

South Central Franchise Consultation by the Department for Transport

Response from London TravelWatch August 2008

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INTRODUCTION

General

- 1 London TravelWatch supports the broad thrust of the proposed Department for Transport (DfT) specification, but some elements need to be strengthened and some need to be fleshed out in more detail.

London Overground standards

- 2 London TravelWatch's present benchmark for a short term franchise is that within the Transport for London (TfL) fare zones (the metro area) it should match the standards of London Overground. This is particularly important in this instance as one of the main corridors into London (West Croydon/Crystal Palace–New Cross Gate) will also be served by Overground trains, and stations on this route will be managed likewise. We therefore welcome that the proposed specification for the whole of the metro area moves closer to Overground standards than any previous DfT franchise.
- 3 However we would like to see the following further improvements
 - Immediate programme of station spring-cleaning and repairs
 - Visible staff presence at all metro stations from start to finish of traffic every day
 - Staff to be multi-tasked and have incentives to take pride in station appearance and environment, and in pro-actively looking after the needs of passengers
 - Tight monitoring and control of cleaning standards
 - Franchise responsibility for litter and graffiti clearance to be extended to include all non track areas within the station curtilage - e.g. station staff or train company (TOC) contract cleaning staff should clear areas behind platform fences
 - TfL fares regime to accompany early implementation of Oyster pay-as-you-go (PAYG)
 - Separate monitoring of metro area performance and compliance, including complaints handling targets

- Rail tickets and Oyster cards to be accepted on appropriate London Buses and Underground routes during engineering works or emergency disruption without extra charge
 - Standards and compliance to be sufficient for TfL to agree that metro stations be branded and signed as London Overground, that the lines appear likewise on maps and other information media, and that the trains carry London Overground roundels to supplement the franchise branding.
- 4 In short, metro services should offer passengers the same in all essentials as TfL's own London Overground concession services.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON DFT CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

- 5 Unless otherwise stated, we support the proposals in the consultation document insofar as they affect the London TravelWatch area. For this franchise this area comprises all lines within the London fare zones, plus onwards to Dorking, Gatwick Airport and Oxted.

Chapter 4 – The South Central Franchise

- 6 Page 13 – 3rd paragraph

Southern's achievement in matching rolling stock to routes that are most crowded – often by using coastal trains to make additional peak trips in the metro area – has been most commendable. It would be unwise for a new operator to assume that there is any further scope for such fine tuning and asset sweating.

- 7 Page 17 – 5th paragraph

The poor National Passenger Survey results for metro compared with coastal services are even more significant than the 9% difference suggests. This is because metro passengers typically have shorter journeys and pay less for their journeys. On average, therefore, their expectations of journey quality are likely to be lower.

Chapter 5 – Objectives for the franchise

- 8 Page 19 – 2nd paragraph

We particularly emphasise the importance of the final four bullet points.

Chapter 7 – Major schemes and other initiatives

- 9 Page 23 – 1st paragraph

Whilst fully agreeing the importance of high quality replacement bus services, we wish the operator to be imaginative and proactive in minimising the need for these by finding ways to operate as many trains as possible through and around engineering activities.

Chapter 10 - The proposed DfT base specification

10 South London Metro

10.1 Page 32 – 3rd paragraph

We welcome the requirement to serve most metro routes with a minimum 4 trains per hour (tph) off-peak service. Where stations have routes to two or more central London destinations, the 4 tph standard must apply to at least one.

10.2 We recognise the infrastructure limitations (single track) which will limit the Epsom Downs and Beckenham Junction branches to 2 tph. However there is no such limitation on the Tattenham Corner branch. We regard the 3 tph service planned for the latter from December 2008 (i.e. SLC1) as no more than an unsatisfactory temporary arrangement. The new franchise should be funded to provide a proper 4 tph turn up and go service to Tattenham Corner from the December 2009 timetable change date.

10.3 Page 33 – 2nd paragraph

Conversion of the longer distance metro services to run limited stop on the Croydon–London Bridge section will be beneficial. However to provide the best possible connections to the East London line (ELL) and Docklands, we believe these trains should call at New Cross Gate as well as at Norwood Junction. This will be particularly important for trains on the East Croydon route, as otherwise connections from the East London line to the Gatwick and Sussex coast areas will be very slow and unattractive.

