



The Combined Franchise Replacement
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Your ref

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Dear Sir/Madam

Southwark Council's response to the DfT's consultation on the combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern franchise

Southwark welcomes the opportunity to comment on the combined franchise specification and our position is set out below.

Please note that this response supersedes our provisional response, ref. 20120813_Thameslink sent on the 17th of August.

General comments

Residents, businesses and visitors to Southwark alike rely heavily on local rail services to provide access to economic, social and cultural opportunities. Southwark suffers from poor connectivity and high levels of deprivation in some areas and this can affect travel opportunities. These factors make the provision of frequent, reliable and affordable rail services essential. We welcome the opportunity the new combined franchise offers to improve rail services in Southwark.

The council wishes to see a step change in local rail services, with fully accessible stations offering metro style 'turn up and go' train frequencies to a wide range of destinations and affordable to all our community. Southwark has recently benefitted from the introduction of London Overground services to parts of the borough. We consider that the high standards of service provided by the Overground, together with high levels of customer satisfaction recorded, are the benchmark for the new combined franchise.

Southwark is undergoing major change with significant levels of development already underway or planned across large parts of the borough. Associated population growth and economic development will place further demand on public transport services which are already stretched. It is therefore essential that rail services in the borough are responsive to this growth and that the franchise specification plans increased capacity and service levels accordingly.

The new combined franchise covers a wide geographical area and caters for a diverse range of travel needs, including both local metro and longer distance regional services. An equitable balance needs to be struck between the sometimes competing demands of such different services. While we recognise the regional economic significance of longer distance services, local rail services are vital to the success of the London economy, particularly in areas such as Southwark where alternatives may be limited.

Southwark tax payers and businesses investing in the borough are helping to finance Crossrail which will bring significant benefits to London and the southeast. Southwark will not benefit directly as there is no Crossrail station in the borough and it is therefore important to recognise the role the new combined franchise has to play in providing convenient access to Crossrail services. In practical terms this means recognising the demand for direct services to the Crossrail interchange at Farringdon for journeys to and from Southwark and south London generally.

Research shows that affordability is a key issue for some of our residents, effectively limiting their travel horizons. The new franchise proposes to deliver efficiencies in line with Government objectives and to transfer risk to the franchisee where appropriate. We support a more efficient railway, but also wish to see safeguards included in the specification to protect service levels and protect passengers from excessive fare increases. To deliver a more efficient railway, the new franchise should radically review current fare structures to make better use of rolling stock outside peak hours, providing significant incentives to more affordable travel and leading to a more efficient use of the network.

In preparing this response we have consulted with local people across the borough. People are passionate about their rail services, reflecting just how important these services are to Southwark. There is a general consensus that the new franchise needs to protect and enhance rail travel in the borough and to recognise that high quality local rail services are key to accommodate growth and improve accessibility and opportunity for all.

Our response is based on the limited data available to us regarding forecast demand for services in the new combined franchise area. We request that this data is made available to us and the public in order that the franchise process, including service specification, is completely transparent. Further details of track configurations and how this may affect key routing issues would also help aid our understanding of the decision making process.

Yours faithfully

Cllr Barrie Hargrove
Cabinet Member for Transport, Environment and Recycling

Specific responses are provided to selected consultation questions below.

Consultation questions

- Q.1 What improvements do stakeholders believe could be made on the combined franchise through partnership working between Network Rail and the new operator?

While we welcome the objective to reduce costs on the railway we are concerned that any risk transferred from Network Rail to the new operator should not be passed on to passengers. The needs of passengers should be safeguarded including preserving service levels and offering affordable fares.

As well as encouraging partnership working between Network Rail and the new operator, we also consider that the specification should recognise the importance of providing a seamless journey experience as passengers transfer from the new franchise services to other operators. For example, co-ordination is important between current Southern and London Overground services where interchange between the two is required on key routes, Denmark Hill to London Bridge for instance.

- Q.2 Do consultees have any other specific aspirations for the new franchise that they wish to bring to the Department's attention?

The consultation paper highlights the significance of Crossrail and the connection with the Thameslink core at Farringdon, operational from 2018. We would like to emphasize the importance of planning for connectivity to the Farringdon interchange, including recognition of the increased demand for direct access to and from the interchange for trips to and from stations in Southwark and south London generally.

- Q.3 Are consultees aware of any other rail or non-rail development schemes that might affect the new franchise?

Southwark is undergoing a significant programme of regeneration to provide for a growing population and increased business activity. In particular, the Elephant and Castle area is undergoing major renewal and this will lead to increased demand for transport services over the coming decade. Elephant and Castle rail station plays an important role in providing access to the area and as an interchange with other modes. The new franchise should accommodate growth at this station and frequent cross London services calling at Elephant and Castle should be mandated in the franchise specification.

