



**REPORTS FOR DECISION BY THE
CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT**

Date Issued: **09 July 2009**

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MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET MEMBER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Report prepared by Clive Cheeseman

Date Issued: 9 July 2009

1. NETWORK RAIL – KENT ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY

1.1 Issue for Decision

- 1.1.1 To approve the response of Maidstone Borough Council to the consultation by Network Rail on its draft Kent Route Utilisation strategy.

1.2 Recommendation of Assistant Director of Development and Community Services

- 1.2.1 That the response to the Network Rail consultation on its draft Kent Route Utilisation strategy as shown in appendix A be approved.
- 1.2.2 That the Assistant Director of Development and Community Services continue to monitor the consultation process and press Network Rail and the Department for Transport for the early introduction of improved services between Maidstone East and city destinations.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 BACKGROUND

1.3.2 THE INTEGRATED KENT FRANCHISE

- 1.3.3 Proposals for the Integrated Kent Franchise were put forward by the Strategic Rail Authority during 2004 and 2005. In its responses to these Maidstone Borough Council put forward a case that;-
- the level of service provision was inadequate on both the Maidstone East and Medway valley lines and also failed to take account of Maidstone being a major rail destination.
 - there was a clear demand for fast services between Maidstone and city destinations which was a major concern for local employers.

- that the proposals were clearly based on incorrect and incomplete passenger information and a total lack of understanding of the latent demand which was already resulting in significant rail heading to stations on other lines.

The response by the Strategic Rail Authority to these points was poor with no real improvements in service being offered.

Since that time Maidstone has been designated as a regional transport hub in the South East Plan, and by Government as a Growth Point for the period between 2006 and 2026, which will result in the provision of 11,030 houses and 5,000 jobs the effect of which on the local rail network also needs to be catered for.

1.3.4 THE KENT ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY – OUTLINE AND CONSIDERATION

1.3.5 The Kent Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) – draft for consultation – was issued by Network Rail (NR) on the 28 April. Comments are invited before a deadline of 23 July, with an intended publication of the final document in early 2010. It is intended to consider demand for the period to 2029 and beyond.

1.3.6 An extended summary of the consultation document is given in Appendix B.

The full consultation document can be accessed on the Network Rail website at;-

www.networkrail.co.uk/browse%20documents/rus%20documents/route%20utilisation%20strategies/kent/kent%20rus%20draft.pdf

1.3.7 CONSIDERATION OF THE KENT ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY

1.3.8 From the proposals contained in the draft strategy it does not appear that Network Rail (who took over responsibility from the Strategic Rail Authority), have taken any significant action to address the points previously made. It offers little or no improvement to local rail services and where it does this is on the basis of "jam tomorrow", which does nothing to address current concerns or medium and longer term needs and demands.

1.3.9 The main issues considered in the strategy which concern Maidstone are;-

- ISSUE

The current and future capacity of the network and the proposals to cater for expected future growth in demand.

PROPOSED

The strategy concentrates on expected future demand for travel to London, particularly in the peak. There is no scope to operate more trains on services to Charing Cross or Victoria, and little for increasing their length, so it is primarily proposed to use available capacity on the High Speed line. The main beneficiaries of this would be areas in East Kent particularly Ashford.

COMMENT

No account appears to have been taken of Maidstone's allocation as a Growth Point and the level of development that is identified to accommodate 11,030 houses and 5,000 jobs or the likely overall effect that this will have on the future demand for rail services to and from Maidstone.

Whilst the strategy recognises that the current poor service and choice of destinations has resulted in significant levels of rail heading to other stations such as Headcorn, Staplehurst, Paddock Wood, Sevenoaks etc, insufficient account is taken of the effect this has on traffic and congestion on the local road network and the M20, and pollution. Improved services from Maidstone stations would help to discourage this.

- ISSUE

Introduction of Thameslink services on the Maidstone East line, and a reduction in journey times and platform extensions to permit the operation of longer trains.

PROPOSED

Maidstone East is recommended as a future Thameslink destination in the, already approved, South London Route Utilisation Strategy, which would see an additional two trains per hour, including during the peak period. To permit the new network to be introduced in 2015 it will be necessary for part of London Bridge to be closed from 2012 whilst re-building takes place.

COMMENT

Whilst there may be a need for the number of trains to be reduced during the construction work services there can be no justification for reducing services between Maidstone East and the City from December 2009.

PROPOSED

The strategy recognises that reducing the length of journey times has an economic benefit. Detailed work on several specific potential schemes is being undertaken during the consultation period, including sections of the Maidstone East line, particularly between Eynsford and Swanley, with the intention of announcing proposals in the final published RUS.

COMMENT

Under the current proposals a number of towns further away from London will gain the benefit of journey times to London that are shorter than from Maidstone. This could be a disincentive to businesses to locate in this area or those considering a move.