10.4 Page 33 – 4th paragraph

The proposed enhanced Southeastern service via the South London line into Victoria should match the 4 tph standard planned for the rest of the Southern metro area, particularly if East London line phase 2 to Clapham Junction does not go ahead. However we would be most concerned if the latter were not completed by the time the works at London Bridge reduce the terminating capacity there, as the link it will provide from the Denmark Hill/Tulse Hill routes to Docklands and the City (Shoreditch station) will be an essential mitigation for reduced services to London Bridge.

11 South London Metro services at evenings and weekends

11.1 Page 33 – 5th & 6th paragraphs

We welcome the intention behind the proposals for more frequent and later evening and weekend services. However the specification should be tightened to match London Underground standards, with 4 tph required on all routes up to last departures from central London no earlier than 0030.

11.2 We would supplement this standard with a need to specify last trains from the major suburban entertainment centres at Croydon and Sutton to be no earlier than 2400. This should not impose any additional costs, as the 0030 from London stipulation will cover it in the southbound direction, and the need to feed trains into London for 0030 departures will do likewise for northbound services.

11.3 So far as applying the improvements to Thursday–Saturday evenings only is concerned, this would clearly be a step in the right direction. However we see no reason why the daily standard which has long applied for Londoners who are served by the Underground should not also be provided for those who have to depend on National Rail services. We therefore believe that Network Rail must be pressed hard on this matter, and on the related issue of permitting 2-track operation of 4-track railways on Sundays regardless of whether any engineering work is being carried out.

11.4 Whilst Network Rail has made much of its need to invest in new techniques and machinery in order to deliver better evening and weekend train services, the anecdotal evidence available to us suggests that some of the present rules on track availability are based on historic circumstances which no longer apply or exist simply to provide the engineers with easy access whenever it suits them even though no work is carried out on most nights. These rules should be reviewed urgently, so that some service improvements can be made without having to wait for new investment to be brought on stream.

11.5 Page 33 – 7th paragraph

We welcome the fact that the Department is now showing an interest in improved Sunday services. We trust that its deliberations will not take too long, as little more than a glance at service frequencies and loadings on London Underground, Docklands Light Railway, and most London bus routes is needed to see that demand for weekday standard Sunday services is there.

11.6 The same applies to Boxing Day, where London has moved from skeleton services less than twenty or so years ago to Saturday type frequencies today.

11.7 All other bank holidays should standardise on Saturday services.

12 **Horsham, Redhill, Uckfield and East Grinstead**

12.1 Page 34 – 3rd and 4th paragraphs.

London TravelWatch's boundary is at Oxted, so the Uckfield line is technically outside our remit. However its operation is inextricably linked with all the other services which operate to, from and within London. Because of this, the proposed service reductions have ramifications on which we must comment. We believe these reductions must be avoided and that the way to do this is to electrify the line. See Appendix for details.

12.2 Page 34 – 7th paragraph and page 35 – 1st paragraph

We welcome the improved local services on the Redhill corridor being introduced in December 2008 as a long-overdue development. These should be further improved by adding calls at Merstham to increase its off-peak service to 4 tph.

13 West London line

13.1 Page 36 – 5th, 6th and 7th paragraphs and page 37 - 1st, 2nd and 3rd paragraphs.

The proposals are no doubt well intentioned, but they seem to be driven by operational considerations and an assumption that West London line (WLL) services have to be inserted into timetables which have already been written to cater for other priorities. The result can only be a mess – as the consultation paper implicitly admits in its account of the service's complex and unstable history. Regrettably, the proposals only perpetuate the instability, with new links being introduced and then withdrawn in successive timetables.

13.2 London TravelWatch considers that the letting of the new South Central franchise provides an opportunity for the service to be reconsidered from scratch, and that when drafting the new timetables for SLC2 and SLC3 the WLL service should be looked at on an equal footing with other requirements, and not left to be shoe-horned into the timetable after everything else has been settled.

13.3 Our view is that the service should be configured to meet passenger needs for a cross-London service serving principal towns and interchanges, provide an alternative to the hassle and expense of crossing London by bus, taxi or Underground, and offer a frequency which is acceptable in the event of passengers' journeys not going exactly to plan.

