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Ask for: Anna Taylor
Date: 8 February 2021

Dear Member

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WEDNESDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2021

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Wednesday, 10 February 2021 meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, the following written submissions relating to the Kent Rail Strategy 2021 call-in. These were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda Item No

B1 Decision 21/00011 - Kent Rail Strategy 2021 (Pages 1 - 16)

1. Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association **Pages 1-2**
2. West Malling Parish Council to KCC **Page 3**
3. Statement from Maidstone Borough Council **Page 5**
4. Question to the Leader, Sir Paul Carter, by Ian Chittenden at County Council meeting on 15 March 2018 and Sir Paul's response. **Page 7**
5. Letter from the Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling, dated 13 October 2018 reaffirming commitment to provide 2 hourly Thameslink service from Maidstone East to City of London with journey times comparable to High Speed services from Maidstone West (60 minutes). **Pages 9 - 10**
6. Article published by Helen Grant, MP for Maidstone & The Weald, on 15 December 2020 regarding recent meeting with Rail Minister, also attended by Michael Payne and the Leader of Maidstone BC, Cllr. Martin Cox. **Pages 11 - 12**
7. Email Correspondence between Michael Payne and Roger Johnson, Vice Chair of Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association **Pages 13 - 16**

Yours sincerely

Benjamin Watts
General Counsel

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SEVENOAKS RAIL TRAVELLERS ASSOCIATION (www.srta.org.uk)**Maidstone East – Does the DfT’s Proposal deliver for Kent? An Assessment for KCC.***Roger Johnson and Tony Clayton***What is the basis for assessment?**

The purpose of this note is to provide a basis to assess the forthcoming DfT proposal to deliver the Thameslink service from Maidstone East via Otford and Swanley to the City and beyond. There are currently two fast trains each day from Maidstone East to Blackfriars (leaving at 06.01 and 06.54). These demonstrate timings that are successfully delivered daily.

The new service promised for 2018, via London Bridge and Thameslink, offered much more than this. It created a service running twice an hour throughout the day, to make travel to work fast and convenient. It provided good connections at Otford and Swanley to make access to London fast and easy from Bat & Ball in north Sevenoaks, and to give good connections from and to Eynsford and Shoreham, both for commuters and for tourism development. Perhaps most important was the rapid access it gave to the Jubilee Line (at London Bridge), to Crossrail (at Farringdon) and to mainline services from St Pancras International .

Taken together these elements of the new service were to connect Maidstone and West Kent to London in ways which cater for the needs of new developments at Borough Green and Kings Hill, reducing the need to drive to Sevenoaks, and giving much better connectivity across London’s labour market. In addition, it delivered the only option identified in Network Rail’s Kent Route Study for additional capacity from West Kent to London in the next decade.

Our test in this assessment is how far DfT’s proposal delivers the promise.

What is DfT likely to be offering?

We do not have details of DfT’s proposed new service. What we do know is that it will use the Catford Loop, which is mainly occupied by slow trains through the day, and so is unlikely to run fast. Also, trains entering Blackfriars from the Catford Loop go to the terminal platforms in the station. They cannot run through the Thameslink core to Farringdon and St Pancras International.

This routing means that the service cannot pass through London Bridge to link up with the Jubilee Line for Docklands. Neither can it make the very valuable links to Crossrail, or to mainline services heading north from London.

We also understand that the trains which were originally expected to deliver the fast Maidstone East service - built to take both third rail and overhead electric supply - have been diverted to the slow all stations service from Rainham, Dartford and Greenwich into London Bridge, Blackfriars and the Thameslink core. It is not clear that the trains available to DfT for their current proposal will have the necessary power supply capability to run from Kent through the Thameslink core

Assessment of what is likely to be offered

The table compares actual, offered and potential timings. Then we summarise the benefits offered to the community by the original proposal as a checklist to assess any new proposal.

The table below shows the May 2018 service (col 1), the two current services (col 2), possible DfT proposal (col 3) and a “worst case” service calling at all stations (col 4). The journey time for each option is given in the bottom row of the table.

