

By: Mr K Ferrin, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste.

To: County Council – 30 April 2009

Subject: **SELECT COMMITTEE: Domestic Rail Services**

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Summary: To comment on the report of the Select Committee on Domestic Rail Services

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## **1. Introduction**

1.1 The Environment and Regeneration Policy Overview Committee, at its meeting on 25 September noted the proposal to establish a Select Committee to look at the issue of Domestic Rail Services. This was agreed by the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee and noted at its 23 May and 10 September meetings.

## **2. Scene Setting**

2.1 In December 2009, domestic passenger rail services in Kent will be completely recast when new services are introduced using the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (High Speed 1). This will mean journey times between parts of east and north Kent and London will be significantly reduced and many existing services will be revised

2.2 The reduction of journey times from parts of Kent which need to be regenerated is welcomed, but there are concerns that the regenerative effect could be reduced for a number of reasons, including fare levels being set too high and the current economic climate. It will also be a number of years for people to adjust to the new opportunities the new services provide and for residents and people to relocate to take advantage of them.

## **3. Select Committee Process**

### *Membership*

3.1 The Members of the Select Committee were:

Miss Susan J Carey, Chairman: Conservative Member, Elham Valley

Mr Terence Birkett: Labour Member, Deal

Mr Alan Chell: Conservative Member, Maidstone South

Mr Dan Daley: Liberal Democrat Member, Maidstone Central

Mr Charles Hibberd: Conservative Member, Birchington and Villages

Mr R Parker: Labour Member, Northfleet and Gravesend West

Mr Richard Parry: Conservative Member, Sevenoaks West

Mrs Elizabeth Tweed: Conservative Member, Ashford Central

Additionally, Mr Ken Bamber of Medway Council was a Member of the Committee.

## *Terms of Reference*

3.2 The aim of the Committee was to identify the best rail passenger services solution for Kent, both in terms of:

- The immediate benefits of the solution in terms of journey times and improved services to London and around Kent ; and
- The long term benefits of the solution in terms of the regeneration of Kent and the impacts on the wider rail network and transport in the County.

3.3 This involved investigating the following:

- Current proposals of the franchise holders, Southeastern, for services from December 2009 and proposed fare levels;
- Forecasted effects of these proposals and whether they are robust - including whether rising general fare levels and additional premium fares on CTRL DS will prove to be a deterrent to travel by rail;
- The effects the proposed services will have on the regeneration of Growth Areas and the coastal towns;
- The case for new parkway stations at Minster and Westenhanger;
- The likelihood of rail heading to certain stations with significantly improved services and likely effects;
- Access to stations forecast to attract significant rises in passenger volumes;

## *Evidence*

3.4 The Committee received both oral and written evidence from a wide range of witnesses. Witnesses included professionals dealing with rail and public transport issues and from the tourism and property industries.

## **4. Conclusions**

(1) I welcome the report and would like to thank the Select Committee on completing this piece of work and to thank all those witnesses who gave evidence to the Select Committee.

(2) The Select Committee report was presented to the Cabinet on 1 December 2008 by Miss Carey, Chairman of the Select Committee, and Mr Daley. Cabinet welcomed the report but considered that they needed to look in more detail on some issues including rail fares on the new services and improving the facilities and accessibility at stations on the high speed domestic network.

(3) Since the report was considered by Cabinet, more information on the proposed services levels has been issued by Southeastern, the Train Operating Company, and the County Council commissioned a survey into passengers' reactions to the possible

premium fare levels on the new high speed services. Additionally, Southeastern has published revised information on journey times.

In the light of this new information and the comments by Cabinet, I set out comments on the recommendations of the Select Committee below:

## **5. Select Committee Recommendations (with my comments)**

**The County Council should:**

- 1. with the evidence available at this time, welcome the new high speed rail services starting in December 2009 serving stations in Kent with new trains.**
- 2. welcome the link to St. Pancras in opening access to a growth area in London and offering excellent connections to the Midlands and the North.**

Comment:

Agreed. The County Council has consistently supported the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL). One of its benefits is to offer faster domestic services from east and north Kent to London and over the years the County Council has worked with partners to lobby for the CTRL scheme to be completed and for domestic services to serve as many stations as possible.

