

Forest Hill Society response to Combined Southern and Thameslink Franchise

Consultation document available at <http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/dft-2012-23/>

The Forest Hill Society is a civic society in South East London representing around 400 members in the Forest Hill and Honor Oak areas. Many of our members are regular commuters using the Overground and Southern services on the Sydenham corridor, as such train services are of major importance to our members and to the prosperity of the local area.

Our members predominantly use Forest Hill and Honor Oak Park stations for commuting into central London and Docklands, with most heading to London Bridge, others to Canada Water, and smaller numbers using the services to Victoria. In addition some of our members in the north of SE23 use Crofton Park station to travel to Victoria or Blackfriars and beyond.

1. Background from the 2007 South London RUS

- 1.1. Section 7.2.5 recommended '**12-car operation on the suburban route via Sydenham to London Bridge**' with the note that '*The Strategic Business Plan incorporated costs for 10-car operation on the Sydenham route. However, the need to mitigate adverse impacts of construction works at London Bridge (as described in Chapter 8), together with the current working assumption regarding the 2015 Thameslink train service (as described in Chapter 9), indicates that there is a need for 12-car operation on this route.*'
- 1.2. Section 9.4 referred to the *potential within the Thameslink services for 4tph on the Sydenham route via London Bridge*
- 1.3. Section 9.4.4 extended the analysis of this route stating: '**The Thameslink stopping service via Sydenham appears to be highly desirable from a passenger demand perspective.** Although the new infrastructure in the New Cross Gate area has not been specified with this service in mind, the track layout would still permit it to operate – albeit at the expense of an increased number of conflicting crossing moves between fast and slow lines. Although this is not believed to be a significant hurdle at the time of writing, further timetabling work will need to be undertaken to ensure the operational robustness of this proposal. In addition, there is potentially a requirement for further enhanced turnback facilities in the Croydon area.'
- 1.4. Section 9.5.2 also stated that: '*the following services will almost certainly need to be included: at least 2tph Sydenham line all stations (in addition to the 4tph to Thameslink)*'
- 1.5. Section 9.5.4 stated that: '*Initial demand forecasts have indicated that crowding on the Sydenham line will be broadly addressed by running longer trains, including those running to the Thameslink network, and the introduction of East London Line services.*'
- 1.6. The assumptions of Thameslink services on the Sydenham line led to the recommendation of the withdrawal of services on the Sydenham line terminating at Charing Cross. The existing weekend and late evening services were withdrawn in 2009 with all Southern trains on the Sydenham corridor terminating at London Bridge.
- 1.7. For commuters from Crofton Park the RUS recommended an introduction of the Victoria – Bellingham service to compensate for the loss of Victoria services due to

the ending of the SLL.

- 1.8. From this 2007 RUS it was clear to the Forest Hill Society and our members that we could expect Thameslink services that would connect us directly to the Thameslink core, with services direct to Blackfriars, St Pancras, and possibly further. This was welcomed by the Society and was at least some reassurance when our direct services to Charing Cross were removed in 2009.

2. Thameslink / Southern Service Provision for Forest Hill

- 2.1. The Society believes that Thameslink offers an important opportunity to reduce overcrowding and increased journey options for commuters on the Sydenham Corridor.
- 2.2. The existing Overground services and the Southern services are well utilised and demand continues to grow at a fast rate. It had previously been recognised that these services had suppressed demand of up to 40%. Between 09/10 and 10/11 Office of Rail Regulation Figures showed an increased use of all stations on this line, exactly as predicted from suppressed demand when the East London Line was opened and extended beyond Sydenham.

Station	Increase in Entries/Exits (2010-2011)
Sydenham	19%
Forest Hill	24%
Honor Oak Park	24%
Brockley	36%
New Cross Gate	63%

- 2.3. The figures in the above table are not exception for increased use of stations in London but do show the success of the East London Line / Overground in its first year of operation.
- 2.4. The extension of some Southern trains during peak hours to 10 carriages has also been welcomed by commuters even if this was at the expense of regularity of services to and from London Bridge. Overall there was a small increase in overall capacity on Southern services on the Sydenham corridor at the end of 2011.
- 2.5. Demand is expected to rise with predictions of all trains during the morning peak running at 125% of capacity north of Brockley by the mid-2020s.
- 2.6. The solution to this expected overcrowding is two-fold:
- Five carriage trains on the East London Line and more frequent services on the Sydenham branch
 - 12 carriage trains on the services to/via London Bridge
- 2.7. The 2007 RUS recognised the need for 12 carriage services on the Sydenham corridor and this needs to be included as part of the franchise agreement for the Thameslink/Southern franchise beyond 2015.
- 2.8. To relieve congestion on the East London Line improved connectivity is needed beyond London Bridge. This should be one of the key drivers for extending services on the Sydenham corridor north of London Bridge. Most commuters on ELL

currently change to the overcrowded Jubilee Line at Canada Water, Crossrail will provide another useful interchange at Whitechapel, but capacity on ELL is not sufficient to make this a viable route in the 2020s.