	1	2		3	4
	Original Thameslink Fast Proposal	Timings of the CURRENT two fast services (Maidstone East – London)		Possible DfT proposal	All stations stopping timings
	Proposed May 2018 Timetable ¹	Fastest current service²	Current AM peak service³	Estimate ⁴	Existing slow service timings ⁵
Maidstone East	xx.00	xx.00	xx.00	xx.00	xx.00
Barming			xx.05		xx.05
East Malling			xx.08		xx.08
West Malling	xx.07	xx.07	xx.11	xx.07	xx.11
Borough Green	xx.14	xx.14	xx.18	xx.14	xx.18
Kemsing			xx.22		xx.22
Otford	xx.22	xx.22	xx.28	xx.22	xx.28
Swanley	xx.31	xx.31	xx.38	xx.31	xx.40
London Bridge	xx.55				
Bromley South		xx.42	xx.49	xx.42	xx.52
Blackfriars	xx.01 (+1)	xx.07 (+1)	xx.13 (+1)	xx.18 (+1)	xx.28 (+1)
Farringdon	xx.06 (+1)				
St Pancras International	xx.10 (+1)				
Time – MDE-BFR	1.01	1.07	1.13	1.18	1.28

Notes:

1. Timing in the May 2018 Thameslink timetable published in June 2017
- 2.
3. 06.01 service from Maidstone East – Blackfriars
4. 06.54 service from Maidstone East – Blackfriars
5. Timings assume semi-fast to Bromley South and all stations thereafter
6. Timings for an all stations service based on existing timetables 06.22 from MDE, 08.52 from SEV changing at Otford

Does the DfT proposal deliver real gains to rail travellers?

1. Does the service offer a start to close of business service every 30 minutes Monday to Saturday?
2. Is the service fast enough to attract commuters away from the SE mainline and hence fulfil Network Rail's objective of exploiting the only opportunity to increase peak capacity across west and mid Kent?
3. Are timings fast enough to deter environmentally damaging railheading along country roads to reach the SE mainline and other services?
4. Will the new service provide fast access to London from Bat & Ball and for Darent Valley line stations via well timed same platform changes at Swanley?
5. Does it provide access to Heathrow and Docklands with just one change (by changing to Crossrail at Farringdon)?

Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association believe that the indicative DfT proposal fails on all criteria except the first.

KCC should not accept this as an interim service, except on the conditions that there are clear commitments: 1) to order the trains needed for the fast service; 2) to complete any outstanding infrastructure work; 3) that paths through Thameslink Core must be protected until this is done.



WEST MALLING PARISH COUNCIL

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website: www.westmallingpc.org

Clerk to the Parish Council: Claire Christmas

Kent County Council
County Hall
Maidstone
ME14 1XG

8th February 2021

FAO the Scrutiny Committee.

Dear Sir,

We refer to the publication of Kent County Council's *Kent Rail Strategy 2021*.

Following a meeting of the Parish Council on Monday 1 February 2021, we write to express disappointment that the strategy does not push more strongly for the introduction of the services to St Pancras and beyond as originally promised. The failure to include this in the *Summary of Recommended Actions* on page 61 is unacceptable.

It is, however, our fervent hope that the comments made in paragraphs 4.14 and 4.15, and the service patterns set out in table 11 on page 42, are vigorously lobbied for as *an absolute minimum*. It is imperative that West Malling is included in the completion of the whole Thameslink service programme – many residents have moved to the area to avail themselves of the promised services and the continued delay will only put more pressure on existing services, and may ultimately lead to residents moving away. Although members would prefer to see services extended to St Pancras and beyond, as originally promised, at the very least all-day services *must* be introduced to Blackfriars once normal service levels are restored post-lockdown, and no later than the December 2021 timetable introduction. This is even more essential with the suspension of Eurostar services from Ebbsfleet and Ashford until at least 2022, where residents have to travel to St Pancras first.

We welcome the acknowledgement in paragraph 7.3 that West Malling is a high-growth area, and thus the failure of the *Strategy* to not push more forcefully for the full introduction of Thameslink services through central London is both puzzling and disappointing.

