

From: **Michael Payne, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment
and Transport**

To: **Cabinet 25/01/21**

Subject: **Kent Rail Strategy 2021**

Key decision: **Affects more than 2 Electoral Divisions**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: **Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee 15/09/20**

Future Pathway of Paper: **None**

Electoral Division: **All divisions**

Summary:

The principal purpose of the Kent Rail Strategy 2021 is to inform the public consultation which will determine the train service specifications in the next South Eastern concession agreement, for the operation of Kent's rail passenger network for at least the next decade.

This strategy therefore sets out in detail Kent County Council's ambitions for the next South Eastern concession:

- To determine the required passenger service levels in each sector of the network: High Speed, Mainline and Metro;
- To determine the requirements for rail infrastructure enhancements to facilitate these levels of passenger service;
- To establish the requirements for new fleets of rolling-stock in each sector to enable these levels of passenger service to operate;
- To improve the provision of passenger station facilities and communications.

The policies set out in the Kent Rail Strategy 2021 also aim to achieve deliverable modal shift of passengers and freight from road to rail, supporting the county's intention to become net-zero by 2050, also thus contributing to a healthier environment.

Recommendation:

Cabinet is asked to adopt the Kent Rail Strategy 2021 as the Council's rail policy, the principal purpose of which will be to inform the rail service specification in the next South Eastern concession agreement.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The principal purpose of the Kent Rail Strategy 2021 is to influence the infrastructure outputs, rolling-stock fleet and rail service specifications which will inform the next South Eastern concession agreement, for the operation of Kent's rail passenger network for at least the next decade.
- 1.2 The Kent Rail Strategy is aligned with national and local transport policies which recognise rail as a key element of Kent County Council's (KCC) transport priorities for the next decade. The Kent Rail Strategy recognises the need to deliver modal shift of passengers and freight from road to rail, supporting efforts to tackle the climate change emergency by reducing carbon emissions.
- 1.3 The COVID-19 pandemic has also accelerated thinking about home working and has demonstrated that with the right technology, home working is a realistic alternative to most office based employment. While this development has significantly affected current demand for rail travel, there is a need to plan ahead for a post-COVID-19 world in which such demand is expected to have returned to near its previous level. The global pandemic must also not diminish the need to plan for medium and long-term significant growth in demand for rail travel in the county, based on the forecast population and housing growth identified in KCC's Growth and Infrastructure Framework.
- 1.4 The draft Kent Rail Strategy 2021 was considered by Members of the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on 15 September 2020, prior to commencement of the strategy's public consultation. Members of the Committee commented on several aspects of the draft rail strategy and:

RESOLVED to endorse the draft Kent Rail Strategy 2021, and the proposals set out in the strategy's summary of recommended actions for public consultation in Autumn 2020, subject to updating the section on Eurostar services to reflect the current situation at Kent stations; the inclusion of a reference to the need for charging points for electric cars at railway station car parks; and the addition of the words 'KCC supports the ongoing efforts of Dover District Council in securing a journey time between St Pancras and Dover Priory of under 60 minutes and their efforts with Network Rail to increase car parking capacity at Dover Priory'.

These amendments have all been incorporated in the final version of the Kent Rail Strategy 2021, which Cabinet Members are asked to endorse.

2. Background and Context for the Kent Rail Strategy 2021

- 2.1 KCC published a Rail Action Plan for Kent in 2011, the principal objective of which was to ensure that the new South Eastern franchise award, then due to commence in April 2014, delivered a rail service for Kent that met the needs of the county's residents, businesses and visitors. The Rail Action Plan set out a proposed passenger service plan which was designed to meet those needs, including the procurement of additional High Speed rolling-stock to meet the forecast growth in demand.
- 2.2 The principal recommendations contained in the 2011 Rail Action Plan informed the detailed response which KCC submitted in 2017 to the Department for Transport's (DfT) public consultation on the then proposed new franchise award. Several of these proposals were well received by the train operating companies bidding for that contract, but the new South Eastern franchise award was subsequently cancelled.
- 2.3 In 2018 DfT then tasked Keith Williams, the former Chief Executive of British Airways, to undertake a comprehensive review of the structure and organisation of the rail industry in Great Britain. KCC responded to the call for evidence which informed the Williams Rail Review and highlighted the failure of the existing franchise system, while acknowledging the improved performance delivered by Kent's primary franchised operator, Southeastern, in recent years. Since then, with the exception of the announcement by the DfT in October 2020 that the franchise system would be replaced with a new system of concessions awarded to train operators, aligned with deeper integration between each train operating company and the regional Network Rail Route, there has been no further information from the DfT about the publication of the Williams Rail Review.
- 2.4 While there remains uncertainty about the future structure of the rail industry, the DfT has recently announced that, following the termination of the temporary Emergency Recovery Measures Agreement with Southeastern, a further Direct Award will be made with the existing operator, commencing on 17 October 2021. This new concession agreement will have a core period of 2 years until 16 October 2023, with the option of further extension periods of up to 4 years, potentially lasting until 16 October 2027. So the next competitive award for a new South Eastern concession agreement will not now commence until October 2023 at the earliest, and potentially not until October 2027. It is therefore timely to prepare a new Kent Rail Strategy 2021 which would replace the 2011 Rail Action Plan for Kent and update the 2017 submission to the DfT consultation. This would ensure that KCC has an up to date, widely consulted policy on the future of rail services in the county, in readiness for any public consultation the DfT may launch in preparation for the next South Eastern competitive concession.
- 2.5 The importance of rail within the overall provision of transport in the county was recognised in KCC's Local Transport Plan (LTP4) published in 2017, which sets out the Council's transport priorities for the period up to 2031. LTP4 highlights the pressures on demand for rail travel and the need for additional capacity on High Speed, Mainline and Metro services in Kent,

