

## **APPENDIX A**



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Dear Sir

### **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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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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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,

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