



NETWORK RAIL'S KENT ROUTE STUDY CONSULTATION

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Purpose of the report

To update the Joint Transport Board on Ashford Borough Council's draft response to Network Rail's consultation on the South East Route: Kent Area Route Study.

Background

Network Rail have 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, and sets out the strategic vision for the next 30 years. The purpose of the study is to provide the evidence base to inform funder's consideration of the medium and long-term options. The consultation was opened in March 2017 and closes on the 30th June 2017.

The Department for Transport has also published their "South Eastern Rail Franchise Public Consultation" document in March 2017, originally requesting responses by 23rd May 2017, although this has now been extended to the 30th June 2017 due to the calling of the General Election. 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.

Ashford Borough Council's draft response to these consultations was reported to Cabinet in May 2017, and the key priorities within the Council's response is set out below.

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

Network Rail have 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
 - New connection at Ashford International that allows trains from HS1 to access the Marshlink line
 - Electrification of the MarshLink line from Ashford to Ore
 - 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.

Apart from the Canterbury Chord project, these are all items that are also raised in the South Eastern Rail Franchise consultation as well. The Kent Area Route Study also proposes no significant station improvements in the Ashford Borough during the period of the plan to 2024.

In responding to the consultation, the main priorities set out for the Council's proposed 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.

With the Council's response to the Rail Franchise consultation having been submitted in advance of the original consultation deadline, this report seeks the views of members in responding to the South East Route: Kent Route Study consultation, reflecting the priorities agreed with Cabinet on the 11th May 2017. The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety will then be incorporating these comments into the Council's response to this consultation with support from the Economic Development Manager.