PROPOSED

It is recommended that all peak trains should operate to the maximum length that each line permits – 8 cars on the Maidstone East line (with a longer term possibility of 12 cars on some journeys). It is not however considered economically practical to extend Maidstone East station to permit full operation of 12 car trains. It is hoped to lengthen platforms at some other stations on the line to accommodate 8 car trains, but this is not possible at all locations.

COMMENT

These improvements are welcomed and we would encourage Network Rail to progress these as soon as possible

- ISSUE

Possibility of High Speed services on the Medway Valley line to Maidstone West

PROPOSED

It is recommended that in the peak two high speed services per hour are extended from Ebbsfleet to either Ashford International or Maidstone West (via Gravesend and Strood). Ashford is considered to have the better economic case for this service, but they are unable to be accommodated on the “domestic service” platforms. A detailed operational evaluation of the potential for them to operate to Maidstone West instead is therefore being undertaken by Network Rail.

COMMENT

Maidstone has a better business case to be the destination of this service. This proposed service should operate all day, and not just in the peak. Apart from Kings Cross such a service would be able to offer good services to Stratford (with connections for London Docklands), and at Ebbsfleet for both Kent Thames Gateway area and access to continental services.

A suggested bus link between Maidstone East and Ebbsfleet is ridiculous due to the congestion on the M2.

- ISSUE

Better links to other transport and economic hubs in Kent

PROPOSED

The strategy does not consider that there is currently an economic case for improving rail services to Canterbury, Medway or Tonbridge.

COMMENT

It is however important for future economic development that improved rail services are provided to these key transport hubs and commercial centre'. This is clearly recognised in the South East Plan and will become increasingly important as development proposals (economic and housing) come forward through the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF).

Some sections of the rail network could be far more effectively used to help reduce traffic movements on local roads. This is particularly the case on the section of the M20 between Ashford and West Malling where the Maidstone East line runs parallel to it. This could offer the possibility of "rail and ride" services to both Maidstone and West Malling (for Kings Hill), using services that do not conflict with peak London commuting times. Similar opportunities could also be available on the Medway Valley line where station car parks are underutilised, and it is not possible to provide bus priority lane.

- ISSUE

Improved services and links for the Medway valley line.

PROPOSED

Suggested improvements to increase the frequency of trains to Tonbridge, extend services on to Gatwick Airport and in the other direction to Rochester and/or Sheerness were evaluated but are not considered to be operationally or economically viable.

COMMENT

This is disappointing and in the light of the 2001 Travel to Work patterns, and subsequent growth, it is important that these options are reviewed at an early date, particularly as development takes place in the Thames Gateway areas.

- ISSUE

Freight via Redhill

PROPOSED

The primary freight route for traffic to and from the Midlands and the North, and the Channel Tunnel is via the South London and Maidstone East lines. The diversionary route via Redhill is currently unable to be used by electric locomotives due to signaling immunization problems, and this can cause disruption and delay if an electric locomotive breaks down. A business case for these works is to be undertaken is therefore welcomed.

Whilst there has been a reduction in freight traffic in recent years it is expected that this will return to its previous levels. To provide for future growth thirty five train paths have been protected from the Channel Chunnel up until 2052. However with the international market increasingly using unitized containers gauge issues may become a limiting factor. It is recognised that it may be necessary to increase the gauge of the Maidstone East line, and diversionary routes, to W12, but this is considered to be a national matter rather than something for the Kent RUS to deal with.

COMMENT

Action to provide a diversionary route for electric freight trains via Redhill is welcomed and we would encourage Network Rail to deliver these as soon as practicable.

1.3.10 The recommended response to Network Rail in respect of the draft Route Utilisation Strategy is shown as Appendix A.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

- 1.4.1 To fail to respond to the consultation may result in the views of Maidstone Borough Council not being adequately taken into account in the development of the Kent Route Utilisation Strategy.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

- 1.5.1 The objective of Maidstone being a place to achieve, prosper and thrive requires that businesses should be encouraged to be prosperous and provide high quality jobs in the area. The provision of good quality rail services to London and other key economic centres will help to deliver this.

1.6 Risk Management

- 1.6.1 There is a risk that if the Kent Route Utilisation Strategy does not take into account the need for improved rail services that it may adversely affect the delivery of future growth in the town.

1.7 Equality Needs Assessment

- 1.7.1 The provision of good public transport services and infrastructure helps people to access jobs, shops, services, health and leisure facilities. At present the rail services on the Maidstone East and Medway Valley lines are less than ideal and can act as a barrier to such travel. By encouraging the introduction of better and faster services to key destinations (including other towns in Kent) this will help to address these issues, and encourage future investment in infrastructure and stations. It is important that the need to improve passenger facilities and introduce more access for all stations is understood and such investment maintained. A failure to do so risks a negative impact on sections of the community.

