



NEW THAMESLINK FRANCHISE — INITIAL POSITION PAPER BY THE EAST SUSSEX RAIL ALLIANCE (ESRA)

1. ABOUT ESRA

ESRA is an umbrella group comprising the four main rail user groups in East Sussex. These are:

- Bexhill Rail Action Group (BRAG)
- East Coastway Commuter Group (ECCG)
- Marshlink Line Action Group (MLAG)
- St Leonards and Hastings Rail Improvement Programme (SHRIMP)

2. FRANCHISE ANNOUNCEMENT

ESRA notes the announcement of January 2012 by the Department for Transport regarding the shape, scope and duration of the new Thameslink franchise, in particular the intention to merge existing Thameslink and Southern outer-suburban services into a single franchise.

The purpose of this paper is to identify ESRA's priorities for the new franchise and the operation of services in East Sussex, and where possible to assist potential bidders for the franchise.

3. SERVICE PRIORITIES

ESRA believes that the Brighton Mainline (BML) and East Coastway timetable needs to be re-cast.

The following areas have been identified as service priorities.

(a) East Coastway–Victoria

- Maintenance of an all-day, 7 days a week service between Hastings and Victoria.
- An end to dividing and attachment of trains during the off-peak at Haywards Heath, and a more rational service pattern on the Brighton Mainline itself. ESRA hopes that a move to a single operator on the BML will end the current situation of competition



Putting Sussex back on the map

and overcapacity between London and Brighton, at the expense of other routes.

- A reduction in journey times on morning peak services into London [which have progressively increased in recent years].
- A faster and limited-stop off-peak service between Eastbourne and Victoria.
- A recast of the evening peak timetable from London, which has been detrimental to the East Coastway since December 2008.

(b) Brighton–Ashford/Marshlink

- ESRA wishes to see this service retained 7 days a week as a through service between Brighton and Ashford, and for extra capacity to be provided on overcrowded services through the provision of new carriages.
- ESRA would wish to see an additional local service between Hastings and Ashford each hour as and when infrastructure allows.
- In the medium to long term ESRA wishes to see electrification of the route between Ore and Ashford and its full integration into the East Coastway.

(c) East Coastway Local Services

- ESRA wishes to see extension of the Lewes–Brighton shuttle to give a half-hourly local service between Brighton and Eastbourne. Including the Brighton–Ashford service, this would give three trains an hour and a more even service. [The third service is the Brighton–Ore stopping service].

(d) Gatwick Express

- The current service is unfit for purpose. Differential premium fares have left the service over-priced, uncompetitive and under-used. Consequently, passengers have been displaced onto Southern Coastway services causing overcrowding. Nonetheless, improvements to Coastway–Victoria services have not been possible in part because four BML paths an hour in each direction are used — or under-used — by the Gatwick Express.
- The new franchise specification should look at all options, including discontinuing the Gatwick Express and/or extension of Gatwick Express services to coastal destinations.



(e) North Thameslink–Tunbridge Wells/Hastings

- If proposals to withdraw the peak Hastings–Cannon St services go ahead as part of the Thameslink project, ESRA would demand that Hastings continues to have a direct link to a City of London station. The logical means of delivering this would be to extend some of the proposed Thameslink–Tunbridge Wells peak services to Hastings via Battle.

(f) Business Model

- ESRA notes that the existing operator of the Southcentral franchise has very much worked to a positive growth model, which has involved pricing additional business on to the railway at off-peak times through incentives and promotions. ESRA wishes for this approach to continue under the new franchise.
- ESRA would deplore any move towards a higher-cost/low-frequency model of service whereby passengers were priced off the railway through additional ticket restrictions and/or higher prices.
- Some bidders may raise competition issues in relation to other rail and bus interests. Equally a positive approach could be used towards integration of services/ticketing.

(g) Customer Services

- ESRA would wish to see current best-practice on the two existing franchises retained and enhanced. This includes retention of the current Delay-Repay regime.
- ESRA would wish to see continued the current high-maintenance approach to stations and facilities adopted by Southern, but is somewhat concerned that the whole network will have to experience another new assertion of corporate identity.