

From: David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport and Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Growth and Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee – 22 January 2014

Subject: Rail Capacity in Kent to support Economic Growth

Classification: Unrestricted

Electoral Division: All

Summary:

Kent County Council (KCC) adopted its principal rail policy with the publication of the Rail Action Plan for Kent in April 2011. This new rail policy initiative, developed primarily to inform the new franchises for the Southeastern and Thameslink networks, was based on the future needs of the county for a rail network which would have sufficient capacity to support economic growth.

Many of the recommendations set out in the Rail Action Plan have now come to fruition, following three years of negotiations and meetings with the Department for Transport (DfT), the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR), and the rail franchise operators Southeastern Railway (SER) and Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR).

Partly as a direct result of KCC's involvement in the rail service planning process, there will be a significant increase in rail capacity in Kent. The new Southeastern timetable which commences in January 2015 will deliver several of the planned outcomes of the Rail Action Plan for Kent. These are set out in detail in this report.

Recommendation:

The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is asked to note and welcome the report.

1. Introduction

1.1 Kent County Council (KCC) adopted its principal rail policy with the publication of the Rail Action Plan for Kent in April 2011. This new rail policy initiative, developed primarily to inform the new franchises for the Southeastern and Thameslink networks, was based on the future needs of the county for a rail network which would have sufficient capacity to support economic growth.

2. Financial Implications

2.1 KCC did provide revenue support for the initial High Sped peak service to Deal and Sandwich between September 2011 and March 2014, but this revenue

support has now finished and the service has been subsumed, and expanded, into the existing Southeastern Direct Award franchise agreement with the Department for Transport (DfT).

2.2 There are no other financial implications for KCC.

3. Policy Framework

3.1 The Rail Action Plan for Kent (KCC, April 2011) set out the rail policy of the Council as part of the wider transport delivery strategy set out in 'Growth without Gridlock' (December 2010) and the Local Transport Plan 3 (April 2010).

RAIL PLANNING POLICY IN KENT

3.2 The Rail Action Plan for Kent recognised the importance of planning the rail network to support future growth:

- The [Strategic Rail Authority] SRA had recognised the importance of the influence of local authorities in determining the pattern of rail services that were included in the original [Integrated Kent Franchise] IKF [Stakeholder Briefing Document] when bids were invited for the existing franchise:

“The SRA is aware of the aspirations of regional and local authorities in relation to redevelopment and inward investment. It is essential, therefore, that in the design of new railway services such as that arising from the completion of the CTRL [now HS1], full account is taken of plans for future land use and economic activity. The development of a new franchise that can not only provide services on the existing network, but also offer new domestic links between Kent and London on the CTRL, can only be viewed as a major advance in service provision for the whole of the region.”