1.8 Other Implications

1.8.1

1. Financial
2. Staffing
3. Legal
4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment
5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
6. Community Safety

X
X

- 7. Human Rights Act
- 8. Procurement
- 9. Asset Management

1.9 Background Documents

- 1.9.1 Network Rail Kent Utilisation Strategy – Draft for Consultation (April 2009). Accessible at the Network Rail website;-
www.networkrail.co.uk/browse%20documents/rus%20documents/route%20utilisation%20strategies/kent/kent%20rus%20draft.pdf

NO REPORT WILL BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT THIS BOX BEING COMPLETED

Is this a Key Decision? Yes ☐ No ☒

If yes, when did it appear in the Forward Plan? _____

Is this an Urgent Key Decision? Yes ☐ No ☒

Reason for Urgency

[State why the decision is urgent and cannot wait until the next issue of the forward plan.]

How to Comment

Should you have any comments on the issue that is being considered please contact either the relevant Officer or the Member of the Executive who will be taking the decision.

Mark Wooding

Cabinet Member for Environment

Telephone: 07932 830888

E-mail: markwooding@maidstone.gov.uk

Clive Cheeseman

Transport Policy Officer

Telephone: 01622 602365

E-mail: clivecheeseman@maidstone.gov.uk

APPENDIX A



Kent RUS Consultation Response
RUS Programme Manager
Network Rail
Floor 4
Kings Place
90 York Way
London N1 9AG

Date: July 2009

My ref:

Your ref:

Dear Sir

David Petford
Chief Executive
David Edwards
Director of Change &
Environmental Services
Alison Broom
Director of Prosperity
& Regeneration
Zena Cooke
Director of Resources
& Partnerships

Maidstone House
King Street
Maidstone ME15 6JQ
t 01622 602000
w www.digitalmaidstone.co.uk
minicom 01622 602224

CONSULTATION ON KENT ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY

The Council is very disappointed that the draft of your future strategy offers very few real improvements to rail services and infrastructure in the Maidstone area. It ignores the status of Maidstone as a growth point and regional transport hub as recognised in the South East Plan, which is particularly important in considering the future level of services that must be provided. Also the period of time that it is suggested that we must wait for such improvements is unacceptable given the extremely poor services that are currently provided.

The strategy primarily seeks to resolve the demand for current and future peak travel. It refers to the Growth Areas of the Thames Gateway and Ashford but ignores the Growth Point status of Maidstone which will see the provision of an additional 11,080 houses and 5,000 – 10,000 jobs created, in the period to 2026. In addition the emerging Local Development Framework for Maidstone, which is expected to be published in 2010, envisages that such growth will require an integrated transport strategy that encourages modal shift from car to public transport. This will obviously have an implication on the demand for future rail services to a range of London destinations, which will need to be accommodated in the range of destinations, services and capacity which are then provided.

Maidstone is recognised in the South East Plan as a regional hub, major commercial centre and rail destination for business, shopping, education and leisure purposes. The plan states that transport plans should support and develop the role of such regional hubs by increasing the level of accessibility by public transport. Both the Maidstone East and Medway Valley lines are recognised in the South East Plan as transport spokes between Maidstone and neighbouring regional hubs. As such they should be developed, yet this has not been accepted in the strategy.

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APPENDIX A

Southeastern Railways have previously stated that more passengers have Maidstone as a destination than as their starting point. The Travel to Work pattern survey compiled from the 2001 Census indicated that of the 44,723 people working in Urban Maidstone some 14,016 were commuting from, and 7,765 to other centres in Kent for which journeys by rail are possible;-

	To Maidstone	From Maidstone
Ashford	1,333	458
Canterbury	699	157
Dartford	190	325
Dover	316	72
Gravesham	523	202
Medway	5,647	1,643
Shepway	441	72
Tonbridge & Malling	4,104	4,063
Tunbridge Wells	763	773

These figures have obviously risen since then. Your strategy acknowledges that there was a 120% increase in rail passengers between Ashford and Maidstone over a recent ten year period, indicating the obvious potential for obtaining further modal shift from car to train on these corridors in this area. The M20 Motorway which parallels the railway line on this corridor is already operating close to capacity between junctions 5 and 8 and is the subject of an Air Quality Action Plan. It would be sensible to build on the proximity of the existing parallel rail service using "non London peak" rail capacity to obtain modal shift for such journeys to/from Maidstone and West Malling (for Kings Hill).

This could further be extended to encourage journeys between towns (recognised regional hubs) to be undertaken by rail. In this context I trust that you will enable the delivery of an additional platform at Canterbury West so that direct rail services between there and Maidstone can be reintroduced at the earliest possibility.

Similar possibilities exist on the Medway Valley line which also parallels congested roads and where there is spare capacity in station car parks. In this context we would be interested in working with the rail industry and neighbouring authorities on developing such opportunities on both lines into a form of "Rail and Ride".

