

**EXTERNAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY****RESPONSE TO RESOLUTIONS OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 11 AUGUST 2009****CONVERSION OF HAYES BRANCH**

The comment from Kent County Council in their response to Network Rail is placed out of context as it does not refer to proposals relating to services from Maidstone. It is an option to help address the difficulty of increasing capacity on the line from Tonbridge and Sevenoaks via Orpington to London. This currently has an average of 80% loading in the morning peak with routine standing at peak times (fig 3.10) and the track is at 70 to 90% utilisation (fig 3.20). There are a number of constraints on sections of the line which preclude the operation of additional trains/capacity. Some track capacity could be released and train cross over movements alleviated if the Hayes branch were converted into either an extension of the London Underground or the Docklands Light Railway.

**UK CENSUS 2001 – PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFORMATION**

Information on travel to work by mode is available on a district by district basis (Table KS15). This indicates that 6.9% of those aged 16 – 74 (4,259) who live in Maidstone travel to work by rail. This is further split in table UV39 by ward, which additionally indicates the method of travel to work by the daytime population;-

	Rail Travel Resident population Numbers	Rail Travel Daytime population Numbers
Allington	134	26
Barming	51	8
Bearsted	292	22
Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton	57	7
Boxley	263	71
Bridge	158	90
Coxheath and Hunton	168	15
Detling and Thurnham	109	12
Downswood and Otham	68	6
East	208	52
Fant	192	66
Harrietsham and Lenham	180	55
Headcorn	296	31
Heath	124	38
High Street	196	395
Leeds	48	6
Loose	50	6
Marden and Yalding	462	71
North	214	124
North Downs	82	8
Park Wood	46	43
Shepway North	111	21
Shepway South	48	8
South	165	47
Staplehurst	465	38
Sutton Valence and Langley	73	5

### CONSULTATION AND DISCUSSIONS WITH NETWORK RAIL

Further supplementary information has been submitted to Network Rail (attached) in support of the case for providing improved rail services to Maidstone. In addition Michael Thornton (Planning and Environment Manager) has discussed with Network Rail detailed issues relating to the future development of the town centre that would impact on the demand for rail services.

Officers are due to hold a meeting at the end of September with Network Rail about the possibility of developing Park and Rail at appropriate locations on the Maidstone East and Medway Valley lines. This will also help to inform proposals for inclusion in the Integrated Transport Plan in the forthcoming Local Development Framework.

### KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

Officers attended a meeting at Kent County Council on the 13 August at which details were outlined of a conceptual study they have commissioned from consultants into possible ways of delivering reduced journey times by High Speed Services to the Thanet, Canterbury and Maidstone areas. This centres on use of the High Speed line and the Ashford to Ramsgate route and potential options for improvements in sections of track, rolling stock and the provision of possible new sections of line and stations.

### MEDWAY VALLEY LINE

A meeting of the Medway Valley Community Rail Partnership takes place at East Farleigh on the evening of the 22 September. So far they have held three public events this year – two walks and a journey on the line with historic commentary and bar. Consideration will be given at the next meeting to future events for next year. Suggestions are welcomed.

The Kent Community Rail Partnership steering group met on the 16 September at Oakwood Park. This group covers the work of the Medway Valley, Swale Rail and Marsh-link Railway partnerships. Maidstone Borough Council was represented.

### CONSULTATION OF RAIL USERS

Discussions are taking place with Kent County Council, the rail industry and consultants to identify how a survey of rail users who live in Maidstone might be undertaken, and the indicative cost of undertaking this. The issue is not straightforward due to the degree of rail-heading that takes place to stations outside of the Borough and restricted access to details of rail season ticket sales. The only practical way to capture a reasonably complete response may be to undertake surveys at all of the various stations in and outside of the Borough that are regularly used by its residents. The cost of this may prove to be prohibitive.

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## CONTENT OF SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION TO NETWORK RAIL

### High speed train services in Maidstone

The introduction of high speed domestic services utilising the HS1 line through Kent, from December 2009, will see significant improvements to rail services in the north and east of the county and particularly from Ashford. This is most noticeable in the advertised reduction of journey times to London from Ashford of 37 minutes, Canterbury 59 minutes and Dover 69 minutes.

The high speed service is incorporated as part of the Integrated Kent Franchise (IKF), and is being run alongside conventional services by Southeastern. No high speed trains are due to serve Maidstone and the conventional services that remain are due to be reduced in December 2009, with the fastest service, to Charing Cross being axed completely. Most Maidstone services will still take more than 60 minutes to get to London.

