



## **SOUTHEASTERN FRANCHISE CONSULTATION – SUBMISSION 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 Action Group (MLAG)
- St Leonards and Hastings Rail Improvement Programme (SHRIMP)

### **2. SUMMARY**

ESRA believes that the current Integrated Kent Franchise (IKF) paid little attention to the needs of Hastings Line users at the time of its conception. Even the name of the franchise is indicative of this: Frant and stations south thereof are in the County of East Sussex.

Although many towns in east Kent received a qualitative upgrade in services from December 2009 in the form of High Speed ‘Javelin’ services, there was no parallel improvement in services on the Hastings Line, despite a significant release of extra capacity north of Tonbridge following the migration of Eurostar and premier east Kent services to High Speed 1.

The off-peak timetable on the Hastings Line is particularly unsatisfactory, being effectively an extension of a quarter-hourly outer suburban London – Tunbridge Wells ‘metro’ service, which was designed principally around the needs of Orpington and Sevenoaks – two stations which have plenty of other trains. The result is a slow service for the Hastings Line, which is especially prone to overcrowding in the shoulder-peaks.

Furthermore, ESRA remains concerned that the peak hour service on the Hastings Line may deteriorate following the completion of the Thameslink project, and seeks an assurance that peak hour services will be maintained between Hastings Line stations south of Tunbridge Wells, and the City of London. This could be achieved either by retaining peak hour services to/from Cannon St, or extending proposed Thameslink services south of Tunbridge Wells in the peak.

Improved rail services are vital to Hastings, suffering as it does with a correspondingly poor road network, and significant economic deprivation. In the longer term ESRA wishes to see the extension of Javelin services from London to Eastbourne via Ashford, Rye and Hastings, but for the foreseeable future the existing mainline services need to



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be improved to level the playing field between Hastings/Bexhill/Rye and coastal towns in Kent.

ESRA's specific comments in relation to the Southeastern Consultation are detailed below:

**Q.1 What improvements do stakeholders believe could be made on the combined franchise through partnership working between Network Rail and the new operator?**

ESRA wishes to see the franchisee and Network Rail work in partnership, but not at the risk of further 'parallel fragmentation' of the network. The Hastings area is an interface between two franchises, and already there is some evidence that information systems at the Southeastern operated stations do not always pay attention to the needs of Southern customers at times of alteration/disruption.

**Q.2 What, if any, changes to South Eastern services need to be made given the likely changes in demand?**

- In the next timetable re-cast, a faster service to Hastings must be prioritised.
- ESRA wishes to see a limited-stop off-peak service between Hastings and London calling at St Leonards Warrior Square, Battle and Tunbridge Wells only. ESRA's first preference would be for this to be in addition to the current two trains an hour. A less than ideal alternative would be to run a fast portion behind/in front of the all-stations service and attach/detach at Tunbridge Wells or Tonbridge.
- Of the existing two trains an hour off-peak, ESRA does not believe it is necessary for both to call at Orpington and Sevenoaks. The objective of the current timetable appears to be to provide these stations with fast services to and from London, rather than a direct country-bound connection. There also appears to be a low uptake for connecting services via these stations, as evidenced both by low numbers, and indeed, by trains not stopping there in the peak [when one would imagine demand to be at its highest].
- It is essential that a direct link is retained between Hastings Line stations and the City of London. The long-standing proposal to scrap the peak Cannon Street service is unacceptable unless there is a corresponding extension of the proposed Thameslink – Tunbridge Wells service. We do not accept the recommendations of the Kent RUS in this respect and will continue to campaign vigorously alongside MPs, local councils and other stakeholders. We note that Southeastern and Network Rail have recently worked to operate a number of 12 car diagrams south of Tunbridge Wells



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during the peak periods, and would tentatively suggest that these paths could be used in the future by fixed formation Thameslink services.

- ESRA wishes to see limited stop portions between Hastings and Tunbridge Wells in the peak periods and would not object to this aspect of the Kent RUS proposal to attach and divide Charing Cross Services, subject to an additional service to the City of London being maintained [either Thameslink or Cannon St].
- ESRA wishes to see services on Boxing Day on the Hastings Line in the new franchise.
- ESRA also wishes for a re-write of the Sunday timetable to provide a service similar to Saturdays, with earlier first and later last services.

**Q.3 Are consultees aware of any other rail or non-rail development schemes that might affect the new franchise?**

A new Link Road between Hastings and Bexhill is likely to lead to further housing and commercial development. This may make a new park and ride station at Wilting Farm more viable. It is also likely to lead to increased demand and pressure on parking facilities at Battle and Crowhurst.

**Q.4 What increments or decrements to the specification would stakeholders wish to see and how would these be funded?**

See Q.3

**Q.5 Which aspects of the specification, other than those services operating on the HS1 network, would stakeholders wish to see mandated and which aspects of the specification could be left to the discretion of the operator?**

See Q.3

**Q.6 What changes to services would stakeholders propose, why and would these provide economic benefit?**

See Q.3

**Q.7 Do respondents feel that there are other destinations that domestic high speed services could serve that would support regional and national economic growth?**

ESRA wishes to see the electrification and upgrade of the line between Ashford and Hastings to permit the extension of High Speed 'Javelin' services to Eastbourne via Rye and Hastings. This would link the regeneration areas of Eastbourne, Bexhill and



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Hastings with the designated growth areas of Ashford, the Thames Gateway and East London, which are likely to be the nucleus of economic growth in southeast England over the next two decades. Such a development would also relieve the Brighton Mainline and will be essential in the event of a future decision to develop a new international aviation hub in the Thames estuary.