Although we welcome much in the report, the continued failure to introduce the promised Maidstone East to Cambridge services does much to diminish any benefit to the residents of West Malling and surrounding towns and villages, and urge the Council to reconsider its strategy to push more vigorously for the introduction of the originally promised services.

Finally we look forward to receiving more information regarding the Maidstone East Line CRP as set out in paragraph 9.15 since communication and interaction with the communities it is supposed to represent appears to have been lacking to date.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Claire Christmas
Clerk to West Malling Parish Council

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"Maidstone Borough Council has been in correspondence with KCC's Rail Project Manager following the concern expressed in the Kent Rail Freight Strategy about Thameslink Services from Maidstone. Rail industry advisors to KCC have indicated that the introduction of Thameslink services - a fast, frequent service to London Bridge and onwards though London to Cambridge - is now unlikely. The Rail Industry appears very concerned that taking trains from 20 trains per hour (tph) to 24tph through the core will not provide them enough resilience to manage the timetable effectively. Instead, a proposal is being developed for a slow service from Maidstone East that will terminate at Blackfriars. Whilst these will be half hourly Monday to Saturday, journey times will be way over the hour. This is not the transformative service we have been promised for years.

There may be a solution however. A faster service from Maidstone could be achieved if a service going through Sevenoaks, that has been suspended since 2018, is not resumed as planned. This service currently terminates at Blackfriars but would continue through the core if resumed. This would take the trains going through the core up to 22 tph. If Thameslink Services from Maidstone could use these 2tph slots, trains could travel a different route which would reduce journey time to under an hour. The Sevenoaks service in question is actually very slow, and is not regarded as a primary route from Sevenoaks to London. It calls at all stations via the Catford Loop, whereas the Maidstone service will be much faster and should be non-stop from Bromley South to Elephant & Castle. Please see attached email exchange explaining the above point.

A choice appears to have been made here by the Rail Industry (DfT primarily) to the detriment of Maidstone. The author of the Kent Rail Strategy believes that DfT will resist this change in favour of reinstating the suspended service so has not recommended it as a course of action. Why the DfT want to reinstate the service is not clear. There may be other issues that MBC and KCC are not aware of, but with the information available to MBC, we think DfT should be pressed to explain why this can't happen and what can be done to overcome, any perceived barriers. The County Town deserves better services and this seems a small compromise on the Network that would make it achievable."

Thank you

John Foster

Head of Regeneration and Economic Development

Maidstone Borough Council, King Street, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6JQ

W www.maidstone.gov.uk

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COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 15 March 2018

Question by Ian Chittenden to Paul Carter,
Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Traded Services & Health Reform

In November, the Secretary of State for Transport authorised a further one-year delay to the introduction of the long-awaited Thameslink rail service to Maidstone. He is now threatening to reduce the number of high-speed trains from Maidstone to London St Pancras or possibly replace them altogether with a stopping service to Abbey Wood. Does the Leader agree that the Department for Transport is failing to recognise that good rail links are vital for Maidstone's residents and businesses and what steps is he taking to ensure that the Secretary of State puts Kent's County Town back on the rail map?

Answer

I can assure Mr Chittenden that we have expressed our very strong concerns about the proposed change to the delivery of the Thameslink services in Kent. We have made clear that it is unacceptable that a "double-whammy" has been dealt to rail passengers in mid-Kent, with the new Maidstone East Thameslink service deferred by one year from December 2018 to December 2019 at the same time that the existing Thameslink service via Bat & Ball is being curtailed at Blackfriars for one year from May 2018 to May 2019. I wrote to the Minister with responsibility for rail on 14 December expressing Kent County Council's grave concern about the proposal to delay the introduction of Thameslink services to Maidstone until December 2019, and emphasised that this decision would blight businesses and residents throughout mid-Kent.

Mike Whiting and our officers have also made it clear, both to the Department for Transport and to the companies bidding for the new South Eastern franchise, that the proposed option to replace the High Speed service between Maidstone West and London St Pancras with a much slower service to Abbey Wood (where it could connect with the new Elizabeth Line service) is completely unacceptable. Such a proposal, which is considered in the options in the Train Service Requirement for the new franchise published by the Department for Transport, would result in a much slower and circuitous journey for Maidstone's rail passengers, and as such it should be rejected as an option for the new franchise.