The new high speed rail services will help regenerate parts of east and north Kent by making access to London more attractive. This will encourage people to move to cheaper housing, further away from London but within acceptable commuting range. With the new services running to St. Pancras and Stratford, people currently living to the north and east of London will in future be attracted to relocate in Kent. The new services will also attract businesses to locate in areas close in London in terms of time, but at rates significantly below those in central London. They will also encourage tourism to Kent by making attractions in the County more accessible by rail from central and north London as well as areas beyond the capital.

**However, the success of these services will also depend on the fares charged on these train (see response to Point 9 below) as well as access to stations and the state of the stations themselves (see response to Point 6 below).**

**The County Council should:**

- 3. use the publicity surrounding the launch of the new services to promote:**
  - a. Tourism from London and north of London to Kent, building on the present campaigns by Visit Kent.**
  - b. Inward investment by businesses especially knowledge based (i.e. non industrial) businesses to take advantage of Kent's good connectivity building on the work by Locate in Kent.**

Comment:

Agreed. The County Council needs to work closely with both Visit Kent and Locate in Kent to publicise the opportunities the high speed services offer to attract businesses and tourists to the County.

**The County Council should:**

- 4. lobby for services lost in the new timetable to be reinstated at the earliest opportunity.**

Comment:

Agreed. However, it is most unlikely that changes to the train specification will be made until after the new services actually start running from December and the effects are seen in practice.

The introduction of the new services at some stations has meant that revisions to the existing services to London from these stations will be made from December 2009. When the Strategic Rail Authority and Department for Transport (DfT) announced indicative train levels in 2005, a significant number of existing services to London were cut. Since then Southeastern has persuaded the DfT to restore many of these cuts.

*Peak Services*

Information on peak period services (ie trains arriving in London between 7 and 10 am in the morning and leaving London between 4 and 7pm), was not available at the time the Select Committee considered the issue. This is now available and the proposed high speed services are shown in Figure 1 with three services from Whitstable, Herne Bay and Birchington and five or six services from the other high speed stations. Table 1 shows all the proposed services from these stations – high speed and those to existing London termini. There was particular concern that peak services to the City (ie Cannon Street) would be significantly cut from December, but the reductions have been limited to no more than one in the three hour period and in some cases services to Charing Cross have been increased enabling passengers to change at London Bridge for Cannon Street. Victoria services have also been reduced to no more than two trains (from nine to seven at Faversham and Sittingbourne).

As the timetabling becomes more detailed, it is likely that more existing peak services will be slower than now and the County Council will need to monitor the situation and ensure Southeastern gets the right balance between journey time and accessibility from all stations. Experience shows that relatively minor changes in train timings can upset people as it changes their routine. It will depend on how attractive the high speed services are in the short term, which will depend on how passengers actually value the improvements in journey time and quality of the new trains against the fares. The continuing effects of the credit crunch on the numbers commuting to London at the end of the year will also be a factor on crowding levels on particular services.

## *Off-peak*

The proposed off-peak service levels on the high speed line are shown in Figure 2 and a summary of the services to London from the high speed stations is shown in Table 2. This information has been in the public domain for longer and concern has been particularly expressed at the reduction of off-peak services from four to two per hour between Ashford and Charing Cross. There is also concern that journey times on this service will be lengthened as the reduced service has to stop at all immediate stations whereas currently there is a mixture of faster and slower trains. There are also concerns that off-peak trains on the North Kent Line (between Sittingbourne and Thanet) travelling to and from Victoria will be slower. Figure 3 shows revised before and after journey times from the stations which will have the new high speed services from December

### **The County Council should:**

- 5. work with key partners to ensure a direct pedestrian link between Northfleet and Ebbsfleet stations is created as soon as practicable**
- 6. produce a review of the stations that will be served by High-Speed rail to identify and prioritise work needed to stations and station access to be ready for or soon after the December 2009 launch.**

### Comment:

Ideally there should be a high quality pedestrian direct link between Ebbsfleet and Northfleet to enable ready access to high speed and Eurostar services from rail passengers from Dartford and stations in south London. The current distance between the two stations is around one kilometre and a direct link with an underpass crossing under a number of railway lines would reduce the distance to some 300m.

However, the cost is high, requiring an underpass estimated to cost in the order of £9m and unfortunately, the ongoing credit crunch has meant no development in the Ebbsfleet area is currently taking place and the scope for developer contributions in the near future is therefore limited. It seems therefore extremely unlikely that such a link could be provided in the near future.

