



Consultation on implementation of the Brighton Mainline Route Utilisation Strategy

A briefing for passengers, rail groups and
stakeholders

Introduction

On 29 September the Department for Transport (DfT) issued a consultation document on options for the implementation of the Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy (BML RUS). This follows on from publication of the final document in February. The consultation runs until 22 December 2006.

The purpose of this briefing is to highlight the key points from the consultation and invite comments to inform the Passenger Focus response. Information about how to obtain the consultation document, together with details of where to send individual responses is also provided.

Main aims of the BML RUS

In this consultation the DfT affirms the guiding principles for the BML RUS set out in the published strategy and makes the following points in relation to each of the objectives:

- Reducing overcrowding and maximising carrying capacity within the existing infrastructure constraints continues to be the dominant issue for the BML. Large commuter flows and the uneven spread of passenger loads across the Gatwick Express (with spare seating capacity) and other services which passengers are often unable to board during the morning peak means that “*do nothing*” is not considered to be a viable option
- Continuing to improve operational performance is still an important objective as, despite encouraging improvements, there is still some evidence that the complex timetable is a significant contributor to “*reactionary*” delays
- Maintaining a high quality London Victoria to Gatwick Airport service continues to be a key outcome sought but the only means to address the overcrowding and route capacity issues on the BML is to make changes to the existing dedicated service
- Achieving sustainable value for money for both the passenger and the tax-payer is an ongoing concern for government. The current inefficient use of trains and network capacity on the BML route means that the cost of supporting franchised services is unnecessarily high.

Train service options

The consultation identifies four train service patterns on which stakeholder views are invited.

1. Extra South Coast trains option

This seeks to use all trains to ‘do more than one job’. Proposals include improving capacity by replacing the current four trains per hour (tph) running non-stop from Gatwick Airport to London Victoria with:

- two tph calling intermediately at Redhill, East Croydon and Clapham Junction, taking an additional 8 minutes; and
- two tph South Coast originated trains running via Arun Valley/Horsham that would stop at Gatwick Airport for five minutes and then run to Victoria with a stop only at East Croydon, with no changes to overall journey time.

In addition, there would be a further six tph from South Coast to Victoria calling at Gatwick Airport: operating two from East Coastway, two from West Coastway and two from Brighton.

No changes are currently proposed to the First Capital Connect services from Brighton via Gatwick Airport to London Bridge and Bedford.

This option creates anticipated performance improvements by reducing the slow to fast line crossings, elimination of splitting and joining at Haywards Heath and improving efficiency of platform occupation at Gatwick and Victoria.

2. Retention of dedicated airport service option

This retains most of the current service pattern, including the dedicated non-stop Gatwick Airport to London Victoria service of four tph. Some key changes include starting and terminating Gatwick Express trains at Three Bridges in the peak, reducing platform occupation at Gatwick Airport to ten out of every fifteen minutes and confining all Redhill trains to the slow lines to reduce crossing manoeuvres.

3. Splitting and joining at Gatwick Airport

This option, which is subject to further testing, seeks to preserve the 'non-stop' nature of the Gatwick Airport to London Victoria service, whilst still conveying significant numbers of people from further south. It would involve re-introduction of the practice of conveying 'airport carriages' on trains to Sussex coast by detaching and joining four cars to trains arriving and departing from Gatwick Airport. This imports a potential performance risk and would also mean the loss of direct links to East Croydon and Clapham Junction for passengers on trains from the Arun Valley.

4. Peak/off peak option

The initial RUS highlighted poor performance and overcrowding of services – this option is in response to the view that performance is now at an acceptable level and therefore the more significant issue to be resolved is overcrowding. The timetable would focus on the alleviation of overcrowding in the morning peak by operating a timetable similar to the proposal in option one but after around 10am then revert to today's pattern, with the dedicated Gatwick Express service and other features such as splitting and joining at Haywards Heath.

Passenger Focus initial comments

Passenger Focus, with London Travel Watch, made a detailed response to the publication of the BML RUS in February and we believe that this should form the basis for our consideration of the proposals now being consulted upon. Our submission recognised the severe crowding and capacity problems on the route and took the line that:

“Analysis shows that, despite the controversy which the issue has aroused, those using Gatwick Express are the smallest group of passengers on the route. This is not to say that the needs of airport passengers should be ignored, but it does show that a sense of proportion must be preserved when assessing their claims in relation to those of other users”

Airport passengers are still very important and their needs must be catered for, but any changes/enhancement to services should not be to the detriment to other users of the network.

Passenger Focus would like to see the best use of capacity made to and beyond Gatwick. We therefore welcome the fact that the capacity issue is being seriously considered further. Capacity may be the key issue at present, but we would urge that DfT do not let performance drop off the agenda. It is still one of the most important issues for passengers and therefore constant attention needs to be paid to changes in performance levels.

There are long-standing pressures on the BML and we are disappointed that we are still at the consultation stage after nearly two years. We wish to see implementation of effective BML train services to meet identified passenger needs at the earliest possible opportunity once this final consultation is completed.

Next steps

Following a meeting last week with DfT to explore the implications of the implementation options in more detail Passenger Focus is now considering the consultation in more detail.

We would be pleased to receive the views of interested parties to help inform our response. We are particularly interested in views about the relative merits of the four options and the implications of the service changes that are proposed. It would be helpful to have any input by 4 December to allow us time to consider the information we receive.

We will also be assessing the evidence base and other relevant information before finalising our stance on the consultation options. We will maintain a dialogue with colleagues at London Travel Watch to explore whether a further joint submission is feasible.

Further Information

Our response to the published BML RUS [can be found in the press and publications section of our website](#) or obtained from beverley.wright@passengerfocus.org.uk / 0870 336 6096

The consultation document can be found on the DfT website at:

http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_railways/documents/divisionhomepage/612620.hcsp

It may also be obtained from:

DfT Publications, Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DR.
020 7944 8300

Responses may be sent to Passenger Focus to forward before the closing date of 22 December or can be addressed directly to: BML RUS Implementation Consultation Manager, Zone 5/27 at the DfT address above, or sent by email to: bmlconsult@dft.gsi.gov.uk

We should be grateful for a copy of any response that you submit.

Any queries regarding the paper should be addressed to:

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