13.4 To this end we propose the following off-peak specification:

(a) Service to operate Gatwick-Watford 2 tph at regular 30 minute intervals, 7 days per week, calling at principal towns and key interchanges, viz.

Gatwick

Redhill (if operationally feasible)

East Croydon

Crystal Palace (if necessary for the trains to be routed this way)

Balham (for Northern line south London connections)

Clapham Junction

West Brompton (for District Line west central London connections and Earl's Court exhibition)

Kensington Olympia (for exhibition)

Shepherd's Bush (for Central line west and west central London connections)

Wembley Central

Harrow & Wealdstone

Watford Junction

(b) Extension of at least 1 tph (but preferably 2 tph) to Milton Keynes (primary interchange station for Virgin inter-city services), calling at the principal intermediate towns of Hemel Hempstead and Leighton Buzzard.

(c) First and last train times should be based on 0600 (Sundays 0730) and 2400 at Kensington Olympia in each direction.

This is based on the assumption that the West London line stations (including Imperial Wharf) are also served by the planned 4 tph London Overground service, and by peak metro services from the Norbury metro route.

- 13.5 The peak service should adhere as far as possible to the off-peak specification, but we recognise that some deviation may be necessary. In particular, additional calls between Milton Keynes and Watford to serve commuter flows to west London may be needed.
- 13.6 In addition to this day-long cross-London service, we resubmit the proposal we made at the time of the London Midland and Cross-Country franchise bids, namely that a faster and longer distance cross-regional service should be introduced on a limited basis to cover for the December 2008 withdrawal of the present Cross-Country WLL service.
- 13.7 This should be an electric service from Birmingham to Brighton calling at Coventry, Milton Keynes, Watford, Shepherd's Bush, West Brompton, Clapham Junction, East Croydon, Gatwick Airport and Brighton, departing around 0900 and returning around 1300. It would serve the West Midlands and West Coast market, to be resourced by 'between peaks' marginal time (and therefore marginal cost) of London Midland dual voltage class 350 stock. Ideally it would be linked up to operate as an extension of a Manchester or Liverpool–Birmingham service, and there would be no objection – and perhaps worthwhile passenger benefit – if it ran via Northampton.
- 13.8 A corresponding service – perhaps operated by the new South Central franchise – should be considered leaving Brighton around 0900 and returning from Birmingham around 1300, in this case using dual voltage class 377 stock in marginal time from peak Coastway duties (or similar).

14 **Fares, ticketing and revenue protection**

14.1 Page 41 – 5th paragraph

Whilst we appreciate the idea behind the proposal to link fares increases to the performance of the operator, London TravelWatch supports the application of standardised fares across all operators within the London fare zones. This concept could not therefore be applied within this area.

14.2 Page 42 – 5th paragraph

A valuable addition to ticket machine functionality in the metro area would be the ability to top-up PAYG Oyster cards and to issue boundary zone extension tickets. Oyster top-up should also be provided at busier stations outside the metro area so that passengers can conveniently top-up at their home station.

14.3 Page 43 – 1st paragraph

There seems to be an implicit assumption that it is acceptable for stations to be left unstaffed after 2300. This is weaker than the London Overground standard. We believe that, at the very least, the invitation to tender should require a costing for staffing stations and gate lines until close of traffic.

15 **Improving service quality**

15.1 Page 43 – 1st paragraph

We have recent experience of the service quality monitoring regime used on National Express East Anglia (NXEA), which includes mystery shopper audits.

15.2 Whilst we support the principle of such audits we have seen that in their practical operation they are found wanting. Thus, for example, whilst NXEA is achieving an adequate level of cleanliness of stations across their network, in inner London some stations have been allowed to be in a squalid state, left for weeks without any thorough cleaning. This is because of the averaging process across the stations and attributes of stations.

15.3 Therefore if a mystery shopping audit is to be included in this franchise there must be minimum scores of the attributes in addition to an average score – no stations should be allowed to get into the state that NXEA has allowed without penalty

15.4 We would also support the service quality measurement regime being divided into two or three groups, of which the metro area would be one. This regime should include complaints handling targets.