The work of the Select Committee on establishing Network Rail's station improvement schemes on the high speed service network has revealed that there are a very large number of schemes being considered, but programming of works is sometimes vague due largely to uncertainties over funding. It was hoped that extensive improvements to stations such as Canterbury West and Dover Priory would be completed before the services start in December, but these are being scaled back

Additionally, improved access to stations by all modes is not going to be completed before the high speed services begin. Improved access by car is particularly difficult as land adjacent to stations is not sufficient to meet demand, there are land acquisition difficulties and in some cases, development of multi-storey car parks in environmentally sensitive areas will be difficult to progress through the planning system.

**It is vital that adequate parking at the stations is provided as soon as possible to meet demand.**

Theoretically more bus services to stations to meet increased demand can be provided relatively quickly but sometimes there is resistance for operators to serve a station directly at peak traffic times as congestion can mean significant delays in returning to the main road flow.

Kent Highway Services has recently recruited into the public transport section so that the County Council can play a more pro-active role in co-ordinating and progressing station access schemes in conjunction with the District Councils, Network Rail, Southeastern and the bus companies.

**The County Council should:**

- 7. encourage the bus and rail companies to introduce more promotional off-peak fares, joint passes, through tickets (such as the BusPlus pass) and Open Jaw tickets.**
- 8. work with the bus companies to develop more frequent services serving rail stations, particularly more late services serving returning rail commuters and to assist with the Traveline project for accurate journey planning.**

Comment:

Agreed. These are worthy aims and should be progressed although the scope for revenue support from the County Council for more bus services is limited.

**The County Council should:**

- 9. lobby for low introductory fares to ensure early success for the High Speed services.**

Comment:

Already fares in Kent and East Sussex are rising faster than elsewhere in the country (average RPI + 3%) and this situation is likely to continue for the next two years, although with the Retail Price Index forecast to fall by this Summer (the base used for fare calculations), rises in future will be significantly lower than experienced over the last three years.

On top of these increases, there will be a premium added to existing fares for the high speed services. These have yet to be finally announced and it is unknown whether there will be different rates in the peak periods from the off-peak. The latest

published premium fares (by the Strategic Rail Authority in 2005) suggested that the premiums would be 10 – 30% higher than existing fares.

The County Council commissioned a survey at stations where high speed services are to run from to gauge rail passengers' reaction to such fares and based on these premiums and the known journey time savings in January.

Countywide, only 21% of those surveyed said they would be willing to pay these levels of premium and only 36% said they would be willing to pay around half this level of premium. 62% said they would use the new services if there was no premium applied. A summary of the findings on a station by station basis is attached as Appendix 1.

From the evidence available it seems very unlikely that the new high speed services will be successful unless urgent consideration is given to substantially reducing the premium on fares which has hitherto been suggested.

**I recommend that the County Council makes urgent representations for the reduction of these levels of premium; because otherwise it is most unlikely that we will see the potential benefits to Kent residents which have been long promised.**

**The County Council should:**

- 10. decide how best to consider public transport issues in future either through an existing or new board; a formal S101 Joint Committee between Kent County Council and Medway Council; or by establishing a separate or joint Strategic Public Transport Forum**

Comment:

Better liaison between the County Council and Medway Council on public transport issues would be advantageous. However, to avoid creation of new administrative bodies, it is proposed that this should be achieved at officer-level in the first instance and this be reviewed at a later date.

**The County Council should:**

- 11. recognise the timescales for influencing rail services and infrastructure provision and begin consideration of the following:**
  - a. potential Thameslink services to Maidstone, the Medway Towns, Tonbridge and Sevenoaks**
  - b. Network Rail's forthcoming Rail Utilisation Strategy**
  - c. The renewal of the Southeastern franchise in Kent 2014**

Comment:

Agreed. The Thameslink scheme is due to be completed in 2015 and with significantly increased capacity between London Bridge and St Pancras, via Blackfriars, City Thameslink and Farringdon offers great potential for direct links from

parts of Kent to the City and the County Council must work with partners to secure these opportunities.

The Kent Rail Utilisation Strategy (RUS) is due to be issued for consultation on 28 April and it is imperative that the County Council engages fully with the process to influence future Network Rail schemes.