It is acknowledged by the rail industry that there is significant rail heading, an illustration of latent demand, from the Maidstone area to stations on other lines (e.g. Headcorn, Staplehurst, Paddock Wood, and Sevenoaks). It is important to recognise that passengers do this because the rail service on the Maidstone East does not serve the destinations they seek and is extremely slow. It is this rail heading which adds to the level of overcrowding on the lines through Tonbridge and Sevenoaks and the Medway towns which many of the suggested recommendations in the Strategy are seeking to address. In this context it seems strange that there is a preferred economic case for the High Speed peak shuttle services to be extended to operate to Ashford if they can be accommodated there. Such a service would only

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APPENDIX A

benefit Ashford which already has an extensive range of London services, and so would offer little, if any, relief to the capacity problems on the "classic lines". Given the intended extensive provision of rail services to Ashford how can it have a demand and better economic case for these trains than Maidstone?

By contrast your alternative of operating to Maidstone West would help to offer relief to the above lines as well as Maidstone East. Apart from providing a service from this area to Kings Cross it would also offer a good service to Stratford (with links to London Docklands) and a connection to the Thames Gateway growth area and Eurostar services at Ebbsfleet. There is surely a case for this service to be operated all day and not just in the peak. Such provision would also help to reduce rail heading to Ebbsfleet on the congested M2, M20 and M25. The alternative suggestion that passengers could reach Ebbsfleet by dedicated bus from Maidstone is not plausible due to the unattractive journey time involved.

It has been suggested that instead of Maidstone West that Maidstone Barracks might be considered as an alternative terminal for the High Speed shuttle service. This is something that we consider should be further evaluated as it is close to Maidstone East station making improved interchange a possibility. In addition there are plans to redevelop Maidstone East station and this could add to the attraction of High Speed services being available close by.

The subject of direct links and journey times to City destinations is one of our main concerns as it is this which clearly causes much of the rail heading already referred to. It is also of particular interest to businesses based here and at Kings Hill (West Malling) and as such has an impact on the current and future economic development of the area. Apart from the redevelopment of Maidstone East there also plans for a number of new business developments in and around the town which will offer further potential for growth in rail patronage.

I note the draft strategy recognises that the already approved South London RUS shows Maidstone East as a destination for the Thameslink network after 2015. This is essential to delivering some of the capacity and destination improvements that are already clearly needed from this area. This would provide the potential of offering a "turn up and go" service on the Maidstone East line which would further enhance its attractiveness and help to deliver modal shift. The sooner this service can be provided the better. It therefore seems amazing that Southeastern Railways are proposing to withdraw most of the trains to City destinations from December 2009. Whilst it may be necessary to make some changes to allow the reconstruction of London Bridge to take place, in preparation for the new Thameslink network, such withdrawals should be for the shortest possible period of time and not for the proposed six years to 2015! I urge you to press for these services to be maintained and for the new Thameslink network to be introduced at the earliest opportunity.

Unfortunately speeds on the Maidstone East line are relatively low and this is reflected in the time it currently takes to get to London destinations. The forthcoming advent of High speed services from December 2009 will exacerbate this, as places that are further from London will then have journey times which are

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significantly less than those from Maidstone. This, together with the lack of City destinations on the revised services, creates a risk that we will find it difficult to attract appropriate business investment into this area. I therefore welcome your intention to investigate means by which line speeds can be increased, and journey times reduced, particularly on the Maidstone East line. Such improvements would also be useful on the Medway Valley line to help increase its attractiveness for medium length journeys.

Many local stations have limited platform lengths which restrict the number of cars that trains on the lines can operate with. I welcome the intention to investigate the extension of a number of these.

It would have been welcome if there had been more reference in the strategy to the need to improve access to stations for those with mobility difficulties. The "access for all" programme results in only a few key stations being improved and results in some long distances between them. Whilst it may not be possible within this strategy to introduce more of such stations in this area there ought to be a reference to the need to review platform access etc. where works are to be undertaken at stations.

There is concern that the Maidstone East line is currently the only freight route to/from the Channel Tunnel that electric freight locomotives can use. If a locomotive breaks down or there are problems on the line there is a risk of freight and passenger services being disrupted until a replacement locomotive can be sourced. I therefore welcome the proposal to undertake measures to make the route via Redhill available and trust that these works will be undertaken as soon as possible.

I am very disappointed that your initial proposals offer little real improvement to local rail services and infrastructure, but trust that you will now appreciate the need and opportunities that exist to deliver an appropriate rail service in this area. In this context I would welcome partnership working with Network Rail to help deliver them. Should such improvements not be undertaken it will result in a failure to provide a integrated transport network, resulting in increased traffic and pollution, and condemn Maidstone to remain a railway wilderness.

Yours sincerely,

Name
Job Title

Contact:

t 01622 60xxxx

e @maidstone.gov.uk

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NETWORK RAIL KENT ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION (SUMMARY)

The Kent Rail Utilisation Strategy (RUS) - draft for consultation was issued by the Network Rail (NR) on the 28 April. Comments are invited before a deadline of 23 July with an intended publication of the final RUS by early 2010.

