

REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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KENT (RAIL) ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY CONSULTATION

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Summary

This report seeks to outline the Kent Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) recently published for consultation by Network Rail and to suggest issues which may be considered by Cabinet for inclusion in the response to the consultation.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The aim to see improved train services for Medway is included in the Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP).
- 1.2 The main budgetary impact of this report falls on the railway industry. If there are budget impacts for the Council in due course, these will be considered through the normal budget-setting processes.
- 1.3 There are no Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets specifically related to the provision of rail services as this is an area where local authorities have very little direct control. However, there are two national indicators which consider access by public transport. These are:-

NI 175 – Access to services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling, and

NI176 – Working age people with access to employment by public transport (and other specified modes).

Medway's Local Strategic Partnership has chosen to set a target for NI175. This requires that 100% of new residential units in developments of 50 or more are accessible by a public transport service (located within 500 metres of the development) that provide

links with a frequency of 30 minutes or better to a town centre in Medway at peak times.

- 1.4 The levels of rail service which are expected to be provided will meet this requirement for any developments within the specified distance of a rail station.

2. Background

- 2.1 Network Rail are required, periodically to produce a Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) for all parts of the network. The objective of the RUS process is:-

“To make effective and efficient use and development of the route capacity available, consistent with the funding that is, or is reasonably likely to become, available during the period of the route utilisation strategy and with the licence holder’s performance of the duty.”

- 2.2 These strategies are co-ordinated by Network Rail, but all parts of the railway industry contribute to their creation. They review the current situation as a baseline and consider future developments and the ability of the network to meet the future demand and performance needs. If gaps are identified, they then propose actions and interventions which might be taken to overcome these gaps which are consistent with funding and the RUS timescale.

- 2.3 Specific issues that might be considered include:-

- Capacity
- Pattern of service
- Drivers for passenger growth
- Drivers for freight growth
- Performance issues
- How to best serve low use stations
- The impact on station passenger capacity
- Options for sustainable maintenance access
- Rolling stock issues

- 2.4 The Kent RUS covers the “main-line network” in the county and the links towards London. It does not specifically cover the high speed line but does have an interest in the domestic services which use this route. The inner London lines, including the route between Strood and London via Gravesend have previously been considered in the established South London RUS, although inevitably there is some degree of overlap between these two reviews.

- 2.5 The Kent RUS is looking specifically at the needs of the network for the next 10 years, and more generally for a further 30 years. The formal strategy will be published early in 2010.

- 2.6 The full consultation document is available on the Network Rail website at the following address:-

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

Responses are due by 23 July 2009.

- 2.7 The RUS assumes that a number of planned improvement schemes will be introduced. These include the introduction of the domestic services on the high speed line from December 2009, and the provision of 12 car platforms at Strood and Rochester as proposed in the South London RUS. The Kent RUS also assumes the implementation of three other major rail projects:-
- a East Kent Resignalling which will renew the signalling from Rochester through to the Kent Coast, and give the opportunity to explore small-scale capacity and performance enhancements. There are clearly efficiencies if all track and signalling work can be carried out at the same time at a particular location. It is said that this resignalling will be done by 2014 but this is not yet confirmed.
 - b Crossrail – which will provide an east-west rail service across London from Stratford to Paddington linking in with services to Reading and Heathrow in the west and Shenfield and Abbey Wood (with connections to the North Kent Line) in the east.
 - c Thameslink – which will enhance the north-south link across London between St Pancras and Blackfriars/London Bridge to run at 24 trains per hour over this corridor from 2015. This, in turn, brings the opportunity to run trains over this link from a wide range of destinations to the north and south of London. This service will share tracks with Kent services at a number of places which can bring capacity pressures but also interchange opportunities for the passengers. Between 2012 and 2015, the construction work for this project in the London Bridge area will temporarily restrict the number of trains which can be provided in this critical area.

3. Fares

- 3.1 Fares are not an issue for the RUS, however, they are an area of concern for many people. The franchise requires that fares are increased by RPI + 3% for a number of years on the Southeastern franchise compared with RPI + 1% on other routes elsewhere. This is a Department for Transport requirement and reflects the fact that the subsidy being paid to Southeastern reduces progressively over the period of the franchise.

- 3.2 In addition, the franchise allows the train operator to levy a premium fare for the high speed services to and from London. For Medway this is specified as 30% of the cost of a journey between Gravesend and London reflecting the fact that the high speed line is only used from Ebbsfleet. Taking Chatham to London fares as an example, this would add £2.75 to a £14.00 single ticket, £5.40 to a £26.20 peak day return and £2.80 to a £14.00 off-peak day return.
- 3.3 At the time of writing this report it is not known whether or not premium fares will be applied at this level when these new services are introduced in December 2009.
- 3.4 The Council has expressed concern to the railway authorities – and will continue to do so when the opportunity arises - that these high levels of fare increase will impose an unfair burden upon rail users in the Kent area.

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1 The attached appendix summarises the RUS. In particular it shows the gaps which have been identified and the actions to deal with these which have been considered as they relate to the Medway area.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 This report is to consider the Council's response to a consultation being carried out by another organisation – Network Rail. The consideration at this meeting is to help inform Cabinet of the views of this committee so that these can be taken into account when it formally agrees the response to Network Rail.

6. Risk Management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Failure to respond to the consultation by Members would lessen the impact of the concerns and comments of the council.	Network Rail will not take account of Medway's needs in the future.	Members consider the consultation proposals and respond accordingly.

7. Financial and legal implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications for the Council arising from this report.

7.2 The main financial implications of this report fall on the railway industry. However, some of the suggestions put forward will be for Councils to implement. Any new projects which might be agreed following the RUS will be considered through the Council's normal decision-making and budget setting processes.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 It is recommended that the committee encourages the Cabinet to include the following areas of concern in its response to the RUS:-
- a) disappointment at the very limited proposals to increase capacity on the classic rail network, and in particular the capacity constraints in the Medway area which appear to be discouraging the running of additional trains and services;
 - b) encourage retention of fast services between Medway and Cannon Street to continue to offer direct access into the City of London for people working there;
 - c) ensure that an appropriate priority and capacity is given to fast train services on the existing lines;
 - d) encourage the provision of turnback facilities further to the east to allow terminating trains to serve fully the Medway area;
 - e) encourage the speedy introduction of the Grain line enhancements to enable improvements to the freight services in this area and to minimise the risk of delays to passenger services on the main line;
 - f) encourage the development of a rail service to Gatwick Airport via the Medway Valley Line.

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Background papers

Kent Route Utilisation Strategy – Draft for Consultation published by Network Rail, together with various background documents published on the Network Rail website:

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