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Brighton Main Line: SRA consults on strategy to boost punctuality and capacity

Better train performance, less overcrowding and better value for taxpayers are the aims of a draft strategy for the Brighton Main Line published for consultation today by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA).

The Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) is designed to provide a coherent planning framework for one of the country's busiest lines - delivering better punctuality and increased capacity, without the need for expensive and disruptive infrastructure works. Implementation of the strategy will be subject to this consultation and commercial agreement with industry partners.

Key benefits of the draft RUS, the second of a series planned for Britain's busiest and most congested main lines, include:

- More frequent Gatwick Express service, running every ten minutes from London Victoria and Gatwick, calling at East Croydon, with extensions to coastal towns, integrated into the overall service pattern. This will also provide an enhanced service, in terms of speed, quantum and quality, from coastal towns to Gatwick and London;

- More seats for commuters on the main line north of Gatwick, achieved by running all peak hour trains in 12-car formation. This will reduce overcrowding on the Brighton Main Line fast services (currently 130%) and increase patronage on the relatively lightly-loaded Gatwick Express services (often no more than 50%), such that on average, main line trains will be 80% full on leaving Gatwick for Victoria in the morning peak hours;

- Better train punctuality throughout the route, and faster journey times to many destinations on the South Coast. This will be achieved by measures such as reducing complex train moves between lines, abandoning the splitting and joining of trains at Haywards Heath, and tailoring timetables to the speed profile of new trains;

- All-day hourly fast services to Uckfield from London Bridge;

- A regular and frequent suburban service on all the corridors from London Victoria and London Bridge, with some peak hour improvements.

In order to facilitate the major improvements, a number of other changes would need to be made. They include the curtailment of the Hastings - Eastbourne - Gatwick - Victoria service at Eastbourne (but there will be an additional Brighton - Ashford fast service using brand new diesel rolling stock) and the alteration, in the interests of performance, of the Watford - Brighton service into a Watford - Clapham Junction train.

SRA Chairman Richard Bowker said:

'This strategy marks a major step towards delivering a better railway for users of the Brighton Main Line. It demonstrates how the rail industry can work smarter to bring about better performance and more capacity for its customers, in an affordable way.

'We look forward to continuing to work closely with stakeholders during the consultation, to ensure improved delivery of the railway along the Brighton Main Line.'

Notes to Editors

1. The SRA plans to use responses from this consultation to help inform the development of a final strategy to be published after the consultation period. The deadline for responses is 3rd December 2004.
2. The Brighton Main Line RUS focuses on the next two to ten years, and advocates solutions that make best use of the existing rail network, so without the disruption and cost that major infrastructure works can bring. The strategy follows publication of the SRA's first RUS, for Midland Main Line, in March. Others under development include the Great Western Main Line and the West Midlands area, together with a strategy for the East Coast Main Line.
3. The framework informing and underpinning Route Utilisation Strategies was set out in the SRA's Network Utilisation Strategy (NUS), published in June 2003. This set out the first long-term service-planning framework for the privatised railway.
4. Route Utilisation Strategies (RUSs), together with Regional Planning Assessments, form a key link between the SRA's function to provide leadership and strategic direction for the railway through the specification of train services, the management of franchises and the development of railway infrastructure, and its role in identifying local and regional stakeholder interests.

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