OTHER COMMENTS AND ASPIRATIONS

16 **Accessibility**

16.1 In addition to the established programmes under Access for All and the National Stations Investment Programme, we expect to see a continuing programme for general accessibility enhancements such as induction loops, low level ticket windows and ticket machines, and upgraded information screens (CIS) and public address.

16.2 In conjunction with station improvement and new rolling stock programmes, the new franchise should take a lead to develop level transfer between platforms and trains (as already established on Heathrow Express, Docklands Light Railway, Tyne & Wear Metro and Jubilee line extension). This will not only benefit passengers with mobility issues, but also improve station dwell times and thus overall performance.

16.3 The assisted passenger reservation scheme should be reviewed in order to eliminate missed bookings

17 **Passenger information**

17.1 We seek a commitment to the following programme:

- Local bus maps and timetables to be displayed at all station exits
- Where local buses are operated by TfL, provide iBus display screens at each station exit showing real time running information for all nearby routes
- Where similar real-time systems are introduced by other bus operators, the same facility to be provided

- Trains to be equipped with information screens showing real-time train running and platform details prior to arrival at interchange stations (as now being installed on Swiss railways)

18 Cycles

- 18.1 We accept the need to restrict carriage of cycles in the peak periods, but this should be in the peak direction only. Any other restrictions should be justified on a case by case basis.
- 18.2 With cycling now being encouraged as beneficial for health and for the environment, supported by the stick of rising petrol prices, franchise bidders should be required to submit cycle parking plans in excess of the 1000 places called for in the consultation document. Also it is important that cycle parking is provided in places where there is natural surveillance and not banished to the outer ends of car parks.

19 Other stations issues

- 19.1 Train stopping positions should be reviewed at locations where an insufficiency of monitor screens for driver-only operation means that short trains stop a long way from platform entrances.
- 19.2 On the London-bound platforms at all stations with significant commuter traffic, canopies should be provided for the full length of the trains. This is to reduce boarding delays in wet weather, when everyone huddles under the canopy and then all try to board the train at just a few of the coaches.
- 19.3 The provision of litter bins or sacks should be reviewed, with a view to relaxing as many of the present restrictions as possible.

20 Gatwick Express

- 20.1 Despite long debate in the Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Study (BML RUS) and the revised peak arrangements being introduced in December 2008, the issue of making greater use of the capacity of Gatwick Express trains has not been totally resolved. This is not just a problem in the peaks, but also in the off-peak when all Gatwick passengers from/to stations other than Victoria have to use crowded coastal trains. Not only are the sheer numbers going to become an increasing problem as rail travel demand continues to rise, but the need for coastal rolling stock to have a high seating capacity to cope with the peaks means that these trains are unsuitable for carrying large amounts of luggage.
- 20.2 To enable Gatwick Express trains to “pull their weight” better, we believe that serious consideration should be given to their calling at the main interchanges at Clapham Junction and East Croydon. We can see that it would be undesirable for them to be used as metro services between these two stations, so would support the suggestion by the East Surrey Transport Committee that the calls be alternated and thus provide 2 tph at each.
- 20.3 We are conscious that the issue of Gatwick Express making intermediate calls was controversial at the time of the BML RUS, but the opposition came largely from airlines

operating inter-continental flights. We understand that almost all these flights have now been transferred away from Gatwick.

20.4 Late evening Gatwick Express services need to be re-planned to give better integrated services with South Central and First Capital Connect (FCC) for local stations between Gatwick and East Croydon.

21 Other timetable matters

21.1 When compiling the new timetables for SLC2 and SLC3, the mirror image principle should be adopted. This is to avoid the problem which occurs today where (for example) a 4 tph service is evenly spaced at 15 mins. intervals in one direction, but bunched together (say 00 – 8 – 30 – 38) in the other direction. Failure to address this would destroy the effectiveness of the 4 tph turn up and go principle.

21.2 The new timetables should not pad out the running times to ease the achievement of performance targets. This is what South West Trains did with its December 2004 timetable recast, and at the time the relevant decisions were taken it was the right thing to do. However it has resulted in irritatingly slow journeys, trains queuing outside Waterloo waiting for their platforms to be vacated, and in some cases early departures from intermediate stations. The railways' issues with punctuality have – to the industry's credit – now been substantially addressed, and the South West Trains approach is no longer necessary.