The significance of overlooking Maidstone for high speed services is apparent in the Government's Regional Spatial Strategy – the South East Plan (SEP). In Kent there are two growth areas and two new growth points (NGP), these being the focus of housing, employment and infrastructure growth until 2026;

- Kent Thames Gateway – growth area – 6 services peak from Medway, 2 per hour off peak
- Ashford – growth area – 5 services peak, 2 per hour off peak
- Dover – NGP – 5 services peak, 1 per hour off peak
- Maidstone – NGP – 0 services peak, 0 services off peak

There are currently no indications that this discrepancy will be amended.

**Housing:** The SEP has allocated 11,080 homes to Maidstone for the period until 2026, with 90% of these being directed to the Maidstone urban area.

In spatial terms, the importance of Maidstone is further recognised by its designation as both a regional hub and a primary regional centre. Maidstone is also the subject of a specific policy. The implications of these policies are that;

- **Regional hub;** the level of accessibility by public transport should be increased, and high quality interchange facilities between all modes of transport should be developed.
- **Primary regional centre;** the function and viability of pre-eminent town centres to accommodate change and growth is to be supported.
- **Maidstone hub policy;** provision should be made for housing consistent with its growth role, including associated transport infrastructure. Provision should be made for employment of sub-regional significance, enhancing its role as the county town and a centre for business. Give priority to the completion of the major employment sites in the town.

**Employment:** the regional policy is to enhance Maidstone's current role as the county town and as a centre for business. Existing primary employment locations already provide up to 160,000m<sup>2</sup> of floorspace within the town centre<sup>1</sup>. The Maidstone Economic Development Strategy indicates that enhancing the quality of employment provision will bring a potential floorspace increase of up to 28,000m<sup>2</sup> during the SEP plan period<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, the strategy is to deliver up to 10,000 new jobs within Maidstone, however transport infrastructure is needed to support this new business. The Maidstone

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<sup>1</sup> Maidstone Employment Land Review update 2009

<sup>2</sup> Maidstone Economic Development Strategy 2008

Economic Development Strategy has identified that both existing and potential local businesses consider the current rail service to Maidstone as a critical weakness for the economic success of the town.

**Retail:** Maidstone is well known for its retail offer, having been identified as a primary regional centre and being among the top 50 shopping locations in the country. It is the highest ranked conventional shopping destination in Kent, behind only Bluewater in overall terms. Retail forecasts identify that there is a capacity for up to 60,000m<sup>2</sup> of retail floorspace in the Borough until 2026<sup>3</sup>. In comparative terms, this equates to a development significantly larger than the Fremlin Walk centre, opened in Maidstone in 2005.

**Development sites:** the following sites, all of significant within the town centre, are expected to come forward within the plan period;

- Maidstone East station
- Albion Place
- London Road
- Power Hub
- Peugeot garage site

The ongoing regeneration of these town centre sites must be complemented by the public transport system, delivering both capacity and speed to and from the centre of Maidstone.

There is potential for spare capacity to be delivered to Maidstone by routing high speed services through Strood and on to Maidstone West. Indeed, the journey times that could be achieved by providing this service could fall below 50 minutes, which is much more acceptable against the current average of 60 minutes or more. Ashford journey speeds will still exceed this significantly, at 37 minutes to St. Pancras, however the potential to deliver new business to Maidstone, and to the rail network, could be enhanced significantly by a reduction in journey time.

An alternative rail option presented for Maidstone in the Kent Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS - draft) is to extend the current Thameslink service to Maidstone East. The central issue remains however, of journey times, presently a limited service operates through the Thameslink core stops to St. Pancras, but takes approximately 80 minutes to do so, stopping at all stations. This does not provide an attractive or even acceptable option for businesses or commuters.

If the proposed December 2009 revisions to the IKF timetable proceed unrevised, Maidstone will suffer from a severely constrained rail capacity compared to current services, in the face of the Government's regional policy, which has identified Maidstone to accommodate a significant proportion of Kent's growth until 2026. The Ashford growth area, which uses the same conventional lines as Maidstone, benefits from significant capacity improvement of high speed services while also retaining all its existing conventional services.

In comparison, the current proposed IKF timetable deletes conventional services in Maidstone while adding no new high speed services. There is an increasing rail market at Maidstone, which must not be ignored. Any spare capacity must be routed to Maidstone to maintain a coordinated approach to the Government's regional spatial strategy, and to maintain the ongoing viability of the town.

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<sup>3</sup> Maidstone Town Centre Study, Baseline Report 2009