

Maidstone Joint Transportation Board



**17
October
2018**

RAIL SERVICES IN MAIDSTONE

Decision Making Authority	Kent County Council
Lead Director	Barbara Cooper
Lead Head of Service	Tim Read
Lead Officer and Report Author	Stephen Gasche
Wards and County Divisions affected	All Maidstone County Divisions
Which Member(s) requested this report?	Councillor Bird and Councillor Chittenden

This report makes the following recommendations:

That the Rail Services in Maidstone report be noted.

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Maidstone Joint Transportation Board	17 October 2018

RAIL SERVICES IN MAIDSTONE

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

- 1.1 Councillor Bird and Councillor Chittenden requested a report to update members on the current position of the Thameslink, High Speed and other rail services in Maidstone.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report has been prepared to inform members of the current position in relation to the present and proposed rail services in Maidstone. The report explains the delay to the Thameslink service and the measures taken to ensure its delivery; the options presented for an alternative to the High Speed service and the strong opposition locally to any diminution of this service; and the present position of other rail routes serving the county town.

3. THAMESLINK SERVICE TO MAIDSTONE EAST

- 3.1 The Rail Delivery Group (which is the rail industry's trade body representing the train operating companies and Network Rail) indicated earlier this year that many of the principal timetable changes planned for December 2018 would be deferred. While recognising the need for the rail industry to take stock given the serious issues which caused the disruption to the delivery of the extensive changes planned for May 2018, the very real concern for all local authorities and rail users in Kent is that this decision could have an impact on the planned delivery of each remaining stage of the Thameslink programme.
- 3.2 The original date proposed for the Thameslink service to Maidstone East was January 2018, although this was initially to have been a peak-only service. There have subsequently been three deferrals to its introduction: first, to May 2018, but with the benefit of an all-day service on Monday to Saturday; second, to December 2018; and third, to December 2019 as part of a scaling back of the delivery schedule for the whole Thameslink programme.
- 3.3 Any further delay to the delivery of the promised Thameslink service to Maidstone East would be completely unacceptable, as many residents and businesses have made location decisions based on earlier information about the planned date of the Thameslink service on this route. Similarly, passengers from Sevenoaks, Bat & Ball, Otford, Eynsford, Shoreham and Swanley are now seriously inconvenienced by the termination of their service at Blackfriars for a planned period of one year, from May 2018 to May 2019, and would be equally concerned at any extension to this temporary measure.

- 3.4 The Cabinet Member for Transport at Kent County Council therefore wrote in July 2018 to Jo Johnson MP, the Minister of State responsible for rail services at the Department for Transport (DfT), urging him to consider the adverse impact on Kent's rail passengers and the local economy of any further deferral of the Thameslink programme in Kent beyond the current expectations. A reply from the minister is still awaited.
- 3.5 Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council both expect the current timetable for Thameslink services in mid and west Kent to be adhered to, i.e. the resumption of the through service north of Blackfriars on the route from Sevenoaks via Bat & Ball in May 2019, and the introduction of the new service to Cambridge from Maidstone East in December 2019.

4. HIGH SPEED SERVICE TO MAIDSTONE WEST

- 4.1 High Speed services to Maidstone West have been operated by Southeastern for several years and are now an established part of the rail network serving Kent's county town. The service provides three journeys each way with the peak flow, with one counter-peak journey in each direction.
- 4.2 An additional stop has been added to serve the new housing growth at Snodland, which has been well patronised by commuters. While the three peak services are not generally full after leaving Maidstone West and Snodland, passengers are usually standing from either Strood or Gravesend.
- 4.3 The DfT proposed an alternative option for franchise bidders in the DfT's Invitation to Tender (ITT) Train Service Requirement (TSR). This would have replaced the existing High Speed service to Maidstone West with a service between there and Abbey Wood, connecting with the new Elizabeth Line. The DfT's ITT TSR also reduced the minimum requirement for High Speed services from three to two in each peak period, but it would be for franchise bidders to demonstrate that they would still operate the current level of service if they chose to propose this in their franchise submissions.
- 4.4 There has been almost universal condemnation of both the DfT's alternative options, with a strong preference expressed for the existing service to be retained, and preferably enhanced. Kent County Council will continue to make the case to the DfT for, at the very least, the retention of the existing level of High Speed service in the new franchise. Once the new franchise operator is announced the Council will meet with the new operator to express the concern of all service users that there should be no diminution in the level of High Speed service to Maidstone West.

5. OTHER RAIL ROUTES SERVING MAIDSTONE

- 5.1 The existing level of service to Victoria will be retained in the new South Eastern franchise. This level of service is required in the TSR and will not be reduced when the Thameslink service commences on this route. The existing peak services to Blackfriars will however be subsumed into the new Thameslink service, as these peak workings were only retained in the current timetable due to the delay in the delivery of the Thameslink service.
- 5.2 Following intervention from Kent County Council, the DfT supported the bid from Southeastern to receive cascaded rolling-stock from Thameslink. This has resulted in the double benefit of virtually all services on the Maidstone East line being operated with Mainline trains, and other routes receiving additional carriages to strengthen trains as required.
- 5.3 The Medway Valley line service, which operates from Strood to Tonbridge via Maidstone West, is to be enhanced in the new South Eastern franchise. The DfT's TSR requires the franchise operator to increase the frequency to half-hourly all day throughout the whole route on Monday to Saturday, with a further requirement that every train which can be allocated a path beyond Paddock Wood is operated as far as Tonbridge. This will represent a significant uplift in this line's service, and follows strong representation from the Kent Community Rail Partnership, supported by all the local authorities along the route.

6. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 To approve and note the report.