21.3 We have no objection to the splitting and joining of trains en route. Indeed we positively support the concept as a means of providing high frequency services on routes where separate trains all the way to London would be impracticable or otherwise difficult to justify. However we are concerned that in recent years the time allowed for splitting and joining has become protracted, with 6-8 mins. total time now being the norm across the former Southern Region. We believe that timings, procedures, rolling stock and signalling designs should be reviewed for each location with the aim of getting as near as possible to the 4 mins. which was the norm in Southern Railway/Region days.

21.4 Within the metro area, the following non-central London links need to be safeguarded or reinstated:

- Norbury line to East Croydon for onward connections
- Tulse Hill/Crystal Palace line to East Croydon for onward connections
- Connections from the Forest Hill line into fast trains to Gatwick Airport and the coast with no more than one interchange
- Through trains, or good connections at Crystal Palace, between the Forest Hill and the Victoria route.

21.5 Careful attention will need to be paid to peak frequencies on the Sydenham–London Bridge route, where the advent of the East London line extension has raised concerns that the traditional route may lose capacity and reduce frequency below acceptable levels. It may be that on this, and other routes, there should be a direct move from 8-car to 12-car trains – as ultimately proposed in the South London RUS – rather than adopt an interim programme of 10-car trains.

- 21.6 There are similar concerns regarding peak capacity and frequency at intermediate stations between Merstham and South Croydon.
- 21.7 An important issue is heavy crowding of day-time off-peak (particularly on Saturdays) and evening trains. Whilst we accept that some standing is unavoidable during the commuter peaks, at all other times rail has to be attractive to travellers who have alternative options. We believe that not only should there be no need to stand, but also that there should be sufficient spare seats to allow people a choice, to help groups stay together and allow some space to help passengers with shopping. As a rule of thumb we suggest no off-peak or evening trains should regularly load above 75% seat occupancy whilst suitable rolling stock is left unused in sidings. Rolling stock diagrams should be compiled accordingly.
- 21.8 With increasing population density in south London, less reliance on the car, and the resurgence of Brighton as a day-trip destination, consideration should be given to reviving the practice of running summer weekend 'seaside specials' direct from metro stations to Brighton.

22 **Christmas services**

- 22.1 As well as extending Boxing Day services to cover the entire metro area, we believe these should also be provided for all principal stations elsewhere.
- 22.2 Christmas Day services should be introduced throughout the London area within two years.

23 **Rolling Stock**

- 23.1 Opportunity should be taken of the lengthening of metro trains to 10 cars to introduce rolling stock which is more fit for purpose. Both classes 455/6 and 377 which are used on metro trains suffer from restricted circulating space and narrow doorways which inhibit best use of the available space and lengthen dwell times.
- 23.2 However we would not wish new interior layouts to go as far as the London Overground scheme having side seats only; these may be suitable for short distance orbital services with a high turnover of passengers en route, but not for radial routes where trains progressively fill up into London and where some journeys are in the 30–40 mins. range.
- 23.3 Also, we recognise the benefit which Southern has achieved by using coastal trains to run a few peak metro trips after they have arrived from the coast. We would not wish this benefit to be lost as a result of rigid segregation of rolling stock.
- 23.4 All new trains should be compatible with new designs for Thameslink and Crossrail in terms of mechanical couplings, electrical control wiring and driver training. This is to provide maximum flexibility for future transfers between routes. Given the dominance of the Electrostar on Southeastern, Southern, London Overground, and shortly on FCC, all with 20–40 years life ahead, there would be great merit in standardising future orders – regardless of manufacturer – on the same coupling and control systems.

24 **Electrification**

24.1 In addition to advocating electrification of the Uckfield line (see Appendix), we also recommend that the franchise contract include an option for taking over the Reading–Gatwick service from Great Western and electrifying this route. As well as yielding the normal benefits associated with electric trains, this would ease constraints at Gatwick as trains could be interworked between routes to secure a timetable with the most passenger benefits.

25 **Fares and ticketing**

25.1 Croydon Tramlink should be brought into the National Rail ticketing scheme, so that through journeys (e.g. Gatwick Airport to Bromley South using Tramlink between East Croydon and Beckenham Junction) can be made on one ticket.