The following pages are a summary of the document with references to the relevant paragraphs in the original document, which can be accessed at;- www.networkrail.co.uk/browse%20documents/rus%20documents/route%20utilisation%20strategies/kent/kent%20rus%20draft.pdf

For commentary see the report to the Cabinet Member for the Environment.

INTRODUCTION

The Kent RUS primarily covers the area of the main line or “outer” services from Victoria (eastern), Charing Cross and Cannon Street and the High Speed 1 (though it is not required to). In compiling the strategy Network Rail have taken into account any committed schemes that have an effect on services in the area (East Kent re-signalling, Howbury Park freight terminal, Thameslink and Crossrail).

At the end of the consultation draft Network Rail outline their initial “emerging strategy” based on their current conclusions. This is summarised at the end of this paper.

THE PASSENGER MARKET

The rail network in Kent is dominated by the commuting market and that two thirds of all rail journeys involve London terminal stations (3.4.1). Between 1998 and 2008 patronage on Kent services increased overall by 28% (3.6.6). Daily demand from Maidstone to London is shown as increasing from c 3,000 to 4,800 (60 %!) during this period.

Elsewhere in Kent travel between commercial and residential areas is not always easy. There could be significant local growth opportunities with even small levels of modal shift. One figure quoted for this area is for trips between Ashford and Maidstone, showing an increase of 120% over 10 years. This is the largest increase of all the local journey figures quoted.

Rail heading (driving to a station further away) represents a lost opportunity for the rail industry and also has detrimental effects on road congestion (3.9.4). Postcode analysis shows (3.9.5) that Headcorn and Staplehurst experience significant rail heading, with both seeing potential abstraction from the Maidstone East line.

Whilst there is uncertainty over future demand it is assumed it will recover with reasonable growth expected in the medium term, particularly from the Thames Gateway and Ashford areas. Maidstone’s population is shown to grow by about 8% in 2008 -19 (figure 6.1) – taken from the DfT TEMPRO model. The increase

in passenger volume between 2006 and 2026 is mostly as a result of growth areas and improved services (6.4.4). Demand is expected to build up over a period of time as people respond to new and better travel opportunities.

THE FREIGHT MARKET

A significant volume is carried through the area. The primary route to and from the Midlands and the North is via the South London line and on to the Channel Tunnel via Maidstone East (3.11.3). At present Class 92 (electric) hauled freight services are not permitted to use the secondary (diversionary) route via Tonbridge and Redhill due to signalling immunisation issues. A business case for the works to allow this is being developed (6.5.8). It is not possible to use the route via Sevenoaks as it is of too small a loading gauge. Most of the lines in the area can accommodate the historic W6 gauge, but those to the Channel Tunnel (via Maidstone East or the diversionary via East Croydon) are capable of accepting W9 gauge vehicles (3.12.1).

Since the Freight RUS was published in March 2007 forecasts have been supplemented by aspirations from the DfT and other stakeholders who wish to see a transfer from road to rail (6.5.1). Whilst there has been a short term reduction in freight traffic it is assumed that it will return to higher levels. The potential for further growth exists through increased aggregates movements and international traffic. There are 35 paths from the Channel Tunnel which have been protected until 2052 (3.11.6), which should cater for traffic in the short and medium term. However with the international market increasingly using unitised containers, gauge issues may become a limiting factor requiring provision of gauge W12 on the Maidstone East and diversionary lines (6.5.7) (See options considered and recommendations – Gap E).

In addition to the main flows there are aspirations to develop sites as key freight nodes – including a rail freight terminal at Hollingbourne (through the local authority planning processes) (6.5.14).

INFRASTRUCTURE

Whilst much of the track on the Maidstone East line is operable at speeds of 45 to 60 mph, sections of it are restricted to 25 to 40 mph (figure 3.15). Many services on the Maidstone East line are currently limited to six car length due to short platforms at Charing, Harrietsham, Hollingbourne, Barming and Kemsing. Lengthening these platforms to eight car would enable unrestricted eight car operation but Network Rail's delivery plans currently anticipate Selective Door Opening for these services with the use of Class 375 stock (4.4.8). The Medway Valley line is a 2-car route and the Ashford to Tonbridge route 12-car.

There are various capacity constraints on the network towards London caused by the mixture of fast and stopping services, flat junctions, track layout and other operational issues (3.14.3). They also particularly refer to lack of spare capacity at platforms 5 and 6 at Ashford and on the line through the Medway towns (3.14.4)

COMMITTED SCHEMES

It is stated that the December 2009 service changes by Southeastern result in broadly current levels of service to existing London terminals (4.2.3).

The first stage of the Thameslink programme resulted in a small number of peak only trains being extended on the Maidstone East route (4.3.2). It is not until Key Output Two, in December 2015, when construction works have been completed, that Thameslink services will permit the operation of the full 24 trains per hour through the central core. Based on the train service specification in the agreed South London RUS, Thameslink services in the Kent RUS area would then run to and from Tunbridge Wells, Paddock Wood and Maidstone East (4.3.5). This is assumed regarding the figures for the expected December 2015 timetable (4.5.1 and figures 4.3 and 4.4).