which is one of the key priorities for the new South Eastern concession. KCC is also planning to develop a new Local Transport Plan (LTP5) to reflect changes to transport policy as a result of the COVID-19 and climate change emergencies.

- 2.6 The key drivers of increased demand for rail travel in Kent post-COVID-19 are the planned growth in housing and population, as set out in the Kent and Medway Growth and Infrastructure Framework 2018 (GIF). The GIF sets out the forecast growth in population, housing and employment across the county to 2031, together with the infrastructure required across all sectors to support that expansion. The new rail strategy recognises the effect of this anticipated growth post-COVID-19 and the consequent significant increases in demand for rail passenger services during the next decade, and this growth is reflected in the proposals in the draft strategy for enhancements to Kent's passenger rail services and network infrastructure.
- 2.7 This rail strategy also champions the need for a replacement for the Metro fleet and for an increase in the High Speed fleet. The Metro fleet serving West Kent is in urgent need of modern, higher capacity trains offering real benefits for these frequent commuter services, while the High Speed fleet serving North and East Kent is in immediate need of increased capacity to meet the ever increasing demand for these highly successful High Speed services.

3. Public Consultation on the Kent Rail Strategy

- 3.1 A comprehensive public consultation on the draft rail strategy has been undertaken over an eight-week period from 23 September to 17 November 2020. During that time every level of public authority in Kent, other public bodies both in the county and outside Kent, rail travellers' and rail users' groups, representatives from every part of the rail industry, community rail partnerships, representatives of groups with protected characteristics, and individual members of the public were given the opportunity to respond.
- 3.2 There has been a high level of interest in the draft rail strategy with a total of 187 responses, and the separate Consultation Report details these with the corresponding replies. Some of these proposals have been incorporated in the final version of the strategy, while others have been omitted as they did not align with the Council's objectives for the county's rail network. The following changes arising from the public consultation were made to the draft rail strategy:
- (i) Amended status of London Rail, a subsidiary of Transport for London (TfL) (para. 2.11)
 - (ii) Support for contra-peak off-peak fares for leisure travel out of London in peak periods (para. 2.24)
 - (iii) Recognition of Connectivity to Ebbsfleet project as Abbey Wood to Ebbsfleet Connectivity Study (para. 4.10)
 - (iv) The removal of presumed funding support from the London Resort Holding Company for the proposed extension of the Elizabeth Line from Abbey Wood to Ebbsfleet (para. 4.11 & 4.12)

- (v) Addition of new section on school and further education college demand for rail travel (para. 4.16)
- (vi) Updated section on developments at Maidstone East and Swanley stations (para. 5.4 (viii))
- (vii) Addition of new section on proposed Cuxton Chord linking Medway Valley and North Kent Mainline (para. 5.4 (xiii))
- (viii) Updated section on need for stronger commitment in next concession agreement by DfT for extension of 'Access for All' funding (para.5.10) [also referenced in response to EqIA]
- (ix) Updated section on proposed requirement for enlarged High Speed fleet (para. 6.6)
- (x) Updated section on Metro and Mainline service levels reallocating Tunbridge Wells – Charing Cross service from Metro group to Mainline group, following clarification from Southeastern (paras. 7.1, 7.2; tables 3, 5)
- (xi) Updated section to include support for Medway Council's rail project for Hoo Peninsula and detailing collaborative approach to rail policy between Medway Council and KCC (para.7.3)
- (xii) Clarification of peak period fast service between Hastings and London termini via Tunbridge Wells (table 5)
- (xiii) Clarification of need for DfT to agree that TSR for new Direct Award must include station stops at Thanet Parkway once new station is opened (para. 7.15)
- (xiv) Clarification that new Thameslink service to/from Maidstone East will only operate to/from Ashford at start and end of day (table 11)
- (xv) Additional section outlining Network Rail's commitment to new 'First & Last Mile' and 'Mobility as a Service' projects in partnership with Southeastern and KCC (para. 8.8)
- (xvi) Addition of new CRP route between Otford and Ashford via Maidstone East under remit of Kent CRP (para.9.2)
- (xvii) Updated section on Medway Valley line to include need to restore through service to Tonbridge (para. 9.3)
- (xviii) New section outlining project led by Medway Council in partnership with Network Rail to convert freight route between Hoo Junction and Hoo St Werburgh to use by new passenger service, to be funded by Housing Infrastructure Fund (para. 10.10)

