

From: **Michael Payne, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport

To: **Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 15 September 2020**

Subject: **Kent Rail Strategy 2021**

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

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: **None**

Future Pathway of Paper: **Cabinet 25/01/21**

Electoral Division: **All divisions**

Summary:

The principal purpose of the Kent Rail Strategy 2021 is to influence the train service and rolling-stock fleet specifications which will inform the next South Eastern agreement, whether that is a concession, contract or other arrangement, for the operation of Kent's rail passenger network for at least the next decade.

This strategy sets out Kent County Council's ambitions for the next South Eastern agreement:

- 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:

The Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse the draft Kent Rail Strategy 2021, and to endorse the proposals set out in the strategy's Summary of Recommended Actions, for public consultation in Autumn 2020.

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 agreement, whether that is a concession, contract or other arrangement, for the operation of Kent's rail passenger network for at least the next decade.
- 1.2 The new Rail Strategy also recognises the importance of rail within the overall provision of transport in the county and the need for additional capacity on High Speed, Mainline and Metro services in Kent, as well as the extension of Crossrail from Abbey Wood to Ebbsfleet, a direct Tonbridge to Gatwick link and to move freight transport on to rail.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 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.

2. Background and Context for the new 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 of 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 some informal pre-release statements by Keith Williams such as the proposal to replace the current franchising system with a form of concession or, alternatively, contract for much longer periods, aligned with deeper integration between the 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 Given the uncertainty about the future structure of the rail industry, and in particular the further awarding of a Direct Award to Southeastern to continue operation from 1 April 2020 to, in all likelihood, 31 March 2022, it is 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 2021/22 in preparation for an eventual competition for the new South Eastern concession or contract.
- 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 or contract. 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 (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 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.

2.8 There will be a public consultation on the draft rail strategy, from 23 September to 17 November 2020, during which time all organisations and members of the public will have the opportunity to respond. Full details will be published on the KCC website. These responses will be considered for inclusion in the final rail strategy, which will be brought to Cabinet for approval as KCC policy on 25 January 2021.

3. Financial Implications

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

4. Legal implications

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

5. Equalities implications

5.1 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.

6. Other corporate implications

6.1 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.

6.2 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]

7. Governance

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

8. Conclusions

8.1 The principal purpose of this Kent Rail Strategy 2021 is set out in its introductory paragraph: to influence the service and fleet specifications which will inform the next South Eastern agreement, whether that is a concession, contract or other arrangement, for the operation of Kent's rail passenger network for at least the next decade.

8.2 The essential next step is to successfully influence the new Train Service Requirement for the next South Eastern agreement. 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.

9. Recommendation:

The Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse the draft Kent Rail Strategy 2021, and to endorse the proposals set out in the strategy's Summary of Recommended Actions, for public consultation in Autumn 2020.

10. Appendix and Background Documents

10.1 Kent Rail Strategy 2021 consultation draft

10.2 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): <http://kcc-app610:9070/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD5930&ID=5930&RPID=37469073>
- Delivering for Kent: The Economic Impact of HS1 (Steer, Sept 2019): <http://kcc-app610:9070/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD5923&ID=5923&RPID=37469019>
- 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); <http://kcc-app610:9070/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD5929&ID=5929&RPID=37469094>
- Response to the DfT's South Eastern Rail Franchise public consultation (KCC, May 2017); <http://kcc->

- [app610:9070/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD5925&ID=5925&RPID=37470251](http://kcc-app610:9070/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD5925&ID=5925&RPID=37470251)
- Response to Network Rail's South East Route: Kent Area Route Study public consultation (KCC, June 2017): <http://kcc-app610:9070/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD5926&ID=5926&RPID=37470481>
- Response to the Williams Rail Review public consultation (KCC, Jan 2019): <http://kcc-app610:9070/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD5924&ID=5924&RPID=37470494>
- 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>
- Equality Analysis / Impact Assessment for draft Kent Rail Strategy 2021 (KCC, Aug 2020): <http://kcc-app610:9070/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD5927&ID=5927&RPID=37469026>

11. Contact details

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