The "access to all" programme will see improvements at some stations (e.g. Staplehurst). Work will also be carried out at other locations under the National Stations Improvement Programme, though no other stations in this area are listed for this.

PLANNING CONTEXT

The RUS analysis must be consistent with Government (DfT) policies, and be informed by the South East Plan (SEP), Local Transport Plans and local planning bodies. In the same way the RUS can influence major planning decisions. It is recognised in 5.2.4 that within the SEP the transport network is described in terms of regional "hubs" (of which Maidstone is one) and that good linkages between the regional "hubs" by the "spokes" are encouraged.

Section 5.2.5 also makes mention to the SEP identifying the need for up to three new road/rail interchanges for inter-modal traffic.

A section on designated growth areas (5.3) concentrates on the Thames Estuary and Ashford areas and does not mention the growth point status of Maidstone.

Note: The comments on the South Eastern Planning Assessment in section 5.7 may be out of date. An updated policy was being drawn up in March which included the need to improve services from Maidstone's "hub" on the "spokes" to other "hubs".

IDENTIFIED STRATEGIC GAPS

The RUS process identifies and considers six main potential strategic gaps;-

Gap A – is between committed capacity and the forecasts of future demand on peak services to/from London, leading to a prediction that such trains will become unacceptably overcrowded.

Whilst the High Speed line and other measures in the December 2009 timetable will address some issues, in areas such as West Kent benefits will be less significant. It would appear that overcrowded trains in the peaks will remain an issue, and more importantly, worsen during the RUS period (7.2.2).

Gap B - is between the planned train service within Kent (including linkages to adjacent areas) and the need to provide a train service consistent with future levels of demand across all transport modes.

There is a desire amongst stakeholders to see some areas of the standard off peak service expanded. It is suggested that some aspects of the current service constrain demand. Initial evidence does not however prove this (7.3.3), though such improvements would be expected to have positive and beneficial results. In many cases it would be possible at low (operating) cost to improve off peak frequencies though the cost/benefit case would need to be tested (7.3.5).

In the period to 2014 there are stakeholder concerns about off peak frequencies – the loss of Maidstone East to City trains and Maidstone West to Tonbridge which only has one train per hour (7.3.8). It is stated that on most routes there is capacity to provide additional services at off peak times using existing infrastructure and without requiring any additional rolling stock (7.3.11).

Stakeholders have raised the following issues;-

- The Medway Valley line does not have links into major conurbations at each end of its route which limits its effectiveness resulting in increased use of the car.
- From December 2009 there are no direct trains between Maidstone and Canterbury.
- There are limited rail links between Kent and Gatwick. The alternatives are such that many journeys are now made by road.

Whilst the High Speed line brings benefits it is difficult to access it from some areas to make journeys to and from France.

Long rail journey times, especially to London, lead to areas being isolated from wider economic activity. Poor transport links put off prospective employers from relocating to an area, which limits opportunities for employment. Whilst these points are primarily made in respect to areas of the Sussex and Kent coast it is acknowledged that they equally apply to Maidstone. It is brought out in 7.3.23 that journeys will take longer to Maidstone than to Ashford.

It is concluded that further analysis of the potential to reduce journey times is required.

Gap C – concerns accessibility to the rail network.

There is a high degree of reliance on travel by car to reach stations in the RUS area. This can be a problem at stations with insufficient parking space or poor road access. The option of using public transport is not always possible.

Ebbsfleet fulfils its role as a “parkway” well but access to it by public transport could be improved. It is inaccessible by rail from Maidstone (7.4.9).

Gap D – is between the train service on offer at evenings, weekends and on bank holidays and the predicted demand for travel at such times.

Services at such times are much less frequent, but prone to being affected by engineering works. It is not clear that demand exists but society is changing to a 24/7 culture, and actions may be possible to address this (better planning of engineering line “occupations”).

Gap E – is between the current capability of the railway network to accommodate freight and the likely needs of the freight industry in the future.

There appears to be unanimous support for increasing rail’s share of freight movements, which is consistent with Government policy (7.6.1). Many of the issues relate to either the Thames Gateway area or freight operations between the UK and mainland Europe.

Whilst the High Speed line has been designed to carry freight at some stage no firm plans are in place at present. The existence of a single W9 gauge route (via Maidstone East) to the Channel Tunnel which can be used by Class 92 electric freight locomotives, means diesel locomotives must currently be sourced from elsewhere on the network whenever the route is closed for maintenance.

Gap F – is between anticipated train performance on an increasingly busy network and the need for strategic level interventions to reduce major delays.

