



Passenger Focus response to Network Rail South London Route Utilisation Strategy draft for consultation

November 2007

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1. Introduction

Passenger Focus is the independent national rail passenger watchdog that exists to represent and promote the interests of passengers. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the consultation draft of Network Rail's South London Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS).

In preparing this consultation response we have worked closely with colleagues at London TravelWatch (LTW). Both our submissions have much in common and we are in overall agreement about the broad issues that need to be addressed in finalising and implementing the South London RUS.

To inform our response we have considered the views of a number of local rail user groups and other stakeholders. Their opinions have assisted us in developing our position.

2. London Passengers' Priorities for Improvements

Research recently undertaken for Passenger Focus has identified the priorities of London rail passengers for service improvements. Significantly for the draft RUS the following factors are all ranked within the top four priorities:

- sufficient train services at times when passengers want to use the train
- at least 19 out of 20 trains arrive on time
- passengers are always able to get a seat on the train.

The full ranking is shown in Appendix A.

3. Comments on the overall strategy

3.1 Demand and implementation: The need for a longer term vision

Passenger Focus notes the recognition of the current crowding issues identified in the draft RUS and the evidence suggesting that suppressed demand of up to 10% already exists. We believe that these pressures, together with the further growth in households and employment set out in the South East and London plans mean that provision of sufficient capacity is of paramount concern.

The assessment of the options makes it apparent that the draft RUS is very much a 'last fix' to optimise use of current infrastructure on a network straining at the seams. Many of the options considered as potential solutions to identified gaps are deemed unable to be implemented because of insufficient capacity of various types. This therefore suggests that the overall strategy will ultimately fall short of accommodating the growing demand on the railway in South London. The likely impact of this on passenger satisfaction, industry performance and economic, social and environmental objectives may lead to perverse consequences.

A longer term 30 year vision for South London rail services and all the interlinking routes needs to be developed and articulated, including an examination of the major changes and contingent investment that will be required to transform the network. Further measures to provide new

infrastructure will undoubtedly be required in the foreseeable future and planning for this needs to commence now.

In this broader context we believe that it is important that any of the short to medium term interventions identified for implementation in the final RUS are future-proofed. Central to this will be planning for a 12-car operation over the entire metro network and to allow for further efforts to increase operational capacity to enable more trains per hour to run on all metro routes into central London.

3.2 Peak crowding

Passenger Focus believes that the RUS should be guided by the objective that no passenger should stand, other than by choice, for over 20 minutes on a London commuter route. That is irrespective of whether a ‘standing allowance’ technically applies because of a train’s stopping pattern. It is important to note that while it is clearly desirable to achieve a strong Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR), the industry cannot opt out of achieving the White Paper Load factors just because there is ostensibly a weak business case.

National Passenger Survey (NPS) results show low satisfaction with ‘sufficient room for all the passengers to sit/stand’ in the peaks. Table 1 below shows that a worryingly high percentage of passengers on South London routes rate this factor as poor or very poor and this must be tackled.

Table 1: Percentage of peak passengers rating satisfaction with sufficient room for all the passengers to sit/stand as poor/very poor

TOC/route	Spring 2006	Autumn 2006	Spring 2007
Southern/metro	59	54	56
Southeastern/inner	60	54	65
First Capital Connect/south London	60	74	67

3.3 Off peak crowding

Passenger Focus believes that the RUS must seek to avoid off-peak crowding. A train with a load factor above 70% will, in terms of passenger experience, feel crowded. Passenger Focus notes that the White Paper supports this point in paragraph 4.20. Families may not easily find seats together meaning their image of a hassle free, relaxing train journey is destroyed. In addition, the challenge of meeting the peaks in leisure demand, whether seasonal or connected with entertainment or sporting events should be addressed by the RUS.

3.4 Rolling stock requirements

The first stage in delivering the capacity needed for South London is to ensure that trains are formed of a sufficient number of carriages to carry the passengers that will be using them. It is therefore important that the train operators play their part by firstly supplying the rolling stock to

service the current timetable and then making commitments to future acquisitions to service the enhanced capability realised by infrastructure improvements.