3.3 A key element in the consultation process was the annual rail summit on 13 October, held this year for the first time as a webinar. Over 100 participants logged-in to presentations on the rail strategy from KCC; on future service developments by Southeastern; on plans for infrastructure upgrades from Network Rail; and on the ambitions for growth in the use of the High Speed route by HS1. The webinar gave everyone the opportunity to ask questions, and a wide range of questions were answered by members of the panel.

3.4 The rail summit webinar also increased the number of people enquiring about the rail strategy and provided all participants with the opportunity to participate in the public consultation. This resulted in a wider range of consultation responses than would otherwise have been generated, providing a broad base of opinion from across the county.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations proposed in this report.

5. Legal implications

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations proposed in this report.

6. Equalities implications

6.1 The expectation is that the delivery of the proposed outputs and outcomes in the Kent Rail Strategy 2021 would provide a medium level of positive impact for passengers whose mobility is impaired and/or who are elderly, those who may be pregnant or have babies or very young children, and those who are carers. Following strong support from respondents to the public consultation, the section in the EqIA on accessibility for passengers whose mobility is impaired has been strengthened, so that it now seeks commitment from the DfT to increase funding for further investment in 'Access for All' facilities at stations to accelerate delivery of an accessible rail network in Kent.

7. Other corporate implications

7.1 There is a high level of liaison between the KCC Public Transport Team which oversees bus policy and the Rail Project Manager who oversees rail policy, especially in respect of ensuring bus/rail connectivity wherever this is feasible.

7.2 The key recommendations in the rail strategy are also aligned with the following Government and KCC corporate policies:

- Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth without Gridlock 2016 - 2031 [LTP4: KCC, 2017]
- The Kent and Medway Growth and Infrastructure Framework [KCC, 2018]
- The Government's Decarbonisation Strategy [DfT, 2019]
- Transport Strategy for the South East [TfSE, 2019]
- Delivering for Kent: The Economic Impact of HS1 [Steer, 2019]
- The Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy [KCC, 2020]
- Recovery and Renaissance Plan (Economic Recovery Plan for Kent and Medway) [KCC, 2020]
- Local Transport Plan 5: *proposed* [LTP5: KCC]

8. Governance

8.1 The Interim Director of Environment, Planning, and Enforcement will be the main officer responsible via the Officer Scheme of Delegation.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 The principal purpose of the Kent Rail Strategy 2021 is set out in its introductory paragraph: to influence the infrastructure outputs, rolling-stock fleet and rail service specifications which will inform the next South Eastern concession agreement, for the operation of Kent's rail passenger network for at least the next decade.
- 9.2 The essential next step will be to successfully influence the new Train Service Requirement for the new South Eastern concession. This will need political as well as technical support, and the greater the extent to which Kent's political voice is united, the greater will be the success in achieving the goal of a better rail service for all of Kent's residents, businesses and visitors.

10. Recommendation:

Cabinet is asked to adopt the Kent Rail Strategy 2021 as the Council's rail policy, the principal purpose of which will be to inform the rail service specification in the next South Eastern concession agreement.

11. Background Documents

- 11.1 [The following background documents were used in the preparation of the Kent Rail Strategy 2021:](#)
- Business Case for Transmanche Metro (KCC / EU Interreg IV B funded Regions of Connected Knowledge [RoCK], June 2015)
 - Delivering for Kent: The Economic Impact of HS1 (Steer, Sept 2019)
 - Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth without Gridlock 2016-2031 (KCC, April 2017) www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/transport-and-highways-policies/local-transport-plan
 - Rail Action Plan for Kent (KCC, April 2011)
 - Response to the DfT's South Eastern Rail Franchise public consultation (KCC, May 2017)
 - Response to Network Rail's South East Route: Kent Area Route Study public consultation (KCC, June 2017)
 - Response to the Williams Rail Review public consultation (KCC, Jan 2019)
 - South East Route: Kent Area Route Study – Advice for Funders (Network Rail, System Operator, May 2018): <https://cdn.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/South-East-Kent-route-study-print-version.pdf>
 - Transport Strategy for the South East: Executive Summary (Transport for the South East, Oct 2019): <https://transportforthesoutheast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/TfSE-transport-strategy-Summary-Document.pdf>

12. Contact details

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Appendices

- Consultation Report on the draft Kent Rail Strategy (KCC, Jan 2021)
- Equality Analysis / Impact Assessment for draft Kent Rail Strategy 2021 (KCC, Jan 2021)
- Kent Rail Strategy 2021