



Implementation of the Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy: Stakeholder briefing document

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Title page

Stakeholder Briefing Document
Implementation of the Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy

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Background

The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) developed a Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) for the Brighton Main Line during 2004 and published a consultation draft in September 2004. The purpose of the SRA's RUS programme was to seek to identify the best allocation of route capacity to the various groups of rail services (local passenger, express passenger, freight) on busy and congested routes. The Brighton Main Line had been identified as one such route with significant interactions with services branching off the route to Sussex Coast destinations. [1]

A number of concerns were expressed by stakeholders in response to the SRA's consultation, particularly the aviation industry, with regard to the proposed strategy and the belief that, if implemented, it would seriously degrade the quality of the dedicated non-stop Gatwick Express train service currently provided

to airline passengers using rail links to and from Gatwick Airport.

Extensive stakeholder engagement and subsequent analysis followed the close of the consultation and the final Brighton Main Line RUS was published by DfT in February 2006.

Following publication of the strategy DfT continued to engage with the rail and aviation industries on how to implement its principles. A number of timetable options were identified and these were consulted upon during autumn 2006 before a decision was reached on how the RUS should be implemented.

[1] The Transport Act 2005 conferred responsibility on Network Rail for the production of RUSs and they have now developed a programme which they plan to undertake over the next couple of years.

Brighton Main Line RUS Objectives

- To **reduce overcrowding** / accommodate current and anticipated future growth in passenger demand and increase carrying capacity on the BML and suburban commuter services where it can be achieved within existing infrastructure;
- To **continue to improve operational performance** of Brighton Main Line services to give passengers a better service and contribute towards national performance targets;
- To **maintain a high quality London Victoria â Gatwick Airport service**; and,
- To **achieve sustainable value for money** within the constraints of the overall rail budget.

Whilst operational performance on this route has improved considerably since the SRA began work on this RUS in 2003, peak crowding has become a major issue. Southern have made service and resource changes in recent years which has had some positive impact on train crowding but this still remains a source of stakeholder and commuter concern.

Consultation Process

The Implementation of the Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy consultation commenced on 22 September 2006 and sought stakeholder comments on four potential timetable options (or combination thereof) that could fulfil the principles of the RUS by delivering improvements to commuters, who use the Brighton Main Line, whilst meeting the needs of airline passengers travelling to and from Gatwick Airport. The four options consulted upon are:-

- **1: Extra South Coast trains** option, which provides for additional trains from the South coast to call at Gatwick, lifting the frequency of the Gatwick-Victoria service to 10 trains per hour
- **2: Retention of dedicated Airport Service** option, which provides for peak-time Gatwick Express services to start back from Three Bridges, but otherwise leaves the existing service pattern virtually intact
- **3: Splitting and joining at Gatwick** option, which provides for a 'dedicated' airport 4-car train portion to be detached from the rear of a southbound coastal service at Gatwick, and then to be attached to the front of a subsequent northbound service
- **4: Peak/off-peak** option, which provides for a service similar to option 1 to be operated in the morning peak, with the existing service (including dedicated Gatwick Express trains) to operate after 10am

Over 70 organisations were directly consulted and received a copy of the published consultation document. These included airline representatives, Local Transport Authorities, Regional Agencies, tourist groups, economic forums and rail industry stakeholders. A press release was issued and a copy of the consultation document made available on the DfT website. All MPs with one or more Brighton Main Line-served train stations in their constituency were also directly consulted.

In addition a number of meetings were held during the consultation period with Local Transport Authorities, Regional Agencies and airline and rail industry representatives to discuss the timetable options in more detail and clarify issues of concern. DfT officials also presented the timetable options to a meeting of the Gatwick Airport Consultative Committee.

As was made clear in the consultation document, some work was carried out in parallel with the consultation (particularly on Options 3 and 4). However, the same level of detail was provided for all four options with stakeholders' views sought on these as "operational concepts". Prior to the consultation close, DfT confirmed to the stakeholders who attended meetings with us that all of the options were operationally feasible.

The consultation closed on 22 December 2006.

