

"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

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