Kent County Council will continue to work with the Department for Transport, and with the new franchise bidder when the award is announced later this year, to ensure that both rail routes serving Maidstone continue to provide the highest level of service, retaining High Speed from the West station and introducing Thameslink from the East station as soon as operationally possible.

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Department
for Transport

From the Secretary of State
The Rt. Hon. Chris Grayling

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0300 330 3000
E-Mail: chris.grayling@dft.gov.uk

Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

Our Ref: MC/236672

Rob Bird
Kent County Council
Liberal Democrat Group
C/P Members Desk
County Hall
Maidstone
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ME14 1XQ

13 October 2018

Thank you for your letter of 3 September, about the delay to the opening of the Crossrail central section and the South Eastern franchise competition's specification for High Speed services from Maidstone.

I understand your concerns over the delay to the opening of Crossrail's central section and I appreciate how important this and High Speed services are to passengers travelling from Maidstone. I share your disappointment over the delay to the opening of the Crossrail central section. As you know, Crossrail Limited determined that a revised schedule is needed to complete the final infrastructure and extensive testing required to ensure the Elizabeth line opens as a safe and reliable railway.

The safety of passengers and staff and reliability of services is the overriding priority and we accept Crossrail Limited's assessment that more time is needed to fully test the railway before passenger operations can commence. I remain confident that Crossrail will deliver a great improvement to passengers' journeys once it is fully operational.

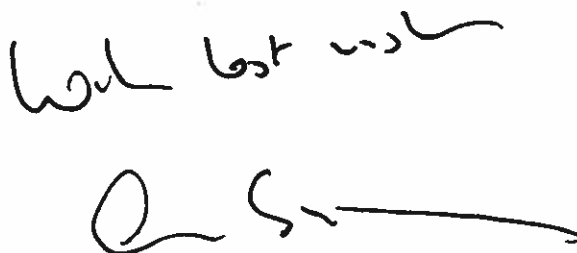
In regard to services from Maidstone stations in the specification for the South Eastern franchise competition, the winning bidder must run at least two peak trains between Maidstone West and London St Pancras – however they are urged to introduce more services, as well as bring in other benefits such as shorter journey times. From December 2019, new Thameslink services between Maidstone East and Cambridge will also provide an extra two trains per hour in each direction all day.

Additionally, the commencement of the Thameslink route in December 2019 will provide all day connectivity between Maidstone, the City and St Pancras. Journey times to the City are expected to be comparable to those using the High Speed service today.

You may be reassured to know that the specification makes clear that bidders must continue to provide a minimum of two High Speed services from Maidstone West in the morning and evening peak. Bidders are also provided with the option to run services to Abbey Wood (to connect with Crossrail) as an alternative to running the two High Speed services in the morning and evening peaks.

This has the potential to offer an alternative option for passengers to complement Thameslink services from Maidstone. It is envisaged this option will provide attractive journey times to locations such as Canary Wharf. However bidders proposing this would need to demonstrate the clear benefit to passengers over the High Speed service.

I hope this reply is helpful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Grayling', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT

Minister will publish date for Introduction of Long Overdue Train Service in New Year

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Tuesday, 15 December, 2020



At a roundtable meeting convened by Maidstone & The Weald MP Helen Grant on Monday 7th December, the Minister of State for Rail pledged to bring forward a reliable date for the delivery of the long-awaited City Thameslink Service from Maidstone East in early 2021.

The roundtable was attended by representatives from Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council and local businesses. All in attendance explained to Minister Chris Heaton Harris how the service is so vital to Maidstone, with its potential to increase business investment, facilitate economic growth and provide improvements for Maidstone's many commuters.

Mr Heaton Harris said that he wanted to provide people and businesses in Maidstone with a date for delivery which they could trust. He explained that he therefore planned to convene a meeting between Thameslink, Network Rail and Department for Transport officials to thrash out the issues and agree a date by which the trains can start to run. He also plans to agree 'staging posts' with industry stakeholders which will allow all those involved to track progress towards the service being implemented.