- 2.9. Extending services from Sydenham to Blackfriars, City, Farringdon, and St Pancras will provide an excellent route into the West End, West London, and connections for North London and France. Relief will be provided to the Jubilee line in both directions, to the Northern Line, and to the ELL which has such limited capacity.
- 2.10. Some concerns have been expressed regarding crossover of lines south of London Bridge, but this should not present a significantly larger problem than the plans in the franchise document which connect trains from the central (fast) lines via Sydenham rather than the slow lines. We are sure that this is an obstacle that can be overcome without major impacts on other services.
- 2.11. At present the Sydenham corridor benefits from direct services to East Croydon. It is an important interchange for many commuters heading south from Forest Hill and for connections to Gatwick Airport. The proposals would appear to indicate that this direct connection is under threat and passengers would instead need to change at Norwood Junction to a small number of trains that connect Norwood Junction to East Croydon. This loss of service would have a negative impact on users from the Sydenham corridor stations, and is another reason why we believe that a Thameslink stopping service continues to be an appropriate service on this line at 2-4tph.
- 2.12. We believe there is a good case to be made for one of the busiest suburban train corridors to be connected beyond London Bridge to provide better connections for South East London commuters and reduce overcrowding at London Bridge and Canada Water stations. The case is not just made by us, but in the 2007 RUS which recognised the value in this improvement to our services.

3. Semi-Fast Trains via New Cross Gate

- 3.1. Even if Thameslink trains do not stop at every station between East Croydon and London Bridge, there is the capability to stop at least some of the trains at New Cross Gate and Norwood, making use of the central platforms at both stations. At present the central platforms at New Cross Gate are virtually unused and this is a waste of a useful interchange opportunity which would relieve congestion at London Bridge.
- 3.2. Stopping some southbound Thameslink trains at New Cross Gate would allow for easy interchange for customers onto the slow line with twice as many East London Line services as services out of London Bridge.
- 3.3. Stopping some northbound Thameslink trains at New Cross Gate would allow more commuters from beyond Croydon to make an easy transition to the East London Line to avoid zone 1 on their way to Canary Wharf.
- 3.4. While we would prefer a stopping service between East Croydon and London Bridge we recognise that a semi-fast service is an option that is worthy of consideration in planning peak train frequencies and timings.

4. Trains outside Peak Hours

- 4.1. The Thameslink consultation document make few references to off-peak services, we understand that this is standard practice when considering franchises and service

patterns, but we believe such an exclusion does not allow the DfT and TfL to properly plan for the provision of off-peak services, which are of significance when dealing with cross-London routes and one of the main routes between three major hubs – Gatwick, Kings Cross, and Luton.

- 4.2. It is normal to run fewer services in off-peak times but it is an opportunity to run complimentary services rather than a cut down version of the peak service timetable. Maximum use should be made of the Thameslink corridor as well as the London Bridge to Charing Cross and Canon Street routes to provide more flexibility for commuters and occasional travellers. London does not stop at 7pm, people continue to enjoy entertainment in the West End, travel to airports off-peak, and work late in the City.
- 4.3. Until December 2009, Forest Hill had regular evening and weekend services to and from Charing Cross. These were well utilised by local residents and the late trains were as busy as peak services.
- 4.4. Built into the franchise agreement should be the specification of minimum off-peak services for Metro services as well as the core Thameslink services beyond London. By using the Thameslink corridor for Metro services more people will be able to get directly to their destinations and provide greater interchange capability within the zone 1 area. This would have little impact on high-speed services which would not be expected to run quite as frequently off-peak.
- 4.5. Canon Street station should remain open beyond the evening peak to provide additional capacity at London Bridge for services heading to South East London and Kent.

5. Thameslink / SouthEastern Service Provision for Crofton Park

- 5.1. Crofton Park currently has less than four services per hour even at peak times. This is partly due to the failure to provide the Bellingham to Victoria services recommended in the 2007 RUS. The result of this is not only infrequent services for Crofton Park commuters, but it puts additional pressure on the services from Honor Oak Park and Brockley, both of which enjoy up to 12 tph in each direction.
- 5.2. Commuters in Crofton Park deserve at least 4 tph and this franchise provides an opportunity to deliver this.
- 5.3. A minimum frequency of 4tph was part of the Mayor's transport manifesto and as such we expect such minimum frequencies to be ensured for Crofton Park.

6. Service Disruption due to works to Thameslink and London Bridge 2014-2015

- 6.1. Serious disruption is planned to many commuters changing trains at London Bridge within the timescale of the proposed franchise, with no services between London Bridge and Waterloo East in 2014/2015. We hope that plans are put in place to minimise the inconvenience this causes to passengers while this essential work is carried out.
- 6.2. Rail only tickets to London terminals should be valid on the Jubilee line between London Bridge and Waterloo and between Canada Water and Waterloo. Alternatively fare reduction should be provided to passengers to compensate for the significant reduction in services and increased cost of travel to London Terminals.

- 6.3. Most importantly we expect that clear advice needs to be provided to passengers well in advance of the changes occurring. We would welcome the opportunity to input into plans for this period to ensure that concerns from commuters from Forest Hill and similar services are adequately heard in the run up to this disruption.

7. Balance between South East London Commuters and Home Counties Commuters

- 7.1. Overall the proposed franchise appears to favour commuters from the Home Counties and provide little in the way of additional services for Londoners, particularly in the South East of London. It is on services within London that capacity is a particular challenge as more people use the trains, and there is every sign that demand continues to increase on these Metro routes faster than for many other routes.
- 7.2. Before any conclusion is reached for the services included in the Thameslink franchise we would like to see a clear adjustment in favour of South East Londoners so that we get equivalent service patterns to North Londoners, rather than services that run non-stop from central London to Croydon.

8. Summary of Recommendations

- 8.1. Thameslink stopping service on the Sydenham corridor as outlined in the 2007 RUS.
- 8.2. Continued connections from Forest Hill to East Croydon.
- 8.3. Plans for the introduction of 12 carriage trains on the Sydenham corridor.
- 8.4. Minimum services frequencies of 4 tph at Crofton Park.
- 8.5. Inclusion of minimum specification for off-peak services, including maximising the central Thameslink corridor beyond the primary Thameslink routes.