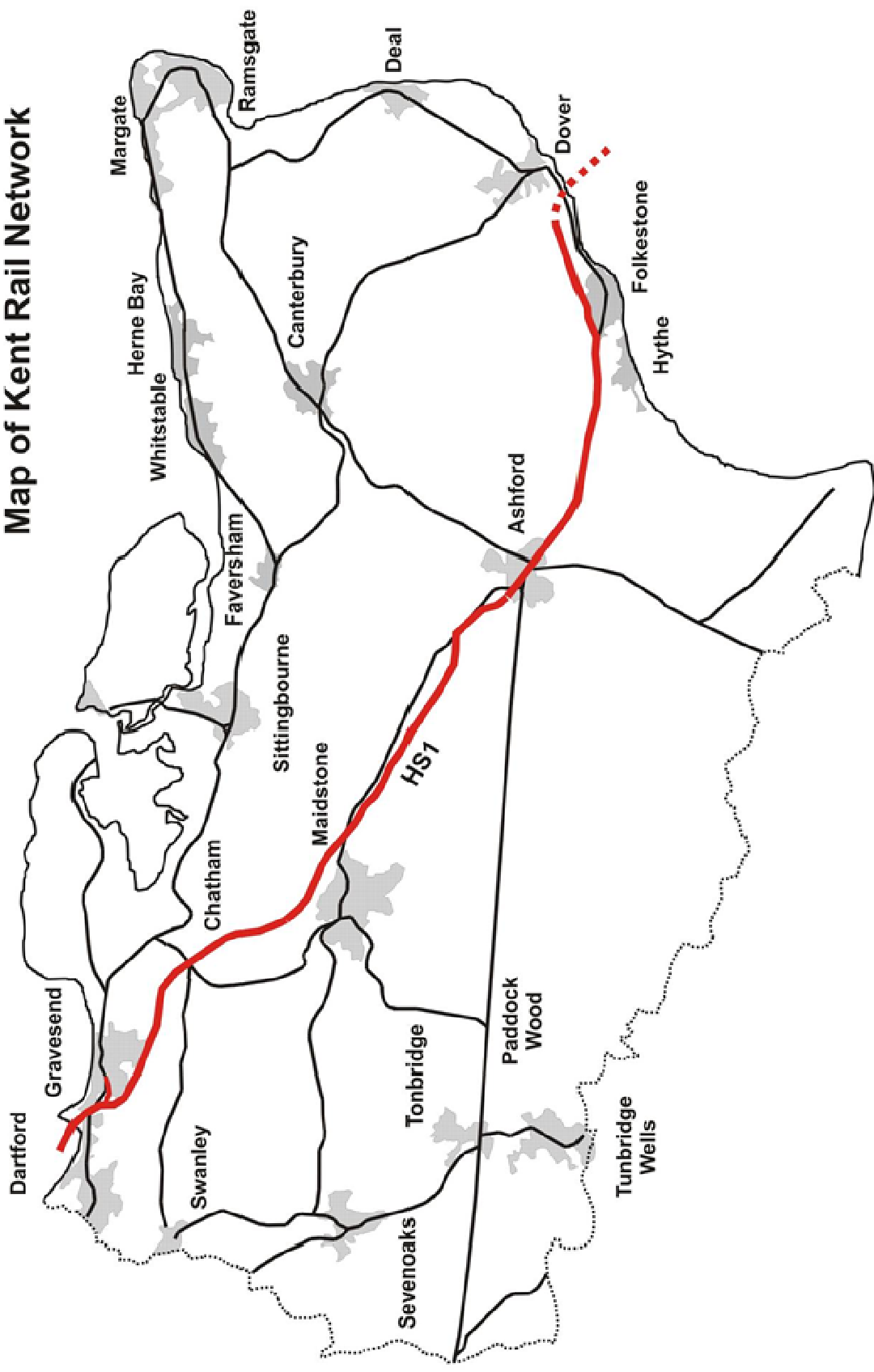
- At the district level, Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) provide a long-term vision and objectives for an area, ensuring that new development is in the right place to meet people's needs whilst minimising the impact on existing communities, transport and the environment.
- KCC's principal framework for economic growth is titled 'Unlocking Kent's Potential: Opportunities and Challenges (2009-2020)'. This framework identifies the key issues that must be addressed to deliver long-lasting economic growth in the county, and establishes a series of priority areas for action by KCC and its partners for the next 20-25 years.
- 'Unlocking Kent's Potential' redefines regeneration to include not only economic growth but also transformation in education and skills, culture, civic spirit, tackling climate change and improving housing conditions. It sets a clear direction for achieving economic growth and diversifying employment in Kent, and it recognises the key role of transport in the successful delivery of all these objectives.
- The provision of a new rail service for Kent is therefore critical to the county's regeneration objectives, especially in East Kent where the

county's areas of greatest deprivation are located, as it will provide the primary mode of public passenger transport which should be a driver for new employment, education and business opportunities. This is especially critical for the areas of:

- Thanet, where the proposed Thanet Parkway should provide the incentive required for the economic growth already created by the Discovery Park Enterprise Zone at Sandwich, for the growth planned at the proposed Enterprise Zone extension to include the Manston Airport site;
- Dover, where the aspiration of Dover District Council to have an under the hour service between Dover and London on High Speed, together with enhanced parking at Dover Priory, will be a significant benefit to Dover Pride and to the regeneration of the town;
- Deal and Sandwich, where an improved rail service to these coastal towns should stimulate the local economy in this part of the county. KCC's aspirations for the new Kent franchise are therefore rooted in the opportunities and challenges set out in 'Unlocking Kent's Potential'.

