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To: Cabinet – 4 April 2011

Subject: **RAIL ACTION PLAN FOR KENT**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary

Kent County Council (KCC) is the largest local authority in the rail operating area currently served by Southeastern Railway. As such KCC is a principal stakeholder in the re-franchising process which will be undertaken by the Department for Transport (DfT) in the period leading up to the award of the new rail franchise for Kent in April 2014. The purpose of this report is to present the Council's Rail Action Plan for Kent for approval and to make recommendations which would deliver the Action Plan's intended outcomes.

1. Introduction

- (1) The Rail Action Plan for Kent sets out the principal objectives of KCC to ensure that the new rail franchise for Kent - which is due to commence in April 2014 - delivers a rail service that meets the needs of the county's residents, commuters and visitors. It is not concerned with changing the existing franchise operated by Southeastern Railway, although KCC will continue to press for improvements in its current operation.
- (2) The Plan lists in detail the rail routes which need addressing in today's network, and recommends improvements to be incorporated in the new franchise specification. It also recognises the need for the level of rail fares charged in Kent to offer better value for money so as to encourage economic growth throughout the county, and the need for the rail system to operate with greater resilience in adverse weather conditions.

2. Relevant priority outcomes

- (1) 'Growth without Gridlock' recognises the potential of Kent's rail network to meet these challenges and to stimulate economic growth. The delivery of High Speed domestic rail services in December 2009 has transformed journey times for many passengers, but the new timetable introduced by Southeastern has also caused serious problems for others. This Rail Action Plan for Kent addresses all these issues, and using 'Growth

without Gridlock' as a starting point seeks to develop a strategy for an improved rail network that will better serve the people in Kent from 2014 onwards.

- (2) The draft Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3) has incorporated the strategy of 'Growth without Gridlock' which identifies the need for major transport improvements for which KCC will lobby, such as enhancements to the classic rail network. The County Council also seeks to maximise the potential of High Speed 1 (HS1), by ensuring that the new franchise from 2014 onwards makes the most effective use of this rail infrastructure and the Class 395 High Speed trains.
- (3) The Action Plan is therefore intended to deliver the following priority outcomes:
 - (a) To represent the people of Kent in the stakeholder consultation which will be managed by the DfT for the new Integrated Kent Franchise which is due to commence in April 2014;
 - (b) To ensure that all the needs of Kent's rail passengers are met by the new franchise service specification, and that the benefits of both High Speed and Mainline services are maximised for the good of all;
 - (c) To influence the delivery of a modern, reliable, useful and value-for-money railway in Kent so that economic growth, employment, education and leisure opportunities will be opened up to all Kent's residents and visitors.

3. Principal Proposals for Inclusion in new Integrated Kent Franchise

KCC's key requirements for each route of the new franchise are listed below. They do not refer to every section of route within Kent, but reflect the principal causes of concern raised by MPs, KCC Members, Rail User Groups and individuals before, during and after our Rail Summits held in March and October 2010:

- (1) There should be a regular peak-period Mainline service to designated West End and City stations on each principal rail route in Kent. By West End is meant Charing Cross or Victoria; by City is meant Blackfriars or Cannon Street. There should also be a regular off-peak period service to a designated West End station from each major town in Kent. In addition there should be a regular peak and off-peak service to Stratford and St Pancras from stations served by High Speed;
- (2) Connectivity at Dover Priory between Mainline from Sandwich / Deal and High Speed to St Pancras must be improved from the present 49 minute wait during off-peak periods. The extension of High Speed from Dover Priory to Ramsgate via Deal / Sandwich should also be included in the new franchise specification as this can be delivered within existing rolling-stock resources;

