

Kent Council calls for stopping trains to northern France

KENT County Council is calling for the provision of Kent stops on emerging rail services to the continent, and for the introduction of a Trans-Manche Metro service linking Kent with Nord-Pas de Calais (RAIL 604).



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The report castigates the present Southeastern franchise for its "abysmal" winter performance, "with extended delays, cancellations and even overnight journeys".

This service would link London and Brussels, calling at Ebbsfleet, Ashford, Calais Frethun and Lille, providing access to jobs and leisure.

On April 4 the council's cabinet approved the *Rail Plan for Kent* report, which states that the "rail service in Kent is a key driver" of plans for regeneration and economic growth in the county, and that the next Integrated Kent (Southeastern) franchise is "pivotal".

But it is not primarily these failures that have caused the anger and frustration of Southeastern's commuters, says the report. Instead: "It is overwhelmingly the almost complete lack of accurate and up-to-date information about the delays and cancellations which has caused the greatest complaints."

"To be worthy of winning a new franchise in 2014, Southeastern must radically improve its provision of information. Anything less will be regarded, not just by KCC, but by stakeholders across the county, as totally unacceptable."

Nevertheless, the Rail Plan looks forward to the new franchise (due to start in April 2014), and what can be done in the interim to produce a better operation under the new contract. The main thrust of this is to reverse the changes made when Southeastern introduced the high-speed services into London St Pancras, denying Kent commuters their traditional London termini.

The Mayor of London's proposal that stops at Denmark Hill and Peckham Rye be inserted into Maidstone East to London Victoria services is strongly opposed, as it would have "an extremely detrimental effect on rail passengers using the Maidstone East line", already the "Cinderella" of the county's network.

The provision of a new rail service for Kent is "critical to the county's regeneration objectives", especially in East Kent and in Thanet, where the proposed Thanet Parkway should encourage the expansion of Manston Airport and economic growth in this district. Dover, Deal and Sandwich are also all seen as potential beneficiaries of improved services.



A Southeastern Class 395 Javelin runs from North Downs Tunnel on High Speed 1 on July 28 2010. Kent Council is calling for improved rail services, including better links by stopping trains to France and Belgium. Javelins run on classic and high-speed lines but do not traverse the English Channel. DAVID STAINES.

Trans-Manche Metro

Kent County Council continues to participate in Trans-Manche Metro, in partnership with Conseil Regional Nord-Pas de Calais.

This project is part of the wider EU-funded Interreg IV North West Europe - Regions of Connected Knowledge project, in which KCC has replaced the South East England Development Agency.

KCC is committed to part-fund the development of the business case for TMM, together with partners in Nord-Pas de Calais and with EU Interreg IV funding.

The concept of TMM is to link the regions of Kent and Nord-Pas de Calais by providing a regular through rail service from London St Pancras serving Ebbsfleet, Ashford, Calais Frethun, Lille and Brussels. This would allow regular cross-Channel journeys for business, education, employment and leisure purposes, says the council, and offer new opportunities to Kent business and educational institutes which could develop EU connections, served by a frequent international rail service.

Tesco looks to expand rail freight at Daventry

Supermarket giant Tesco plans to run up to eight trains per day from its new distribution centre near Northampton, which is expected to open this summer. Tesco says the new site at Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT) will remove 100,000 lorries from the roads each year. It is building the new centre to replace one near Milton Keynes, which it says can no longer cope with the volume of stock it has to hold. TESCO.



No payments to Agility until 2016

No payments will be made to Agility Trains, the preferred builder of the Intercity Express Programme trains, in the years to 2014/15.

Transport Minister Theresa Villiers, replying to a Commons Written Question from Shadow Transport Secretary Maria Eagle on March 30, said: "Payments will only be made to the train service provider once the trains have entered revenue-earning service, from 2016."

In reply to a second question from Eagle, Villiers said that the Department for Transport's "direct programme costs and incremental franchise change costs" relating to the Thameslink project, due to be completed in 2018, in the five years to 2014/15 will be £70million, £84m, £62m, £107m and £111m.

East Coast still bottom of punctuality league table

Train punctuality, as measured by the Public Performance Measure (PPM), continued to climb in February as operators recovered from the harsh weather of last December, with a new high for the month of 92.4%.