The final RUS should identify sufficient provision of stock suitable for the demands of all services in the South London area as a key component to address performance and capacity, especially where route clearance issues will impact on ability to recover services after disruption or mean services are truncated at less than optimal destinations (e.g. West London Line should be resourced with sufficient stock to run Croydon to Watford/Milton Keynes).

3.5 Service pattern changes

The draft RUS identifies a number of service pattern changes and it is important that the needs of the existing users of these services are borne in mind. A series of origin and destination surveys needs to be commissioned to identify which passengers lose and how their position can best be mitigated.

3.6 Engineering access

The balance between engineering access and passenger utility needs to be redressed. It is vital that there is time for the railway to be properly maintained and renewed, but there must be no long-term acceptance that the railway is shut completely at points for several weekends each year. We are moving towards a 24/7 society and nowhere is this more apparent than in London and for travellers to and from the capital. As the RUS recognises, the London economy exhibits a growing demand for late evening and weekend services, particularly on Sundays. The final RUS should recommend how engineering requirements can be accommodated with significantly less disruption to passenger services. To minimise impact a ‘whole route’ approach is needed when planning possessions that affect trains running across more than one Network Rail maintenance territory. Particularly for areas that might reasonably access services from more than one station, every effort should be made to ensure that alternative services are not disrupted simultaneously.

3.7 Balancing the needs of passengers from outside the South London RUS area

Passenger Focus wishes to emphasise the need to ensure a reasonable balance is struck between the needs of passengers whose longer distance journeys originate beyond the RUS study area and who want to travel on faster, relatively limited stop services, and the demands of passengers looking for metro style frequencies for shorter trips in the suburban inner London area. We also stress that passengers travelling on longer journeys need to have access to seats and toilets so that they can travel in comfort.

We welcome the acknowledgement in the draft RUS that many of the metro journeys are made on trains that originate from further afield and that this is given consideration when strategic options are assessed. In addition to the implications for rolling stock configuration, it is important that the overall length of journeys is considered when calling patterns are determined.

3.8 Alignment with other Rail Planning Strategies and Programmes

Passenger Focus believes that it is vitally important that there is proper alignment between the emerging South London RUS and the previously published strategies for the Brighton Mainline (BML), South West and Cross London routes. There are also implications relating to the Integrated Kent Franchise, East London Line extension, the fully confirmed Thameslink programme and now Crossrail that need to be factored in. There are four particular issues which we feel may have a significant bearing on the way in which this RUS can approach the capacity constraints and demands upon routes in the South London area.

3.8.1 Brighton Mainline RUS

In the context of the identified congestion in South London, it is imperative that the impact of the implementation of the Brighton Mainline RUS is monitored closely. Given the need to maximise carrying capacity there is a case to keep under review the usage of dedicated fast line paths in both up and down directions at 15 minute intervals by a non-stop Gatwick Express. Loading figures from the BML RUS consultation demonstrated that these services have been under-utilised in comparison to other services running through the same area and often to the same destinations which are extremely pressured.

In addition, the calling pattern of the ‘extended’ Gatwick Express services, proposed to run to/from Brighton and which will travel non-stop between Gatwick Airport and Victoria, may exacerbate problems as passengers who wish to travel to East Croydon and Clapham Junction seek journey solutions for these destinations, possibly involving additional travel or journeys within the South London network. Strong arguments have been made in favour of all Gatwick Express services stopping at both East Croydon and Clapham Junction. This is an issue which may need to be revisited.

3.8.2 Cross London RUS

The draft RUS recognises the recommendation from the Cross-London RUS that additional services should run from the West London Line (WLL) to the Croydon area. We believe that it is imperative that this is achieved and note that the possibility of terminating existing, well-used West London Line services at Clapham Junction will create unacceptable additional crowding at Clapham Junction as well as forcing passengers to change services at a station where the environment is wholly unsuited to this purpose.

Severing the orbital nature of the WLL by removing linkages to destinations south of Clapham Junction will severely undermine the service’s ability to offer a viable alternative to the M25.