(Source: Rail Action Plan for Kent, KCC, April 2011)

Map of Kent Rail Network



4. Rail Action Plan for Kent – Implementation of Recommendations

4.1 The Rail Action Plan for Kent set out a number of key recommendations for rail service enhancements in the county. Some of these, such as a through service between Kent and Gatwick Airport, have not, at present, proved viable. But many other recommendations set out in the Rail Action Plan have now come to fruition, following three years of negotiations and meetings with the Department for Transport (DfT), the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR), and the rail franchise operators Southeastern Railway (SER) and Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR).

4.2 Partly as a direct result of KCC's involvement in the rail service planning process, there will be a significant increase in rail capacity in Kent. The new Southeastern timetable which commences in January 2015 will deliver several of the planned outcomes of the Rail Action Plan for Kent. Specifically, the following improvements will deliver increased capacity on High Speed, and better connectivity for the eastern districts of Thanet and Dover, linking together for the first time the coastal towns from Whitstable to Folkestone via Sandwich and Deal:

- an all-day High Speed (HS) service via Sandwich, Deal, Walmer and Martin Mill. The existing peak period services were first introduced in September 2011 with revenue support from KCC, and these have grown to become a successful and permanent part of the SER HS network in East Kent. This latest proposal will strengthen the current HS service, and will also provide improved connectivity between towns on the North, East and South coasts of the county. This is an excellent proposal which will not only provide two HS services each hour (one via each route) for the eastern coastal stations, but will also provide the northern coastal stations between Faversham and Margate with an all-day HS service for the first time;
- a proposed route based price mechanism, whereby passengers from the four eastern coastal stations would be able to travel on the HS service via Faversham to London at Mainline rather than HS fares;
- at present the final HS journey from St Pancras to Canterbury West operates at 2242, with a connection available at Ashford from the 2312 but not from the 2342. The passenger traffic on HS between St Pancras and Canterbury West has grown considerably, yet the last through train is considerably earlier than those to less well used destinations. The new timetable will offer a late journey at 2312 from St Pancras to Ramsgate, enabling passengers to benefit from a through HS train after attending evening activities in the capital;
- a reduction in journey time on some of the North Kent line services, enabled by the removal of joining and dividing of trains at Faversham, although there is still scope for some further enhancement to services at Sittingbourne and in the Medway Towns to meet the expected growth in rail demand along this line;
- the Maidstone West HS services will start to serve Snodland in the peaks. This new stop will serve the recent and planned housing developments in this locality, and is supported by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council.

Although this will increase journey time on the HS service by two or three minutes, this is a good proposal given the projected growth in passenger demand at Snodland.

- the proposal to extend the other 1 train per hour (tph) on the Maidstone East line via Wye, Chilham and Chartham to Canterbury West is excellent and one that KCC strongly supports. This proposed change will re-introduce the direct service between the county town of Maidstone and the City of Canterbury which was lost in the December 2009 changes. This journey is popular for business, leisure and student travel, as Canterbury now offers a wide range of higher education facilities which attract students from a wide area of the county.