But state-owned East Coast remains firmly at the foot of the table: at 82.5% it is 7.5 percentage points behind the next worst train operator, CrossCountry. Virgin Trains, long rivaling EC for the

wooden spoon, is now heading for mid-table with 91.8%. Top spot in February was taken by c2c (96.5%), while Merseyrail, Chiltern and London Overground also topped the 95% mark.

Year-on-year (13 four-week periods), Merseyrail is the most punctual operator, at 95.0%. At 83.4% East Coast is also bottom of this ranking, well behind Virgin's 86.6%. CrossCountry, Southeastern, Southern, First Capital Connect and

London Midland are the other train operators (out of 17 measured) with annual PPMs below the 90% level.

East Coast told RAIL: "Around four-fifths of delays to East Coast services continue to be caused by external factors, such as cable theft, trespassers, the weather and problems with the railway infrastructure such as points failures, broken rails and track circuit failures."

EC says that a total of 151 services in February were recorded as 'TOC on self delays' (problems that were EC's own fault). In March, this figure had been reduced to 101.

However, delays caused by Network Rail, such as infrastructure problems, totalled 390 services in February and 385 in March.

"This demonstrates, when comparing March with February, how we have substantially improved our performance on the causes of delay within our control as train operators," said the operator.

Train operators pull through leaf fall and snow

Four-week Period to	Worst TOC %PPM	National %PPM	Best TOC %PPM
September 18 2010	EC 85.2	93.5	Chiltern 97.3
October 17	Southeastern 87.8	92.8	c2c 98.1
November 13 (leaf fall)	Northern 81.8	86.3	LO 94.5
December 11 (snow)	Virgin 70.4	81.7	Chiltern 94.4
January 8 2011 (snow)	EC 63.3%	81.0	LO 93.5
February 5	EC 80.9	90.3	LO 95.4
March 5	EC 82.5	92.4	c2c 96.5

Source: NR. Notes: EC - East Coast, LO - London Overground.

Kent's key aspirations for the next Integrated Kent Franchise

- The present level of service provided on the Maidstone East line is "completely unacceptable, and the new franchise must address this omission above all else". Initially there should be an hourly Maidstone East to Blackfriars service - this would be replaced by a half-hourly Thameslink service via Blackfriars from 2018.
- Regular peak-time main line services to Charing Cross or Victoria, and Blackfriars or Cannon Street, and a regular off-peak service to Charing Cross or Victoria from each major town in Kent.
- Better connections at Dover between Deal/Sandwich trains and the high-speed service to St Pancras. Extension of the HS service through to Ramsgate via Deal.
- Better connections at Ashford and Sittingbourne.
- Route enhancement studies of

- Ashford-Thamet and Ashford-Hastings, also to allow high-speed services to run from Ebbsfleet via Gravesend to Maidstone West from 2014.
- The principal Kent termini for Thameslink services from 2018 should be Maidstone East (via Otford and West Malling) and Sevenoaks (via Otford and Bat & Ball). The Cannon Street service from Hastings via Sevenoaks should be retained.
- Parkway stations at Thanet, Maidstone and Appledore.
- Hourly Gatwick-Tonbridge-Ashford service (Southern franchise route).
- Smart ticketing, better stations and better value-for-money tickets, to "encourage economic growth throughout the county", with a lowering of the annual increases (now RPI+5%) in the county.

"We must all ensure that, whoever is the provider, Kent will enjoy the very best rail service which will meet the needs of all its residents and visitors."

Nick Chard, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways & Waste

News In Brief

ATW revenue system

Arriva Trains Wales is seeking to improve its income from passengers, by appointing HP Enterprise Services of Bracknell, Berkshire, to a £200,000 contract to implement and maintain a revenue management system.

Wheel monitoring

Trackside Intelligence of Australia has won a deal to supply Northern Ireland Railways with a trackside wheel monitoring system, to help the railway reduce wheelset failures that cause train delays.

SVR cuts 12 staff

The Severn Valley Railway has fought back against passenger decreases of 10% last year by cutting 12 staff by redundancy or retirement.