25.2 London - Gatwick fares should be simplified, and Network Card/Gold Card discount accepted on Gatwick Express.

25.3 As well as selling and accepting Oyster pay-as-you-go in the London area, Oyster-compatible smartcards should be sold and accepted on the entire franchise within two years.

25.4 Sale and promotion of PlusBus tickets should be maximised.

26 **Rail replacement buses**

26.1 Where rail replacement buses are unavoidable, they should be planned and managed in accordance with London TravelWatch report “When is a train not a train” – available at <http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/document/1354/get>

27 **Branding**

27.1 Southern, the present franchise holder, has done a thorough job in re-signing its stations and repainting its trains using good quality long-lasting materials. Apart from changes to comply with London Overground standards where appropriate, we would not regard it as beneficial for passengers for a new franchisee to spend money changing the brand image.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

28 We are grateful to rail user groups, local authorities, Passenger Focus and others who have given us their views and in some cases supplied us with copies of their responses to this consultation.

29 These submissions have influenced our thinking and in some cases we have incorporated specific points into this paper. In other instances, e.g., where issues are very localised or where aspirations may not be mutually compatible (a problem which particularly affects timetable matters) we have not included them. However this does not mean that we feel they lack merit, and we consider it essential that they be given full consideration by both DfT and the franchise bidders.

- 30 London TravelWatch will be preparing its own list of detailed issues for discussion with the bidders.

Appendix

ELECTRIFYING THE UCKFIELD LINE

- (a) The London TravelWatch boundary is at Oxted, so the Uckfield line is technically outside our remit. However its operation is inextricably linked with all the other services which operate to, from and within London. Because of this, the proposed service reductions have ramifications on which we must comment.
- (b) The continued operation of diesel trains on this route into London imposes two constraints on timetable compilation. One is that Uckfield trains can only operate to London Bridge (because Victoria's platforms are beneath an office development and the diesel exhaust extraction system is unsuitable for the new trains). The other is that the rolling stock diagrams have to be kept separate from all other routes, as a train from London to Uckfield can only be formed by a train which has arrived from Uckfield.
- (c) At present these constraints do not present too much of a problem. However with rail demand generally continuing to increase and with the forthcoming platform capacity reductions at London Bridge making it more difficult to compile a timetable which will meet the needs of all users, it would be highly desirable to eliminate constraints so that the timetable planners have as free a hand as possible to produce the best results.
- (d) Therefore, rather than increase the diesel fleet to meet rising demand, it would be better to electrify the line and thus fully integrate it into the rest of the South Central network.
- (e) The case for this becomes even stronger in light of the consultation paper's proposal to address the London Bridge capacity problem by reducing the peak service from 2 tph to 1 tph. The problem with this is that – as we understand it – a significant proportion of the increased traffic on the route comprises commuters who previously drove west to board Brighton line trains at Haywards Heath, or drove east for Southeastern trains on the Hastings - Tunbridge Wells line.
- (f) To reduce the Uckfield–London through service to hourly, and introduce connections at Oxted in lieu of the withdrawn trains, would (to use the vernacular) send these passengers scurrying back whence they came. This would be the opposite of what is needed, because on both the Brighton and Hastings lines the capacity they released has long since been taken up by new (or suppressed) demand.
- (g) Any attempt (within the time span of the new South Central franchise) to increase capacity on these routes to accommodate displaced Uckfield line passengers could only come at the expense of reduced services at stations closer to London. This would most likely be on the Redhill corridor (Gatwick–Purley) and at Sevenoaks and Chelsfield, all of which are within the London TravelWatch area.
- (h) For all these reasons it is important that the operational flexibility of the Uckfield line should be improved and capacity reduction avoided. We therefore submit that the line should be electrified as soon as possible so that rolling stock diagrams can be integrated with other South Central trains and peak frequencies maintained by allowing joining and splitting with East Grinstead line trains at Oxted.

- (i) To minimise costs and facilitate rapid design and approval, an electrification scheme should be limited to the power requirements for 8-car trains. If necessary it could include operational rules to avoid two or more trains starting simultaneously, and thus keep the current demand as low as possible. Whilst the design should allow for future expansion, for the moment it should be limited to the existing single-line infrastructure.

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