During the period 2015 to 2018 many core route services will be diverted via Elephant and Castle. We would like to see as many of these services as possible stopping at the station, not only as existing passengers may find Elephant and Castle the closest station to their intended destination, but in order to increase train frequencies at the station to serve the growing population and relieve pressure on alternative travel options.

- Q.4 What increments or decrements to the specification would stakeholders wish to see and how would these be funded?

- Q.5 Which aspects of the specification, other than for those services operating through the Thameslink core route, would stakeholders wish to see mandated and which aspects of the specification could be left to the discretion of the operator?

We are concerned that the proposed devolution of train service specification to the franchise operator should not adversely affect local rail services that provide vital links to the borough. An equitable balance needs to be struck between the need to deliver efficiencies and the need to provide essential connectivity. This may sometimes require protecting less profitable, but nonetheless essential local rail services.

We would wish to see the frequency of Southern metro services serving London Bridge mandated as part of the specification.

We would wish to see train lengthening on the Southern service into London Bridge mandated as part of the specification (See Q.21).

- Q.6 Are there other approaches to train service specification which you would prefer?

We would prefer a detailed specification that balances the need to manage costs alongside the need to provide services to areas where overland rail plays a key role in providing access and supporting economic development. A detailed specification in terms of trains per hour is also required to ensure that the significant disruption to services expected within the franchise period is well planned and managed.

- Q.7 What changes to services would stakeholders propose, what is the rationale for them and would these provide economic benefit?

We propose enhanced services for those areas which otherwise have poor levels of public transport accessibility and also to areas of significant growth. Improved service levels to growth areas such as Elephant and Castle and other town centres such as Peckham will support the development of such areas helping to drive inward investment in the borough.

- Q.8 How might better use be made of the capacity currently available?

We believe that a flexible approach in terms of train configuration, fares and frequencies across the day will be required in order to make the best use of current capacity and to plan for expected changes to available rolling stock.

The planned new fleet of trains should be configured to allow flexible running across the network. For example, if all trains are 12 car then this will limit the roll out of the fleet and may rule out specific routes. The ability to run 12 car trains should not be the sole criteria for allocating capacity on the Thameslink core route.

An efficient railway will incentivise off-peak travel to ensure that, as far as possible, services outside of busy times are still well used. With the planned new fleet of longer trains this issue becomes even more significant.

- Q.9 What steps might bidders be expected to take to meet passenger demand and what might be the most appropriate mechanisms for managing demand?

Bidders should be expected to meet passenger demand by providing frequent reliable services across the network and a 'turn up and go' metro style service in urban areas. Further increases in fares beyond inflation are not affordable to many passengers in Southwark and it is considered preferable to incentivise off-peak travel in order to reduce demand at peak times.

- Q.10 What destinations on the current Southeastern network do respondents think should be served by the combined franchise's services and what is the rationale for such proposals?

We support the incorporation of services jointly operated by FCC and Southeastern into the new franchise, including core route services calling at Elephant and Castle, Denmark Hill, Peckham Rye and Nunhead.

- Q.11 How might better use be made of the capacity available on the Brighton Main Line?

- Q.12 What steps should bidders be expected to take to improve performance on the route?

- Q.13 What destinations on the Great Northern route do respondents consider would be appropriate to become destinations for trains which serve the core Thameslink route?

- Q.14 Do respondents believe Great Northern trains which do not serve the Thameslink core route should remain as part of this franchise or be transferred to the new Inter City East Coast franchise?

- Q.15 What improvements would respondents like to see made to Great Northern services as part of the combined franchise and what is the rationale for this?

- Q.16 What services would be appropriate to serve the Airport market?

For many of our residents and businesses Gatwick would be the most convenient airport to use, but rail connections are poor. The provision of direct services to East Croydon from stations such as Herne Hill would improve accessibility to Gatwick.

Direct services from stations in Southwark to connect with Crossrail at Farringdon will make Heathrow Airport considerably more accessible to our residents, businesses and visitors. It is therefore imperative that these services are maintained.

Direct links to Luton airport should be maintained from stations in the borough.

- Q.17 What improvements could be made without adversely affecting the service provision on the remainder of the franchise?

- Q.18 What services that run via Elephant & Castle do respondents think should run via the Thameslink core route?

We question the assumption that the allocation of train paths on the core route should automatically favour services via London Bridge. There is scope to significantly increase service frequency on the London Bridge route without adversely affecting services on routes via Elephant and Castle that provide access to the core route for many of our residents, businesses and visitors.

Core route services that serve Elephant and Castle, Denmark Hill, Peckham Rye and Nunhead on the current jointly operated services are essential and must be maintained. This route through the core of the borough provides essential connectivity to key regeneration areas where significant investment is planned. We are resolutely opposed to any suggestion that this route be considered for termination at Blackfriars.