Certain parts of the network will become busier once the new High Speed services are in operation. This is likely to put pressure on train performance unless interventions are taken.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gap A – options to increase peak capacity between Kent and London

Possibilities for lengthening existing trains to provide additional capacity are primarily limited to the shoulder peaks. On the Tonbridge line there are track constraints in central London and between Orpington and Tonbridge together with conflicting train movements on key sections. Advanced signalling systems and other infrastructure improvements are unlikely to address these problems.

On the routes into Victoria via Bromley South there appears to be more spare capacity (outside of the London area) and consideration has been given as to whether an additional two trains per hour, in the peaks, could be operated from Medway, Maidstone East or Swanley (8.6). However network pressures on the London approaches, at Herne Hill and at London terminals are such that end to end train paths do not appear to be available (option 3.2 assessment). It is recommended that further work on this is carried out as part of the development of the future 2015 Thameslink programme.

They have therefore looked at the potential for lengthening trains on services on the Maidstone East line (8.7). Extending platforms on the line to accommodate 12-car trains would require major re-modelling of Maidstone East and provision of a turning facility near Bearsted at an estimated cost of £75m and has

therefore been discounted (12-car trains cannot turn at Maidstone East). Selective door opening (SDO) would cause operational problems at a number of stations but might be considered by operators as a tactical solution for the busiest services (Option 4.3 assessment). They have therefore only recommended that all high peak services on the line be extended to 8-car.

It is not considered practical to extend the spread of the high peak service due to the pressure that this places on the network leaving little room for "service recovery". There will however be additional services when the Thameslink network is introduced (Option 5.1 assessment).

It is recommended that all main line trains are, as far as operationally possible, extended to their maximum length for the three hour peak period. By doing this it is hoped to encourage travel in the "shoulder peaks", possibly by the introduction of fare incentives (Option 5.2 assessment).

Due to limited options for increasing capacity on "classic" services the RUS has turned to the St Pancras (High Speed) services as the only practical means of responding to the gap in a meaningful way (8.9). In particular there is scope to lengthen some peak services from 6-car to 12-car. Also two trains in each peak hour between Rochester and St Pancras could start further back e.g. Faversham (though this may adversely affect "classic" services). In addition the planned Ebbsfleet – St Pancras peak shuttle could be more usefully employed by starting somewhere else. Constraints on track capacity preclude these being extended through Rochester. This leaves two options – either Maidstone West (operationally limited to 6 car operation) or Ashford (which has congested domestic platforms) (8.9.5). Operation to Maidstone West gives a number of calling options but risks overcrowding due to its constrained length, whilst journey times must be kept competitive to offer potential relief to services operating on the Maidstone East line (Option 6.4 assessment). The cost benefits of this option are lower than that for Ashford, so more development work on the Ashford option is recommended once demand is known after December 2009.

Gap B – increasing off peak frequencies

Such interventions are normally deliverable within committed infrastructure and rolling stock. These issues are generally considered by the Department for Transport at the time of re-franchising.

In line with the strategic planning aspirations of the main local authorities, the RUS appraised the case for implementing the following off-peak options on the "classic" railway (8.12.2);-

- Retaining a service from Maidstone East to the City of London
It is anticipated Thameslink services will provide the missing off peak service from 2015 so this is not further appraised (Option 7.1 assessment).
- Providing a two train per hour service on the Tonbridge – Redhill line (reversing recent reductions).
This and the alternative of extending services to Gatwick Airport are not recommended due to insufficient demand.

- Providing a two train per hour service over the Tonbridge – Maidstone West line to match the frequency between Maidstone West and Strood.
Not recommended due to insufficient demand (Option 7.3 assessment).
- Providing a two train per hour service on the Marshlink route between Ashford and Hastings.
This is not recommended due to insufficient demand.

A number of towns in Kent are not well connected by rail (8.13.2). Opportunities to deliver improved links that were considered are;-

- Extend the Maidstone East – Ashford service to Canterbury West, which would also improve Ashford to Canterbury links.
This is considered to be the most likely candidate but requires an additional platform and track changes at Canterbury the cost of which currently outweighs the benefits of easing congestion at Ashford station (Option 8.1 assessment).
- Extend the Medway Valley line service through to the Medway Towns and Sheerness.
Although this has some benefits it increases train numbers in congested sections of the network, and has a poor economic case (Option 8.2 assessment).
- Extend Victoria to Gillingham services to Sheerness.
Not recommended due to insufficient demand.
- Link Medway Valley line and Tonbridge to Redhill line (and possible extension to Gatwick).
Not recommended due to insufficient demand and adverse effects on train service patterns beyond Tonbridge (Options 8.4 and 8.5 assessments).

The benefits of reducing journey times are briefly covered in section 8.14, with some suggestions, one of which is the western end of the Maidstone East line between Eynsford and Swanley. Various potential schemes to reduce journey times are currently being evaluated and will be covered in more detail in the final published document.

Gap C – improving station accessibility

The principal options are considered to be expanded station car parks, improved local bus/taxi links and improving access on foot (8.15.1). There are no current schemes listed to increase car parking at any stations in the Maidstone area. Though other places will be considered it is not always practical or possible to extend car parking facilities, so other solutions may be sought (8.16.4).

