashford Borough and Kent County

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Councillors. The operator should also engage on individual projects where required, such as Southeastern's involvement in the Ashford International Rail Connectivity Project (Ashford Spurs), and the Ashford International Station forecourt / interchange improvements project.

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

Please see comments made in question 5.

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

Private sector investment can most beneficially be utilised in providing new trains to cater for existing and new demand on the railway. The primary opportunity is to extend the fleet of trains that could be used on the high speed line between Ashford International and St Pancras International.

Greater management and redevelopment of stations and associated land could also stimulate economic development in towns and cities on the south eastern network, providing greater revenue streams to support future services. A great example of an opportunity is the Ashford Commercial Quarter development.

The other area where private sector investment could provide new efficiencies and improved passenger experience is in the use of new technologies and the introduction of Wi-Fi networks on trains and within stations.

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

New imaginative ways of utilising the existing infrastructure should be maximised, through incentivising passengers to use less trafficked routes through new innovative fare structures, through partnerships with schools, tourism associations and to undertake leisure activities.

Community Rail Partnerships (CRP) should also be supported to ensure customers can help shape the future direction and use of this infrastructure alongside operators, and develop new routes stimulating increased modal shift.

Marshlink

The Marshlink route between Ashford and Hastings, although not included in the scope of the SERF, is supported by the Sussex CRP. This CRP will need to support the smaller stations which would continue to be served by a local stopping service when High Speed trains are introduced to Hastings and Bexhill via Rye.

Tonbridge-Reigate

Appendix A

The Tonbridge – Reigate CRP, which is also outside the scope of the SERF, links Kent with Surrey but is administered by Sussex CRP. This route offers an innovative opportunity for the development of the south-east regional rail network. Consideration should be given to a future option of providing a through Ashford – Tonbridge – Redhill – Gatwick – Redhill - Guildford – Reading service, potentially as a joint operation between the Greater Western Railway (GWR) and South Eastern franchises.

This could provide an option to link up Ashford International Eurostar services with International travellers at Gatwick Airport.

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

Ashford is a rail hub within the south east, but is served by more than one operator with Southern services on the Marshlink line. A co-ordination of all services passing through the Borough of Ashford under one franchise would provide potential benefits through a more co-ordinated and efficient service for local passengers. Therefore the inclusion of High Speed and Mainline services between Hastings and Ashford International within the south eastern franchise would be supported, with the Southern franchise retaining services running westwards from Hastings.

25. Are there any part[s] of these questions that are not immediately clear or that you do not understand, either in terms of the language used or the intent behind the direction?

No.

26. In conclusion, is there anything else you wish to say about the South Eastern franchise?

Yes. For the first time in the history of the privatised railway there is now a real joined-up approach between the processes for awarding a new franchise and agreeing funding options for the railway infrastructure on which that franchise will operate.

Network Rail published their ‘South East Route: Kent Area Route Study (KARS) – Draft for Consultation’ in March 2017, as part of their ‘Long Term Planning Process’. This draft route study contains significant proposals as options for funders within the period of Network Rail’s Control Period 6 (CP6: 2019-2024), and further options for consideration beyond that period to 2044. There is therefore a clear alignment between the expected operation of the new SERF (2018 to 2025/2028) and the delivery of infrastructure investment on the Kent Route (2019 to 2024, and beyond).

It is imperative that bidders for the new SERF are fully informed about the options for Government investment in the infrastructure of the Kent Route, as

Appendix A

decisions about these will have a significant impact on the level, type and frequency of service that can be provided.

Conclusion

Ashford Borough is home to a key railway hub at Ashford International Station, which has driven growth in the town for many decades, and which has recently been driven by the introduction of High Speed services in 2009. Key to the growth of the town and to the attractiveness of surrounding towns and villages is the great rail connectivity to London, other parts of Kent and Sussex and Internationally to Brussels and Paris. Therefore retention and expansion of these services, with the provision of a cost effective and quality service is essential to the ongoing economic growth of the area. Ashford Borough Council therefore welcomes the opportunity to comment on this vital franchise consultation to support the successful transition to the next franchise period. Continuity of good quality services throughout this transition period as well as beyond is essential for the area and existing passengers.