Core route services that serve Elephant and Castle and Herne Hill on the Wimbledon Loop line must also be maintained. Where the DfT decide that through services cannot be maintained then it is imperative that a frequent and reliable service is provided on the Wimbledon Loop Line, with a minimum of 4 trains per hour and convenient interchange at Blackfriars.

- Q.19 Recognising that not all of these services can run via the Thameslink core route, what would be the most satisfactory way of managing the interchange at Blackfriars?

An equitable allocation of train paths should allow core route services to be maintained on existing routes.

- Q.20 What improvements would respondents like to see made to Coastway East and West services, the rationale for such proposals and the economic benefit expected to be delivered from these changes?

- Q.21 What improvements would respondents like to see made to other Southern services as part of the combined franchise from 2015, what is the rationale for such proposals and the economic benefit expected to be delivered from these changes?

The South London Route Utilisation Strategy, 2008, highlights that even with the implementation of the Thameslink Programme, some routes in the strategy area will still experience significant overcrowding at peak times. Once such route is the Southern operated service into London Bridge via Tulse Hill that shows passengers in excess of capacity north of East Dulwich. The RUS therefore recommends train lengthening to 10 car operation on this route and we support this proposal which should be mandated as part of the combined franchise specification.

- Q.22 What are respondents' views on the practice of splitting trains at stations such as Haywards Heath?

- Q.23 Do respondents feel that the Newhaven Marine branch line and station should be kept open and maintained or should the rail industry deploy the relevant funding elsewhere on the rail network?

- Q.24 How would you like to see performance information published?

Q.25 How frequent should its publication be?

Q.26 What level of disaggregation of performance do you believe is reasonable?

Q.27 What are the priorities that respondents consider should be taken into account to improve the passenger experience of using these services?

National Passenger Survey results show that of the three train operators currently running services in Southwark (excluding London Overground), Southern are generally recognised as having higher levels of customer satisfaction than either FCC or Southeastern when compared to similar operators. The difference is particularly pronounced in terms of value for money and the helpfulness and attitude of train staff. The new operator should maintain and improve the customer ratings achieved by Southern and increase satisfaction across the new Thameslink network. Areas of particular priority include:

- Overall satisfaction with the station
- Staff availability and helpfulness
- Personal security
- Value for money
- Reliability and frequency, and
- Dealing with delays

Q.28 What do stakeholders see as the most important factors in improving security (actual or perceived) and addressing any gap between the two?

Actual and perceived security are best addressed by the presence of station staff and through improvements to the quality of the station environment.

Q.29 What is important to stakeholders in the future use and improvements in stations?

We welcome the specification placing greater responsibility on the franchisee for the maintenance, repair and renewal of stations. The revitalisation of stations now forming part of the London Overground is a model to follow in this respect.

A number of stations in Southwark require significant investment to meet acceptable standards. Important interchange stations, such as Elephant and Castle and Peckham Rye, neither of which are fully accessible, should be prioritised for investment.

We would expect the franchisee to work closely with other industry bodies to improve accessibility at our stations and to improve station facilities and the general station environment. We have delivered a number of successful schemes to improve access routes to stations in the borough and are working with industry partners to bring forward significant improvements at Denmark Hill, Peckham Rye and Queens Road Peckham.

We support the development and implementation of station travel plans.

Q.30 What priorities would respondents give to car parking and cycling facilities at locations where these are fully used?

Providing dedicated car parking, apart from disabled bays in some cases, is not appropriate for stations in Southwark. We would expect the majority of station users to walk, cycle or use public transport to travel to or from their local station.

We support the provision of cycle parking facilities in and around stations in Southwark. Wherever possible, this parking should be fully secure and should offer a range of facilities for cyclists. For example, we are currently developing proposals for cycle hubs at both Peckham Rye and Queens Road Peckham stations. Where fully secure parking cannot be provided, CCTV coverage should be sought and parking should be located prominently where there is good passive surveillance.

Q.31 What sort of ticketing products and services would you expect to see delivered through 'smart' technology on this franchise?

Q.32 What local accessibility and mobility issues do stakeholders see and how they might be addressed?

As per our response to Q.29 above, there are a number of stations in Southwark where physical access is limited and we would expect the franchisee to collaborate with industry partners to delivery fully accessible stations wherever possible.

Apart from physical barriers to accessibility, the availability and disposition of staff at stations and on trains can play an important role in the journey experience, sometimes affecting the decision whether to travel at all. Well resourced stations with helpful staff can help to reduce barriers to travel as can the timely and accurate provision of travel information.

Southwark holds a regular public forum on public transport issues and we would expect the franchisee to be an active participant in this opportunity to engage with local people, including disability groups and local hospital trusts.

Q.33 What environmental targets would stakeholders like to see within the franchise specification?

We would expect the franchisee to lead by example and set out and implement a strategy to reduce the environmental impacts of the railway, particularly in relation to noise impacts.