Helen Grant said, ‘I very much welcome this commitment from the Minister. Frankly, commuters and businesses in Maidstone have had enough of waiting for this long overdue service now. We all know that it will be a game changer for the County Town of Kent, unlocking substantial business investment and providing much needed new options for commuters.

I would urge the Minister to bring forward a date for delivery as soon as he possibly can and then bang a few heads together to ensure that, this time, everybody sticks to it.’

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Email Correspondence between Michael Payne and Roger Johnson, Vice Chair of Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association

From: GETPriorityEnquiries@kent.gov.uk <GETPriorityEnquiries@kent.gov.uk>

Sent: 22 January 2021 14:59

To:

Subject: RE: Our ref 18633993 Maidstone East Fast Rail service

[Sent on behalf of Michael Payne](#)

Dear Roger

Thank you for your letter of 18 December concerning the urgency surrounding the proposed Thameslink service between Maidstone East and the City. My colleagues and I completely support the need for this new service, which, as you know, has been the subject of numerous ministerial meetings and letters between members, officers and colleagues from other authorities for several years.

Firstly, I want to reassure you of the importance that Kent County Council (KCC) attributes to this new service in our new Kent Rail Strategy 2021, to which your own association has provided valuable input. In the section on 'Key Drivers of Demand for Rail Services in Kent', the strategy clearly supports the need for this new service:

"Thameslink to Maidstone East

4.14 The proposed Thameslink service to Maidstone East has now been postponed on four occasions. It was originally due to commence in January 2018, and has since been delayed to May 2018, then to December 2018, then to December 2019, and recently to an unspecified date in the future. KCC's Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport, and all his recent predecessors, have all written to the Rail Minister expressing the serious concerns of residents and businesses along the proposed route, many of whom have already made location decisions based on the proposed service.

4.15 This strategy therefore calls again on the Rail Minister to approve the operation of this last leg of the whole Thameslink service programme, with at the very least an all-day service between the county town and Blackfriars if there remains disquiet about operating the full 24 trains per hour (tph) service level through the central Thameslink core between Blackfriars and St Pancras. This would provide a regular Thameslink service every 30 minutes over its line of route."

It is perfectly true that the rail strategy states "service to be confirmed" in table 11 where the service proposals for Thameslink in Kent are set out, but that is only because this is the case at present. This does not in any way diminish KCC's commitment to its introduction.

Secondly, while the original proposal was indeed for two trains per hour (tph) all day on Monday to Saturday from Maidstone East to Cambridge via the central core stations of Blackfriars, City Thameslink, Farringdon and St Pancras, it does now appear that this objective – while still remaining the ultimate goal for this service - is

unlikely to be realised in the short term. Kent County Council's understanding, from our contacts within the rail industry, is that the service would initially operate via Bromley South, the Catford Loop and Elephant & Castle rather than via the faster route to London Bridge.

There are apparently two principal reasons for this disappointing but more likely outcome:

- there is concern about the capacity of the Mainline (Chislehurst Junction - London Bridge section) to accommodate an extra 2tph without affecting resilience;
- more significantly, there is greater concern about the capacity of the central core section of the Thameslink route to accommodate the original proposal for 24tph, which would mean the Maidstone East service terminating in the bay platforms at Blackfriars.

To further complicate matters, following the re-ordering of the track layout as part of the Thameslink project, these platforms (3 & 4) can only be accessed from the Elephant & Castle route and not from London Bridge. Therefore, for all these reasons, it does now appear that we are looking at an initial service operating between Maidstone East and Blackfriars.

While this is extremely disappointing when compared with the original proposal, KCC's view is that it would be better to support this interim proposal than to reject it so as to hold out for the full service, risking in the process losing the whole project and resulting in no additional service at all. It is, as I am sure you will agree, an incredibly complex and frustrating situation, but at least Blackfriars would give Maidstone and the other mid-Kent stations a direct service to the City once again, offering relief to Mainline stations such as Sevenoaks by reducing rail-heading from mid-Kent stations to access City trains.