The current Southeastern franchise runs from April 2006 to the end of March 2012, with an automatic two year extension if targets are met. The County Council will have eventually to consider carefully what the bidders to run the franchise from 2014 are offering.

**The County Council should:**

**12. consider the feasibility of the following rail services/infrastructure projects:**

- a. direct services from Kent and Medway to Gatwick airport**
- b. rail links to the Kent International and Lydd Airports**

Comment:

Agreed. In particular, the County Council considers that a Parkway Station near to Kent International Airport is necessary to improve journey times from the surrounding area (including Pfizer, China Gateway and Manston Business Park) and to assist in the regeneration of Thanet.

**The County Council should:**

**13. engage with Southeastern and the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) to plan for joint ticketing arrangements to maximise use of public transport to the Games and to minimise disruption to Kent's residents and businesses during the 16 day period of the main Games.**

Comment:

Agreed.

Mr K Ferrin  
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste

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Background Information: *None*

If you require a full copy of the report please contact Mick Sutch on 01622 221612 or email [mick.sutch@kent.gov.uk](mailto:mick.sutch@kent.gov.uk)

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Figure 1

# Highspeed service December 2009

Peak service arriving at St Pancras between 07:00 – 09:59



**Table 1**

**INTEGRATED KENT FRANCHISE (SLC2) - SUMMARY OF TRAIN SERVICE CHANGES ([AM PEAK](#) THREE HOURS, PEAK DIRECTION)**

	St Pancras		Charing Cross		Cannon St		London Bridge		Victoria		Blackfriars		All Termini (not Lon Br)		
	Current	Future	Current	Future	Current	Future	Current	Future	Current	Future	Current	Future	Current	Future	Change
Ashford		6	6	7	5	4	9	7	7	9	1	1	19	27	8
Birchington		3	0	0	5	4	5	4	7	6			12	13	1
Broadstairs		6	2	0	5	4	5	4	7	6			14	16	2
Canterbury West		5	4	5	1	0	3	2	1	3			6	13	7
Dover Priory		5	3	4	3	2	5	7	2	2			8	13	5
Ebbsfleet		12											0	12	12
Faversham		6			7	6	7	6	9	7			16	19	3
Folkestone Central		5	3	4	3	2	5	5					6	11	5
Folkestone West		5	3	4	3	2	5	5					6	11	5
Gravesend		6	10	10	6	6	11	16					16	22	6
Herne Bay		3			5	4	5	4	7	6			12	13	1
Margate		6	1	0	5	4	6	4	7	6			13	16	3
Ramsgate		5	7	7	4	4	7	7	7	6			18	22	4
Sittingbourne		6			7	6	7	6	9	7			16	19	3
Whitstable		3			5	4	5	4	7	6			12	13	1

Source: www.nationalrail.co.uk

Figure 2

# Highspeed service December 2009

Off-peak and weekend services



Total trains services during Off-peak

St Pancras	4
Stratford	4
Ebbwfleet	4
Gravesend	2
Strood	2
Rochester	2
Chatham	2
Gillingham	2
Rainham	2
Sittingbourne	2
Faversham	2
Ashford	2
Canterbury West	1
Ramsgate	1
Broadstairs	1
Margate	1
Folkestone West	1
Folkestone Central	1
Dover Priory	1