INFRASTRUCTURE CHANGES PLANNED BY NETWORK RAIL

- 4.3 Schemes planned for delivery by Network Rail include increasing capacity by means of platform lengthening, with all high peak trains via Tonbridge likely to be 12-car formations within the next few years; some further 8-car operations on the Maidstone East line; and further 12-car formations via Rochester, Gravesend and Dartford are anticipated. Due to platform length constraints at critical sites such as Charing Cross and Tunbridge Wells, all Mainline lengthening requires use of Class 375 rolling stock with selective door opening.
- 4.4 The major East Kent resignalling scheme commenced in December 2011, initially involving the remodelling of the track layout in the Faversham, Margate and Ramsgate areas. The next stage will cover the constrained section of railway through the Medway towns, where it is anticipated that there will be an increase in frequency of trains in the Rochester to Gillingham corridor together with increased turnback capacity.
- 4.5 During 2014, a period of significant and extended changes to services across a wide area commenced, linked to the Thameslink Programme remodelling works at London Bridge. The re-building works are being delivered in two phases. The first of these will last from January 2015 to August 2016 and will involve Charing Cross trains being unable to call at London Bridge, while the second will last from August 2016 to January 2018 and will involve Cannon Street trains unable to call at London Bridge. The completion of the Thameslink Programme works at London Bridge, scheduled for 2018, will involve an extensive recast of services across Kent and other counties.
- 4.6 The principal gain from the new Thameslink programme in Kent will be the Maidstone East line. As a direct result of negotiations by KCC officers with officials at the DfT, it was agreed that the original proposal to have Tunbridge Wells as the main destination for Thameslink in Kent was replaced by Maidstone East
- 4.7 This had two benefits: first, Tunbridge Wells (and all stations to Hastings) retain their Cannon Street services which would otherwise have been withdrawn; second, Maidstone East, West Malling (for Kings Hill), Borough Green & Wrotham, Otford and Swanley gain a direct half-hourly peak service to and from the key City stations of Blackfriars, City Thameslink, Farringdon and St Pancras, with a part off-peak service strengthening the overall offer.

- 4.8 This new service will deliver a significant increase in capacity for the Maidstone East line; it will relieve congestion on the Sevenoaks line by removing rail-heading for commuters to the City; and it will provide a direct City service with modern, efficient trains as part of the core Thameslink network.
- 4.9 There is also a pressing need for the electrification of the line between Ashford and Ore (near Hastings) so that the Marshlink line can benefit from electric rolling-stock and a consequent increase in capacity through 4-car rather than 2-car operation. Network Rail is committed to considering the inclusion of this upgrade in their next Control Period (CP6) which starts in 2019.
- 4.10 A related objective which may be delivered later (subject to Government approval for new rolling-stock) would be an extension of the High Speed service from Ashford to Hastings and Bexhill via Rye. This would offer Hastings and Bexhill in East Sussex a greatly improved service to and from London, and would also bring significant extra capacity to Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Sevenoaks through additional seat availability on the existing services.
- 4.11 The high level of passenger numbers using the busiest stations in Kent should also be a key factor in the determination of future plans for station and route enhancement. The table below demonstrates the very high levels of use at the busiest West Kent stations served by Mainline and Metro, and at the most popular East Kent stations served by High Speed:

KENT STATIONS WITH FOOTFALL > 1.5M IN 2009/10

Station	Footfall
Tonbridge	3,983,778
Sevenoaks	3,758,990
Tunbridge Wells	3,414,482
Dartford	3,033,670
Ashford International	2,756,090
Gravesend	2,502,232
Sittingbourne	2,034,546
Maidstone East	1,889,886

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Network Rail has planned – and in some cases has already implemented - the following principal interventions between 2014 and 2019, although it should be noted that most of these would be dependent on funding and rolling stock procurement by the existing and new franchises:

- (i) implement committed schemes as planned, including Thameslink and train lengthening;
- (ii) commence detailed development of post-Thameslink timetable, with peak services generally modified to run at 15 or 30 minute intervals;
- (iii) further train lengthening in Control Period 5 (2014-2019) with approx. 100 extra coaches to ensure all high peak trains and the busiest shoulder peak trains run with maximum capacity;
- (iv) improve access to stations and integration with other transport modes;
- (v) prioritise incremental journey time improvements.

5.2 KCC, with clear policy initiatives set out in the recommendations of the Rail Action Plan for Kent, has succeeded through negotiations with the DfT, ORR, Southeastern Railway and Govia Thameslink Railway, in influencing the delivery of enhanced capacity and improved rail services on both High Speed and Mainline routes in the January 2015 timetable. The Council will continue to exercise its influence by informing future rail policy with Government and rail operators, so that Kent's rail service continues to meet the demands of the county's growing economy.

6. Recommendation:

The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is asked to note and welcome the report.

7. Background Documents

7.1 Rail Action Plan for Kent (KCC, April 2011), available at www.kent.gov.uk

8. Contact details

Report Author:

Stephen Gasche
Principal Transport Planner – Rail
03000 413490
stephen.gasche@kent.gov.uk

Relevant Director:

Paul Crick
Director of Environment, Transport and Enforcement
03000 413356
paul.crick@kent.gov.uk