3.8.3 Thameslink

In light of the recent announcement for full funding of the Thameslink programme we recommend that the RUS undertakes the necessary additional work to factor in all the implications of this programme and the timing of the various output phases. In addition to the infrastructure issues, particularly those associated with platform availability at London Bridge station, the availability of dual voltage rolling stock to serve both Thameslink and other routes will have a potential impact on passenger services.

Further consideration should also be given to how best to utilise capacity in relation to the final service pattern at the Thameslink key output stage 2. The balance of demand for travel between longer distance destinations and the scope to alleviate pressures in the suburban south London area should be carefully examined.

3.8.4 Integrated Kent Franchise

Ideally, the Service Level Commitment 2 (SLC2) would have been informed by a Route Utilisation Strategy to properly scope the service and capacity issues affecting passengers from Kent, South East London and Sussex. However we welcome the acknowledgement by the draft strategy that the SLC2 timetable specification for delivering the Integrated Kent Franchise has shortcomings.

We would like these issues to be considered in the RUS but also to be addressed as part of the ongoing development of the service specification for 2009.

A lot is riding on the successful implementation of SLC2. Despite the extensive stakeholder consultation for SLC2, there still exists significant concern about whether the substantial changes proposed will meet passenger expectations. Southeastern passengers are unique in that they have a fares regime which requires them to pay RPI+3. Passenger Focus is opposed to using a fares policy to manage demand except where it is used positively to incentivise passengers, such as early bird fares. Southeastern passengers are already paying the highest rate of regulated fares and would not accept a fares policy which might result in even further increases to spread demand. Passengers rightly have a perception that they are already funding improvements to their services. The shortfalls must therefore be identified and addressed as part of this strategy but bearing in mind that it will not be acceptable to place any more stress on the current fares policy.

4. Comments on specific options

Option 4.6: 12-car peak services on the East Grinstead Line

We support the recommendation that this option is progressed for 12-car operation with Strategic Door Opening (SDO) at some of the smaller and quieter stations as a means of addressing crowding on this route and between East Croydon and London.

We note that electrification of the Uckfield line would enable trains from this line to join with those from East Grinstead at Oxted to run in multiple, possibly offering capacity benefits on the line to/through East Croydon. This would release diesel Class 171s for redeployment elsewhere, e.g. to boost Brighton-Ashford Coastway/Marshlink services.

Option 5: Reconfigure Rolling Stock Layouts

We recommend that further assessment of the implications of any future internal reconfiguration of rolling stock is undertaken by relevant industry parties with input from Passenger Focus/LTW and that particular emphasis is placed on the needs and views of passengers.

We welcome and support the recognition in paragraph 8.3.3 that any reconfiguration to enable a higher portion of standees, 'needs to be balanced against the resultant increase in passenger standing time' and that, 'many metro journeys are made on trains which originate some distance from London, and on which a reduction in seats would not be an appropriate solution. This means that deployment of higher-density stock should not, on its own, form the cornerstone of meeting demand.'

Option 6: Use of fares policy to manage demand

We note that the assessment of Option 6 recommends that the use of fares to manage demand continues to be developed as an industry-wide initiative outside the RUS process.

Passenger Focus remains firmly opposed to the principle of pricing off demand. NPS results show that passengers already have a poor opinion of value for money. There is also evidence that the cost of rail fares is one of the reasons that prevents people using trains. (*Department for Transport. Public experiences of and attitudes towards rail travel. September 2006*). Simply putting up fares will exacerbate these issues, to the detriment of wider transport and modal shift objectives and with additional impact on economic and social inclusion objectives.

Passenger Focus does not, however, oppose using incentives to help spread demand outside peak hours. The key point is to offer discounts to passengers who travel outside peak hours rather than penalise those who travel in the peak. Brief details of our research into this issue are provided in Appendix B.

Intelligent ticketing (smartcards)

Passenger Focus is basically supportive of intelligent ticketing and we welcome the emphasis on finding technical means to enable ticketing to expand to mobile phones, at-home ticket printing and smartcard options. However it is important that this is not a technological fix to suit the industry. Passengers must be happy with and able to use the new formats easily and willingly.