Thirdly, I agree that the readiness of the new maintenance and stabling sidings at Ashford, and also of the rolling-stock, are essential elements in the provision of the new service. The facilities at Ashford are developing at pace, with the original Bombardier depot on Chart Road now demolished and in its place new sidings being provided for Southeastern's Mainline stock, adjacent to the Charing Cross route on which these trains operate. This will in turn release sufficient capacity on the north-eastern side of the station, adjacent to the separate Hitachi depot, for the new rolling-stock for the Thameslink service to be stabled overnight and to receive maintenance as required. This will work well operationally, providing a short run into Ashford station for commencement and termination of each day's service.

Of more worrying concern is indeed the availability of that rolling-stock, and it might be that the trains provided for the new service are just as new as the Thameslink stock but from a separate provider. The overriding issue is of course that there is sufficient stock for at least the provision of 2tph all day between Maidstone East and Blackfriars, with early up and late down workings to and from Ashford.

Fourthly, while you are quite right to raise concerns about proposals from other parties that the paths for the new service might be taken over by other routes from Brighton and Gatwick, I can reassure you that KCC has never supported such a proposal, and if there were ever to be such a suggested reallocation of paths there

would be unanimous objection from MPs and authorities across mid-Kent. In any event, there would be the same issue of reticence within the rail industry to go to the full 24tph through the central core between Blackfriars and St Pancras, regardless of the stations from which the additional trains had emanated.

In summary please be assured of KCC's total support for the new Thameslink service between Maidstone East and the City, even if there has to be compromise on the initial service, while holding the Government to account for the eventual extension of that service through the central core and on to Cambridge.

Thank you once again for writing to me about this important issue, and I hope that, although a very lengthy reply, I have at least assuaged you of your concerns about this Council's commitment to the Thameslink service linking Maidstone East to the City of London.

Yours sincerely

Michael Payne
Member for Tonbridge
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
Kent County Council

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From: Michael Payne - MEM <Michael.Payne@kent.gov.uk>
Sent: 18 December 2020 17:06
To: Roger Johnson
Cc: Roger Gough - MEM <Roger.Gough@kent.gov.uk>; GET Priority Enquiries - GT <GETPriorityEnquiries@kent.gov.uk>
Subject: FW: Maidstone East Fast Rail service

Dear Roger

Thank you for taking the time and trouble to both attend Monday's meeting and also to write to both Roger Gough and me. Despite the technical issues I think you will have seen the fact that Kent County Council and both the two MPs present, Tom Tugendhat and Laura Trott, support the reintroduction of a fast service to the city from Maidstone in the form of Thameslink. I had already had a previous meeting to that effect the week before with Helen Grant MP and the Minister. I will ask that the specific points you raise in your letters are investigated by officers for appropriate response in the New Year.

Yours sincerely
Michael

Michael.Payne@kent.gov.uk
County Member for Tonbridge
Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport

Tel: 03000 419986

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The information you have provided will be held and used by me to respond to your enquiry as a Kent County Council Elected Member. I may share your information with relevant KCC departments, District/Town Councillors, other public authorities and MPs to provide a response to your query. I rely upon the legal bases of 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' and 'processing is necessary for reasons of substantial public interest' (elected representative responding to requests). Your information will be held no longer than is necessary – after this period, it will be securely destroyed. For more information please visit www.kent.gov.uk/privacy

From: Roger Johnson

Sent: 18 December 2020 16:41

To: Michael Payne - MEM <Michael.Payne@kent.gov.uk>

Subject: Maidstone East Fast Rail service

Dear Cllr Payne

I attach a letter to you on behalf of the Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association following the public meeting with the Minister on Monday this week. We are very concerned that there is a serious risk that without vigorous intervention by all stakeholders this unique opportunity to increase peak capacity from west Kent will be lost. You will be aware that Network Rail's recent Kent Route Study said that the Maidstone East service offered the only option to expand services from west Kent. If this opportunity is lost there is no "Plan B".

WE therefore urge Kent County Council, in line with its recent Kent Rail Strategy 2021, campaign for the delivery of this long awaited service.

For your reference I also attach a letter we sent to Roger Gough following his participation in our virtual AGM in October.

With seasons greetings

Roger Johnson Vice Chair Sevenoaks RTA