Consultation responses

A total of 116 written or e-mailed responses to the consultation were received by the consultation close date. A breakdown of the responses is as follows:-

Local Authorities/Town/Parish Councils	21
Regional Agencies	4
Economic Forums	6
Transport Groups	11
Rail Industry	7
Aviation Industry	23
Individuals	23
Passenger Focus/London TravelWatch	2
MPs/MEPs/House of Lords	9
Other	10
Total	116

A 'Save the Gatwick Express' web-based petition was set up on the BAA website seeking support for the continuation of an all day, non-stop, dedicated Gatwick Express service, support for Option 2 as preferred option and delivery of a long-term infrastructure solution to the main line's capacity issues. However the DfT's Consultation Co-ordinator's e-mail address was incorrectly listed on the BAA website for receipt of responses rather than the Brighton Main Line e-mail address listed in the consultation document. As a result of this a further 42 responses were sent by e-mail to the Department's Consultation Co-ordinator and forwarded. Of these 12 expressed support for Option 2, 1 for Option 1, 27 wanted the Gatwick Express service preserved and 2 believed the Gatwick Express service was not justified in its current form.

The DfT has also endeavoured, in good faith, to summarise each response received and these are tabulated at **Annex A**. Any significant omission or incorrect emphasis is unintentional.

The consultation sought stakeholder views on the four timetable options presented (or combinations thereof).

No single option emerged as a clear preference with stakeholders and reservations with all of the options were expressed by a number of respondents.

31 respondents preferred **Option 1** as first or second choice with this option securing the most support from the rail industry, passenger groups, individuals and Local Authorities.

40 respondents favoured **Option 2** as their first or second choice although some raised concerns with the ability of the present infrastructure at Three Bridges station to cope with an enhanced level of service, and believed this option should only form a temporary solution in advance of capacity and infrastructure improvements at Gatwick Airport station to enable a full, dedicated Gatwick Express service to operate from the station. Option 2 was favoured by the aviation industry, tourism groups, Gatwick Airport Consultative Committee and local economic forums.

11 respondents cited **Option 3** as a first or second choice though concern was expressed at the effects of splitting and joining services at Gatwick Airport station on the operational performance and reliability of the route. Network Rail, in particular, were concerned that this option could introduce significant operational complexity and have the potential to reduce overall performance.

16 respondents preferred **Option 4** as a first or second choice with a number citing this as their preference because it provided for the continuation of services from Watford Junction through to Brighton.

19 respondents had no clear preference for any of the options presented, with a number commenting that the dedicated Gatwick Express service should be removed and more stops at East Croydon and Clapham Junction provided to cope with growing demand.

Respondents to the consultation raised a number of generic issues that they felt needed to be addressed in any review of the route's train services. These fell broadly into eight categories:

- Aviation, economic and tourism industry stakeholders believe that maintenance of a full Gatwick Express service is vital if Gatwick is to remain competitive internationally, as an airport, and to support London as a major World city.
- The disparity in fares pricing between the various train operators on the Brighton Main Line was raised as a concern: particularly that all fares might be raised to Gatwick Express levels; that fares differentials and restrictions are confusing to air travellers arriving at Gatwick Airport; and that Southern crowding levels are due, in some measure, to passengers choosing the cheaper fare option.
- Overcrowding levels during the evening peak, out of Victoria station, are believed to be as much an issue as the morning peak and need addressing.
- A number of respondents were concerned that the impact of the planned East London Line extension to West Croydon, hadn't been fully explored and taken account of, particularly in relation to constraints that might be placed on services to East Croydon,
- A clear timetable for investment at Gatwick Airport and the Brighton Main Line infrastructure is sought, and any changes to the Gatwick Express services should be deferred until works had been

implemented.

- Concern was expressed at the delay in implementing the planned enhancement of the Reading - Gatwick Airport services to half-hourly, due to lack of capacity on the slow lines, and the need for an early resolution to this.
- That the loading data presented in the consultation document, particularly for Gatwick Express services, is an under representation of what is actually experienced [2].
- That it is unclear from any of the options that the designated rolling stock would provide an appropriate level of luggage space.