- (3) Connectivity at Ashford between Mainline from Dover / Folkestone and Mainline via Maidstone East has already have been improved off-peak towards London from the December 2010 timetable change – this principle should now be applied to peak periods in both directions; also need for improved connections between Marshlink service (operated by Southern) and Southeastern services;
- (4) Connectivity at Sittingbourne between the Sheerness branch and High Speed / Mainline services needs to be improved, removing the existing long connection periods;
- (5) Journey times on Mainline between stations on the North Kent line and Victoria / Cannon Street have been greatly increased with the new timetable – there needs to be a realignment of the station stopping pattern to reduce these journey times; the peak period High Speed service east of Faversham should however be retained, as these journeys would still need to operate as empty coaching stock if they were withdrawn from the public timetable;
- (6) Network Rail has engaged with KCC in funding GRIP (Governance of Rail Investment Process) 1-2 studies into route enhancement schemes for Ashford-Thamet with the potential of saving up to eight minutes journey time between Ashford and the proposed Thanet Parkway, which would support opportunities for growth following the planned closure of Pfizer's by reducing journey times on High Speed and Mainline between London and Thanet; and Ashford-Hastings (Marshlink) where KCC will continue to press for electrification of Ashford-Ore as a longer-term objective for improving services on Marshlink, although this project is not included in Kent Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS);
- (7) Parkway Stations – 'Growth without Gridlock' proposed development of parkway stations at Thanet for Manston Airport and Isle of Thanet – Network Rail has already produced GRIP stage 1-2 report with KCC support for the parkway station, and funding is being pursued by KCC through the Regional Growth Fund (RGF), local businesses and developers including a contribution towards the upgrading of the route between Ashford and Thanet; Maidstone – for park & rail to/from Maidstone East and London on Mainline service; and Westenhanger - off M20 junction 11;
- (8) The present level of service provided on the Maidstone East line is completely unacceptable, and the new franchise must address this omission above all else – initially there should be an hourly service all day between Maidstone East and Blackfriars (using paths currently allocated to half of the First Capital Connect service from Sevenoaks via Otford) so as to provide a direct service all day to the City; this should be replaced by an all day half-hourly Thameslink (Key Output 2) service to Blackfriars, Farringdon, St Pancras and north from 2018, with the Maidstone East line becoming the principal Kent route for the full Thameslink service south of the Thames;

- (9) Southeastern is due to commence operation of High Speed peak period services along the Medway Valley line from St Pancras via Stratford, Gravesend and Strood to Maidstone West from May 2011 – the new franchise should include this service all day, with additional stops at Maidstone Barracks and Snodland to fill the serious gap that exists in rail provision for the county town of Kent; KCC also supports the aspiration of Medway Council for a new station at a new location in Rochester, provided that this can be funded externally as its redevelopment is not included in the Kent RUS;
- (10) The Cannon Street service from Hastings via Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Sevenoaks should be retained and not replaced by new Thameslink (Key Output 2) service in 2018 which would anyway only operate as far south as Tunbridge Wells – principal Kent termini for Thameslink (Key Output 2) service should be Maidstone East (via Otford and West Malling) and Sevenoaks (via Otford and Bat & Ball); the planned reduction in paths to Cannon Street post-2018 from 25 trains per hour (tph) to 22tph should be met by an equitable reduction in Cannon Street services between Metro and all Mainline Kent / Hastings services;
- (11) Through Gatwick – Tonbridge – Ashford hourly all day service in partnership with Gatwick Airport Ltd and operator of new franchise for Southern operating area could commence in 2015 – not part of IKF but would affect route between Tonbridge and Ashford; KCC will continue to work with Gatwick Airport Ltd, Network Rail and existing franchisee to deliver this objective;
- (12) KCC intends to lobby Government to ensure that a requirement to introduce Smartcard ticketing is included in the new IKF. This would provide the potential for integrated bus/rail ticketing;
- (13) The County Council would also expect to see ongoing improvements to the station environment (cleanliness, comfort, security, information, customer service etc) and to integration with other modes of transport (i.e. the whole journey experience); there is also a pressing need for increased parking capacity at many stations, coupled with on-street parking controls by local authorities on roads in immediate vicinity of stations;
- (14) The planned growth in Thames Gateway (Kent) and Ashford will require a significant increase in capacity on High Speed services to Stratford (for City Docklands via Docklands Light Railway) and St Pancras. This Action Plan includes in its proposed service specification an increase in the peak High Speed service from 2 trains per hour (tph) to 4tph between Ashford, Ebbsfleet, Stratford and St Pancras to meet this increased demand beyond 2014. As this increase would require additional class 395 rolling stock it is an aspiration for future delivery, but is included now to meet the demand for growth in High Speed rail passenger journeys which will result from the planned housing development in Kent's two Growth Areas between now and 2026; also proposed for delivery during the course of the new franchise is an increase in off-peak High Speed service from 1tph

to 2tph (divide/join at Ashford) to Canterbury West, Folkestone West, Folkestone Central and Dover Priory;

- (15) KCC also intends to seek assurances from the DfT and the rail industry that all available options to acquire modern rolling stock, both electric and diesel, are explored, so as to provide the new Integrated Kent Franchise, and other franchises serving the county, with sufficient resources which will enable it to deliver the enhanced rail service for Kent set out in this Action Plan.

(Source: Final version - Rail Action Plan for Kent, KCC, paragraph 6.4)

4. Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications for the Council arising from the Action Plan, but there will be significant officer time involved in delivering the Action Plan and its outcomes.