ESRA also potentially sees Northern France as part of the Southeastern catchment area, and would like to see development of the 'Transmanche Metro' proposal of a regular stopping service between London and Lille calling at Stratford International, Ebbsfleet, Ashford and Calais. Such a service could be developed by the franchisee and another partner e.g. Eurotunnel or SNCF.

**Q.8 How might better use be made of the capacity currently available?**

This is a generic question for the network, but ESRA believes that the current Tunbridge Wells 'metro' service is disadvantageous to stations south of Tunbridge Wells and should be revised in favour of a mix of faster and stopping services.

**Q.9 What steps might bidders be expected to take to meet passenger demand and what might be the most appropriate mechanisms for managing demand?**

ESRA would deplore any move by a new franchise holder towards a high cost/low frequency business model which prices users off the railway by means of ticket restrictions.

ESRA notes recent efforts by Southeastern to promote its off-peak services more widely, but would like the new franchise holder to go further. Again the Southern franchise offers a model, with low cost off-peak and advance tickets designed to price new customers on to the railway at times when demand is light. The Hastings line has significant unused off-peak and contra-flow peak capacity which could be used both for the benefit of the franchise holder in terms of additional revenue, and for the town of Hastings itself in terms of extra day visitors.

**Q.10 What destinations on the current South Eastern network do respondents think should be served by Thameslink core services and what is the rationale for those services?**

The Thameslink project is of secondary interest to ESRA. We would prefer in the first instance to retain direct trains in the peak on the Hastings Line to/from Cannon Street.

There must continue to be a through service between Hastings and the City of London, and a service to/from the Thameslink core would be a distant second preference.

**Q.11 What improvements would respondents like to see made to other South Eastern services, what is the rationale for them and would these provide economic benefit?**



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| <p>This has been discussed in Q.3</p>   |
| <p><b>Q.12 Do respondents feel that Folkestone Harbour branch line and station should be kept open and maintained or would the rail industry be better investing the monies in other rail schemes?</b></p> <p>ESRA does not hold a view on this issue</p>   |
| <p><b>Q.13 How would you like to see performance information published?</b></p> <p>In a way that is clear and understandable to passengers, online and at stations</p>  |
| <p><b>Q.14 How frequent should its publication be?</b></p> <p>Quarterly, and with annual data at the time fares increases are announced</p>   |
| <p><b>Q.15 What level of disaggregation of performance do you believe is reasonable?</b></p> <p>This should be published by line e.g. the Hastings Line and not by service group (Mainline, Metro, High Speed etc)</p>  |
| <p><b>Q.16 What are the priorities that respondents consider should be taken into account with providing passenger experience of using these services?</b></p> <p>Late night connections between inbound Southeastern services and onward Southern services to Bexhill/Eastbourne at St Leonards Warrior Square are unreliable and rarely held in the event of the slightest late running. In view of the low frequency of services late at night, with gaps of up to an hour, timetables need to be more robust. More discretion should be given to holding trains for one or two minutes at St Leonards Warrior Square late at night if the connecting service is in the platform. This is a joint issue between the two operators. There is an unhappy history with the two franchise holders not co-operating [even though they have been owned by the same parent company for a number of years].</p> <p>ESRA would like to see catering services maintained on the Hastings Line – currently these are provided by a partnership.</p> |
| <p><b>Q.17 What do stakeholders see as the most important factors in improving security (actual or perceived) and addressing any gap between the two?</b></p> <p>Visibility of staff, especially in the evenings. St Leonards Warrior station should be gated and staffed all day.</p>  |
| <p><b>Q.18 What is important to stakeholders in the future use and improvements in stations?</b></p> <p>ESRA is concerned at the poor level of maintenance at many stations, especially St Leonards Warrior Square and Hastings. We would wish for the new franchise to</p>   |



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emulate the approach of the neighbouring Southern franchise which is to carry out ongoing painting and maintenance on a regular basis, rather than show long periods of neglect punctuated by occasional facelifts.

We think that consideration should be given to the transfer of management of St Leonards Warrior Square and Hastings stations from the Southeastern franchise to the new Thameslink/Southern franchise, to provide integrated station management on the East Coastway/Marshli

**Q.19 What priorities would respondents give to car parking and cycling facilities at locations where these are fully used?**

These are generally satisfactory. Car parking should be secure and affordable

**Q.20 What sort of ticketing products and services would you expect to see delivered through 'smart' technology on this franchise?**

ESRA would like to see the extension of electronic ticketing and for this to be compatible with the system used on the TSGN franchise, which interfaces in the Hastings area.

**Q.21 What local accessibility and mobility issues do stakeholders see and how they might be addressed?**

No significant issues

**Q.22 What environmental targets would stakeholders like to see within the franchise specification?**

No significant issues

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September 2012