It is anticipated bus operators will, in conjunction with local authorities, enhance their services to match increased demand. It is not practical for the RUS to consider walking and cycling issues which they expect would be addressed at a local level.

The RUS considered stakeholder aspirations for new stations at Ashford South and Minster/Manston Parkway and in both cases recommended that improvements to local bus services be considered to respond to the demand. It also does not support the proposal for a merged Strood/Rochester station but leaves open the possibility of a new one at Rochester (8.22). Suggestions of a new High Speed station near Maidstone are not considered to be within the scope of the RUS (8.19.4).

Ebbsfleet was conceived as a Park and Ride station, for the M2, M20 and M25, and has been relatively successful (8.21.1). It is difficult to access by rail from most of the RUS area, and from parts of London. There is a local fast-track bus service to Dartford and Gravesend. Building on this it is considered that if the demand exists, feeder bus links to Ebbsfleet could be provided from key interchange stations in Kent – Sevenoaks, Swanley and Maidstone East. Whilst the concept is supported it is on the basis of further development by local authorities (Figure 8.6).

Gap D – evening and weekend services

Although demand for train services at such times is increasing there is conflict with the need to undertake engineering works during these off peak periods. It is intended to improve the delivery of engineering works so that these track occupations can be minimised to reduce their adverse effect on train services.

Gap E – freight capability

The train pathways per day that have been protected are considered to be more than enough to meet anticipated demand. However various options have been considered for increasing the capability of the network (8.24.2). These include;-

- Use of High Speed line for freight.
This is considered likely in the short to medium term.
- Construction of new terminal capacity.
The shortage of capacity is a significant issue and a factor that would be considered as part of any planning enquiry.
- Use of electric haulage on the diversionary routes via Redhill.
Enhancement of the infrastructure on the diversionary route via Redhill is recommended (a business case for the works is being developed).
- Gauge enhancements via Catford/Maidstone East (8.24.6).
This is currently W9 gauge, but if increased (together with diversionary routes) would enable the carriage of bigger W12 gauge containers. This is a national issue so no investigation has been carried out by this RUS.
- Running longer freight trains on Channel Tunnel routes.
Operators have indicated aspirations for 1000m trains in the long term, which would require major changes to infrastructure.
- Providing new run-round capability, for example at Plumstead.
This is intended primarily to benefit the Howbury Park terminal.

- Providing new routes, in particular a chord connecting the Higham area directly to the Grain branch.
Detailed consideration is currently taking place.

Gap F – performance improvement

Train performance could be adversely affected by increasing levels of traffic on a congested network. Consideration is given to infrastructure improvements in conjunction with the forthcoming East Kent re-signalling scheme. Particular reference is made to improving the layout at Ashford and providing a turn-round facility at Canterbury West but both require further development.

THE EMERGING STRATEGY

RUS interventions recommended for further development, for potential implementation in CP4 (Control Period 4 - up to 2014) are;-

- Investigate increased capacity through the Medway Towns as part of the East Kent Re-signalling programme
- Develop journey time improvements on both High Speed and “classic routes”, including the western end of the Maidstone East line.
- Improved walking routes and bus services to stations
- Additional station entrances on walking routes
- Potential re-location of Rochester Station
- Increasing the capacity of station car parks
- Limited infrastructure improvements to assist freight capacity and performance.

Recommendations for CP5 (Control Period 5 to 2019) and the next Kent Franchise;-

There may be scope for a limited amount of train lengthening. Once this and the Thameslink programme have been completed it is recommended that the bulk of any further additional capacity needed between the Kent RUS area and London is delivered by the High Speed line. This is because no realistic way has been identified to provide significant additional capacity and the importance of the High Speed line will increase as passengers adjust to its availability.

The highest level of benefits has been identified if the Ebbsfleet shuttles were extended to Ashford or beyond, which would also provide relief to the Tonbridge corridor, for which no other solution has been identified. However, this option is not deliverable with the existing constrained track layout at Ashford. This is unlikely to be economically viable. The alternative is to extend the shuttle to Maidstone West which is economically viable and deliverable. A later extension

to 12 car operation is desirable, probably with SDO (Selective Door Operation) on the Medway Valley line.

On the classic network all services would run at the maximum length for the capability of the route concerned – 8-car on the Maidstone East line. In the longer term, it is possible a limited number of Maidstone East to Victoria services could be 12-car towards the end of the period with SDO in operation east of Swanley. Whilst Maidstone East cannot economically be rebuilt for all train doors to open, some limited platform extensions elsewhere on this route may assist.

Apart from peak services there is no pressing need to make decisions on service levels after 2014. The exception is the Maidstone East to Canterbury link via Ashford. It is recommended that further work on this take place to see if the costs of the necessary infrastructure can be reduced to an acceptable level.

Clive Cheeseman
Transport Policy Officer
Maidstone Borough Council

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