5. Consultation and Communication

Extensive consultation has already taken place with MPs, KCC Members, district councils, town and parish councils, neighbouring authorities, RUGs and interested individuals as part of the Action Plan process following two Rail Summits, so as to ensure as wide a range as possible of stakeholder engagement within Kent. Many of the consultees have responded by strongly welcoming KCC's initiative in establishing a Rail Action Plan for Kent.

6. Sustainability Implications

The outcomes of the Action Plan would result in a continued increase in passenger journeys by rail within Kent, encouraging use of this sustainable mode of transport and increasing modal shift from car to public transport in accordance with the Council's core objectives.

7. Conclusions

- (1) The renewal of the Integrated Kent Franchise (IKF) in 2014 will be a pivotal moment in the provision of rail services in Kent. KCC intends to be at the forefront of the DfT's stakeholder engagement process to ensure that Kent is offered the best possible rail service beyond 2014 within the budgetary and physical constraints available.
- (2) This Rail Action Plan for Kent (RAPK) will form the basis of KCC's response to the DfT's consultation on the new IKF. We have consulted with all our stakeholders to ensure that as wide a range of opinion as possible has contributed to this presentation of Kent's case in standing up for residents and commuters for the future of rail services in our county.

- (3) Once the new franchisee is announced KCC intends to engage with the new operator before they take over the IKF, to ensure that their plans for Kent's railways meet the needs of all the county's residents and visitors - not just for a few years beyond 2014 but throughout the 2020s.

8. Recommendations to Cabinet:

- (1) **To approve the Rail Action Plan for Kent as the basis for KCC's participation in the Department for Transport's (DfT) consultation process for the new Integrated Kent Franchise;**
- (2) **To present the approved version of Rail Action Plan for Kent to the third KCC Rail Summit in April 2011;**
- (3) **To present the approved Rail Action Plan for Kent to the DfT as the basis of KCC's contribution to the consultation process for the new Integrated Kent Franchise;**
- (4) **To recommend that the DfT changes both the present franchise service specification and the new Integrated Kent Franchise specification to require the franchisee to report all performance indicators separately for High Speed and Mainline services;**
- (5) **To recommend that the DfT, with effect from January 2012, changes the current regulated fares policy which permits the franchisee to raise fares above the base level by a further 5%, so that the maximum increase in Kent equals that elsewhere in England at RPI +3%;**
- (6) **To ensure that KCC's interests are fully represented in the final franchise service level specification for the new Integrated Kent Franchise;**
- (7) **To continue to consult widely with MPs, KCC Members, district councils, town and parish councils, neighbouring authorities, Rail User Groups and interested individuals so as to ensure as wide a range as possible of stakeholder engagement within Kent;**
- (8) **To engage with the chosen operator of the Integrated Kent Franchise well before commencement of the new franchise on 1 April 2014.**

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Background Documents

The following background documents were used in the preparation of this report and the Rail Action Plan for Kent:

- (1) Integrated Kent Franchise – Stakeholder Briefing Document (Strategic Rail Authority, London, January 2005)
- (2) Memorandum of Understanding regarding the setting up of a European Network of High Speed Regions (Kent County Council, Region Nord-Pas de Calais, Gemeente Breda, Brabantstad - Brussels, February 2009)
- (3) Connecting Local Communities – Network Rail CP4 Delivery Plan: Route Plans 2009 – Route 1: Kent (Network Rail, London, March 2009)
- (4) The Modern Railway – A Special Modern Railways Publication (Ian Allan Publishing Ltd, Hersham, Surrey, 2009)
- (5) Unlocking Kent's Potential: Opportunities and Challenges (Kent County Council, Maidstone, 2009)
- (6) Kent Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) (Network Rail, London, January 2010)
- (7) 21st Century Kent – A Blueprint for the County's Future (Sir Terry Farrell, London, January 2010)
- (8) Ashford to Ramsgate journey time enhancements – GRIP 1 stage (Network Rail, London, May 2010)
- (9) Local Transport Plan for Kent 2011-2016 – Draft for Consultation (Kent County Council, September 2010)
- (10) Kent Rail Summits – Representations received before, during and after (KCC, Maidstone, March 2010 and October 2010)
- (11) Growth Without Gridlock – A Transport Delivery Plan for Kent (Kent County Council, Maidstone, December 2010)

Appendices

Appendix A – Rail Action Plan for Kent

This appendix comprises the following documents:

Rail Action Plan for Kent – main document

Appendix 1 – Actions and timescales

Appendix 2 – Table of proposed rail service specification

Appendix 3 – Supporting evidence of RUGs and individuals

Appendix 4 – Consultation responses

Appendix B – Equalities Impact Assessment