**Table 2**

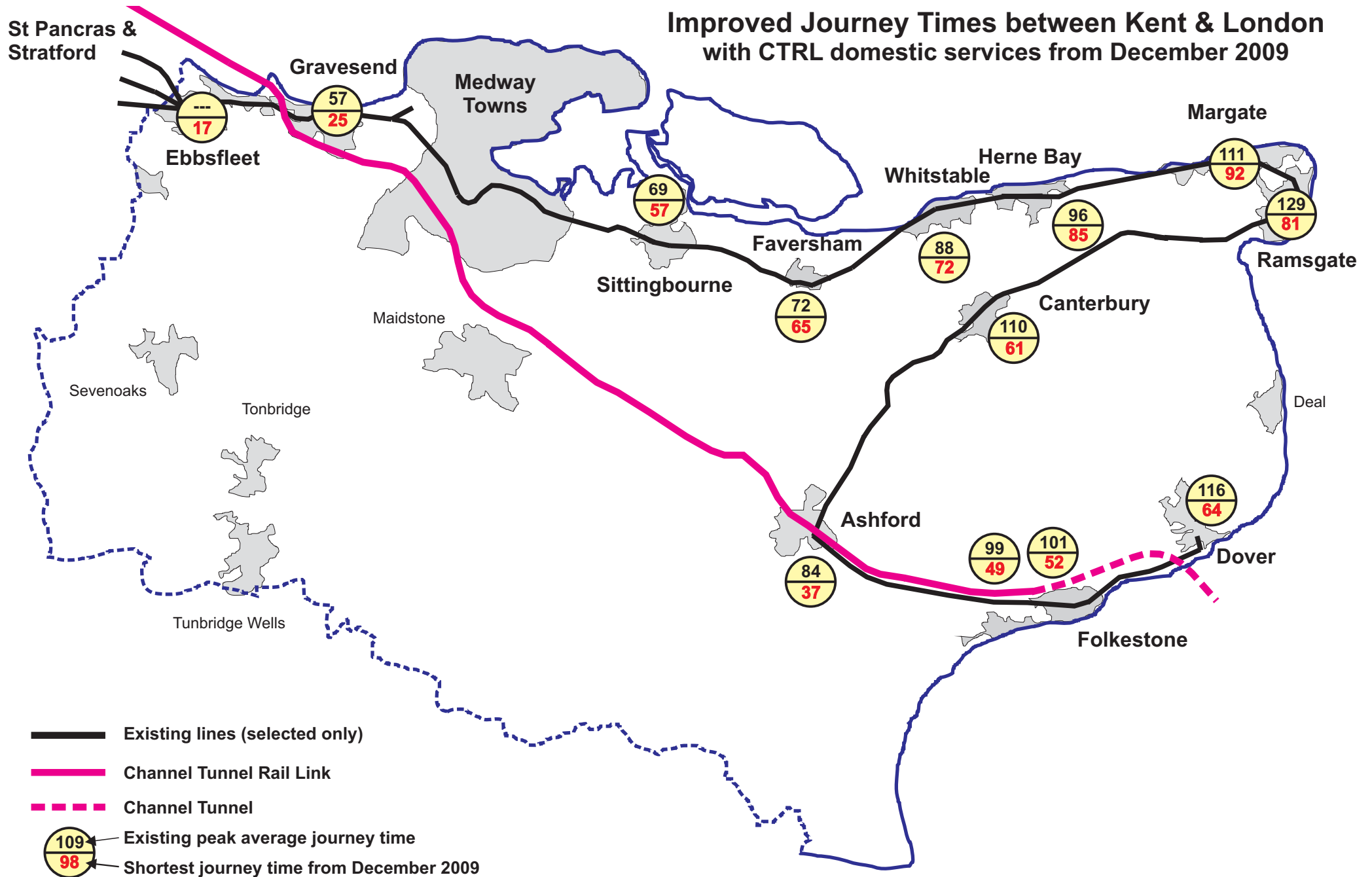
**INTEGRATED KENT FRANCHISE (SLC2) - SUMMARY OF TRAIN SERVICE CHANGES : [OFF PEAK](#)**

	St Pancras		Charing Cross		Cannon St		London Bridge		Victoria		Blackfriars		All Termini (not Lon Br)		
	Current	Future	Current	Future	Current	Future	Current	Future	Current	Future	Current	Future	Current	Future	Change
Ashford	0	2	4	2	1	0	2	2	1	2			6	6	0
Birchington									2	2			2	2	0
Broadstairs	0	1	1	0					2	2			3	3	0
Canterbury West	0	1	2	2			0	2					2	3	1
Dover Priory	0	1	2	2			0	2	2	2			4	5	1
Ebbsfleet	0	4											0	4	4
Faversham	0	2							4	2			4	4	0
Folkestone Central	0	1	2	2			0	2					2	3	1
Folkestone West	0	1	1	2			0	2					1	3	2
Gravesend	0	2	4	4			4	4					4	6	2
Herne Bay									2	2			2	2	0
Margate	0	1	1	0					2	2			3	3	0
Ramsgate	0	1	2	2			0	2	2	2			4	5	1
Sittingbourne	0	2							4	2			4	4	0
Whitstable									2	2			2	2	0

Source: [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk)