The potential for Smartcard technology to play a part through application to longer-distance journeys, whose walk-up fares will usually be considerably dearer than for short-hop urban journeys, remains to be seen. Nevertheless it strikes us that the printed-card ticket will remain for some considerable time yet.

Option 7: Short term acquisition of additional rolling stock

Whilst we support the general principle of integrated procurement exercises and the pursuit of economies of scale, we note that passengers who are currently crammed onto short formed trains will find little comfort in what effectively is a strategy of 'jam tomorrow'.

We therefore support the proposal to transfer 48 Class 319 vehicles from Southern to First Capital Connect (FCC) but note that this must be underpinned by the timely provision of sufficient and suitable rolling stock for the Southern services from which they are released. We seek assurances that the pressure of other programmes, notably Thameslink, will not shift pressures from one part of the network to another or lead to stock changes that work to the detriment of passengers.

We support proposals to supplement the Class 171 fleet on the Uckfield line but, given the well documented pressures and the ongoing pattern of growth we urge that this should be, at a minimum, an additional two four car units.

Where other peak services, particularly on Southeastern, are anticipated to remain short formed we emphasise the need to address this through deployment of suitable additional stock.

Given that South London is one of the most extensively used parts of the national rail network it is imperative that an appropriate share of the 1300 new carriages are allocated to address capacity pressures on as many South London routes as possible. National Rail services in south London are also expected to bear the brunt of passenger demand which in north London is borne by the Underground, little of which serves the areas south of the Thames, and rarely with such frequency as London Underground services.

Option 13.1 Southbound WLL services to terminate at Clapham Junction

We fully support the recommendation that this is not progressed due to the sizeable level of demand that is known, and forecast to exist for services crossing Clapham Junction.

Option 13.2 WLL services to terminate somewhere between Clapham Junction and Croydon

We support the recommendation that this option is not progressed as the WLL service is the only peak service in the East London Line feasibility timetable connecting East Croydon with the Norbury line.

Option 13.3 WLL services to terminate at East or South Croydon

We support the recommendation that this option is progressed and note that previously Sanderstead has often been used to turn stock round to keep the through lines clear.

Options 13.4/13.5/13.6/13.7 WLL services terminating

We support the recommendations that these options are not progressed. We have previously taken the view that termination of WLL services at Gatwick would be the preferred option but on the basis of the analysis, accept that Croydon would be a better option given current circumstances.

Options 14.1/14.2/14.3 Revision of Oxted line/FCC services/Gatwick and South Coast services to a standard pattern through East Croydon

We support the recommendations that these options should be progressed but note that this should not be to the detriment of through journeys or services south of the London area. We agree that passive provision for four trains per hour be made for FCC services.

We note that regular clock face timetables will be of benefit to passengers and recommend that services through East Croydon are arranged on a well spread basis and also that the timetables in each direction on a route should 'mirror' each other.

We further recommend that at least some doubling of the Uckfield line should be undertaken to reduce the timetabling constraints and to allow increased flexibility for services on this line.

Option 16.1 Additional tracks/platforms at East Croydon

It is imperative that the Railway corridor through East Croydon is protected from trackside developments which would render future enhancements impossible.

Option 16.3 Changes to signalling at East Croydon

We support the recommendation that this option is progressed to remove the significant constraint at a critical location and to enable the 2009 timetable.

Option group 20 Thameslink programme

We support the overall objectives and implementation of the Thameslink programme. However, we advocate that the final pattern of services should be reviewed to ensure that optimal use of rolling stock and capacity is made, with particular reference to the balance of passenger needs between longer distance and suburban London services.

Option 22 Station-specific options

We recommend that measures to relieve congestion at stations are implemented at the earliest opportunity and that, where station redevelopment schemes are not clearly developed with firm start dates, these are expedited. At far too many locations passengers continue to endure totally unacceptable conditions (e.g. congestion, inaccessibility, stepping distances) and their consequent impacts on journeys and performance whilst redevelopment schemes take interminable time to be

conceived, realised and delivered. Far greater emphasis must be made on delivering the station schemes in a timely and effective manner and ensuring that passenger and network benefits are placed at the heart of schemes and not at the bottom of a hierarchy seeking to deliver commercial return.