[2] **Annex B** shows the October 2006 comparison between Gatwick Express and Southern train loadings into London during the morning peak

Delivery and implementation of the strategy

From the consultation exercise it was apparent that no clear mandate had emerged from stakeholders to proceed with any one of the options consulted upon. A strong level of response was received urging the Department to retain the existing Gatwick - Victoria service to maintain the UK's competitive position for inbound business and tourism travel. Equally there were strong representations from commuter groups and Local Authorities to increase Haywards Heath, Redhill and Croydon area peak travel capacity provision to and from London. Therefore the service specification taken forward must balance the views of both rail and aviation stakeholders with what is operationally feasible and deliverable, represents value for money and is affordable.

Options 1 and 2 received the most support from stakeholders. Bearing this in mind, the option the Department has decided to take forward is a compromise between these two preferred options, which addresses the principal issues that stakeholders had with the two favoured options. For ease of reference we are calling this **Option 2A**. It addresses the particular issues that have been raised by both rail and aviation stakeholders whilst also delivering, to a large extent, the aims of the BML RUS.

Option 2A

This option retains a 'Gatwick Express' (GE) service of 4 non-stop trains per hour, in each direction, between Gatwick Airport and London Victoria.

However, 6 successive 'Gatwick Express' trains in the peak periods (those arriving 0735 to 0850 in London and departing from London 1730 to 1845 Monday to Friday), will operate to/from Brighton and make some intermediate calls south of Gatwick. In the morning peak, there would be a dwell time of at least 2 minutes at Gatwick Airport station, before proceeding non-stop to London.

Combining the Gatwick and Brighton services in this way releases rolling stock and slots in the timetable (those currently occupied by existing Brighton-Victoria trains) which, it is proposed, will be used to provide additional capacity for the Redhill - Croydon - London market.

This proposal addresses key aviation concerns by retaining:

- Four trains per hour, in each direction, non-stop between Gatwick Airport and London Victoria;
- Gatwick Express branding; and
- Dedicated platforms at Victoria station and, with the possible exception of the 6 trains each way in the peak, at Gatwick station.

This proposal also addresses key rail concerns by:

- Increasing the number of seats arriving into/out of London by at least 1800 during the key 1.5 hours in each morning and evening peak; and
- Ensuring that this additional capacity targets the key generators of commuting business, especially Haywards Heath, Redhill [3], and East Croydon.

The proposed Brighton - London 'Gatwick Express' service will require additional rolling stock to provide the train capacity required. This stock will be modified to be similar to the layout of existing Gatwick Express trains with adequate luggage space.

It is envisaged that this revised service pattern will be implemented on the timetable change date in December 2008.

The class 377 'Electrostar' rolling stock and the timetable paths vacated by the existing Brighton-Victoria peak period express trains will be reallocated to provide additional capacity to outer suburban corridors, especially Redhill-Merstham-Coulsdon South-East Croydon-Victoria where the effects of crowding are particularly prevalent.

In summary this option:-

- achieves the aim of retaining a high quality Gatwick to London service whilst mitigating capacity issues for commuters
- seeks to balance the variety of (sometimes conflicting) needs of several groups of stakeholders
- delivers the objectives of the BML RUS
- addresses the need to serve the Redhill line stations more effectively than any of the other options, which was a key outcome of the consultation exercise
- delivers a solution for both morning and evening peak services
- is compatible with the proposed East London Line service pattern
- is operationally endorsed by Network Rail, and
- represents value for money

Accommodation of the additional Reading - Gatwick Airport services can now be examined in light of the revised service pattern.

[3] Option 2A addresses the need to serve Redhill line stations more effectively which was one of the key requirements stakeholders were asked to consider, as part of the consultation exercise. Redhill has been identified as a Regional Transport Hub in the South East Regional Spatial Strategy. A number of stakeholders who responded were concerned that any review of services on the Brighton Main Line should result in a betterment of services to stations north of Gatwick but south of the GLA boundary, particularly as they are not being considered as part of TfL's South London Rail Corridor Plan.

Annex A Consultation responses

[Click here to view the consultation responses](#) (PDF, 88KB).

Annex B - Oct 2006 a.m. Southern and Gatwick Express train loadings into London

[Click here to view the Oct 2006 a.m. Southern and Gatwick Express train loadings into London](#) (PDF, 23KB).