**Figure 3**

**Improved Journey Times between Kent & London  
with CTRL domestic services from December 2009**



Schematic Only - Not to Scale

**Rail Passenger Survey Results**

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who would pay the full latest proposed premium for the new high speed services

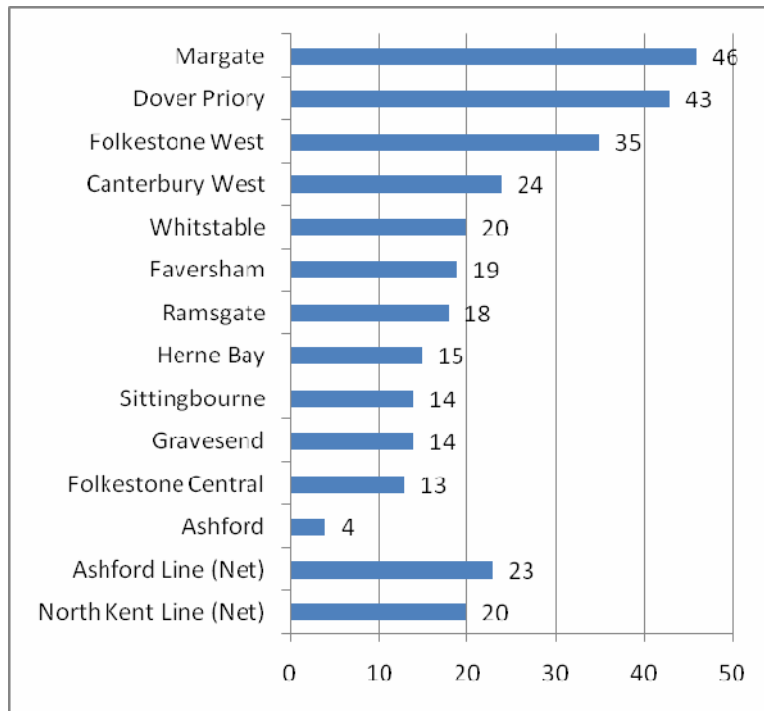


Figure 5: Percentage of respondents who would pay half the latest proposed premium for the new high speed services

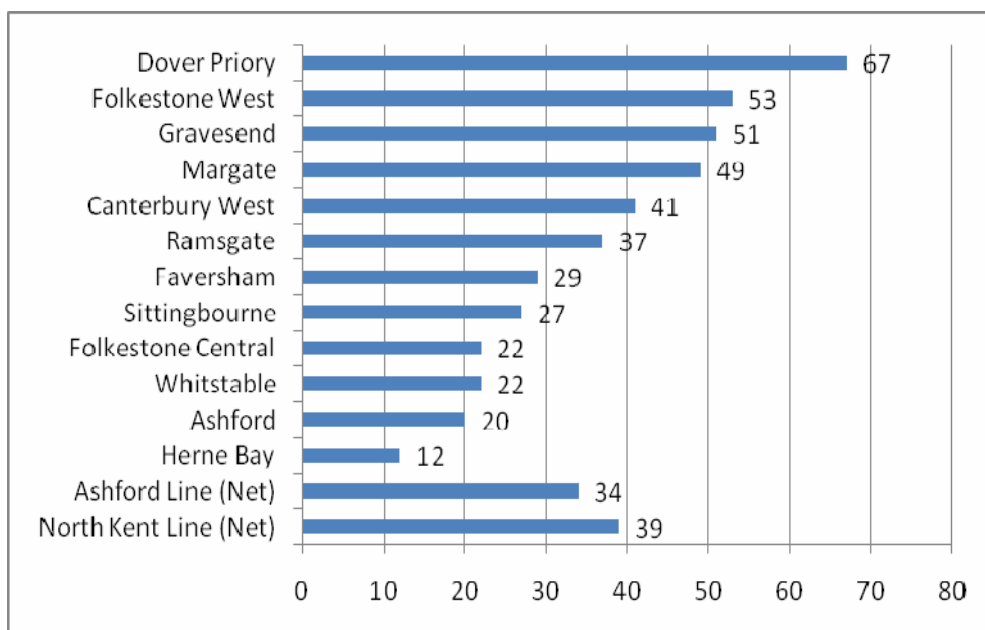


Figure 6 Percentage of season ticket holders prepared to pay the current price (ie no premium) for the new high speed services