5. Issues not covered by the RUS

Horley to Coulsdon South

Neither this draft RUS nor the Brighton Main Line RUS properly addresses the needs of the stretch of the line south of East Croydon and proper planning for these stations needs to be undertaken within mainstream strategies, not as an afterthought. We note the significant usage at some of these stations (e.g. Redhill, ranked tenth on Southern network) and also the potentially important role enabling local travel to and from Gatwick Airport, especially for workers. Services that better reflect the hours of activity at the airport should be considered.

Contra-flows

The draft RUS focuses on travel towards London yet other centres of employment, notably East Croydon and Gatwick Airport, also create travel demand. These factors and their impact on longer term travel patterns should not be overlooked.

6. Contact details

Any enquiries regarding this response should be addressed to:

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Appendix A – London Rail Passengers Priorities for Improvements

London Attribute	GB Rank of Attribute
Rank	
1 Price of train tickets offer excellent value for money	1
2 Sufficient train services at times I use the train	2
3 At least 19 out of 20 trains arrive on time	3
4 Passengers are always able to get a seat on the train	4
5 Company keeps passengers informed if train delays	5
6 Maximum queue time no more than 2 mins to purchase tickets	6
7 Information on train times/platforms accurate and available	7
8 Trains are consistently well maintained/in excellent condition	8
9 Passengers experience a high level of security on the train	10
10 Seating area on the train is very comfortable	9
11 Good easy connections with other forms of transport	12
12 Personal security at stations is improved through CCTV/staff	11
13 Your journey time is reduced by five minutes	13
14 The train travels at a fast speed throughout the journey	16
15 The inside of the train is cleaned to a high standard	14
16 Station staff are available whenever required	17
17 All station staff are helpful and with a positive attitude	21
18 Always a quick response to information requests at stations	19
19 Connections with other train services are always good	15
20 Useful information is provided throughout the journey	22
21 Facilities at stations are plentiful and of good quality	18
22 All trains have staff to assist	20
23 There is sufficient space for passengers' luggage	24
24 All train staff are helpful and have a positive attitude	23
25 There are good quality toilet facilities on every train	25
26 Station environment always pleasant and comfortable	26
27 Stations are cleaned to a high standard	27
28 All station building maintained to a high standard	28
29 The outside of the train is cleaned to a high standard	30
30 High quality car parking available	29

Appendix B – Incentivising travel outside the high peak

Passenger Focus research ('Encouraging edge of morning peak travel'. October 2006) indicates that passengers might be willing to travel outside the high-peak hour (i.e. 08.00-09.00) through the use of so-called 'early-bird/late-bird' schemes that offer a discount/saving (in the region of 25%) on the cost of peak fares. This was not sufficiently detailed to draw any conclusions as to exactly how much congestion could be alleviated. Nonetheless, we believe that there is still scope for train companies to explore the potential for an incentive scheme, especially before considering more punitive measures to restrict demand through measures such as increasing peak fares or restricting ticket validities.

The research also has implications for the ticketing structure. The focus group findings clearly point to the need for any system to be flexible. Existing Early Bird schemes have tended to specify an arrival time (e.g. you must arrive before 07.30) with season ticket-holders travelling outside this time penalised with an excess fare. The research indicates that commuters do not want to be tied down – they want to be rewarded for those days they travel outside the peak rather than be penalised when they travel within. The idea being that passengers accrue a benefit by avoiding the peak – the more often they do so, the higher the overall benefit. This would require a relatively sophisticated ticketing system capable of recording actual journey details.

It is likely, therefore that any successful introduction of an early/late bird scheme for commuters would need to be linked with the roll-out of smartcard technology (i.e. ITSO/Oyster). This makes it

crucial that the technology includes (or at least includes the option for) scope for an early/late bird scheme.



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Passenger Focus is the operating
name of the Rail Passengers Council