South London Route Utilisation Strategy – consultation by Network Rail

A response from London TravelWatch

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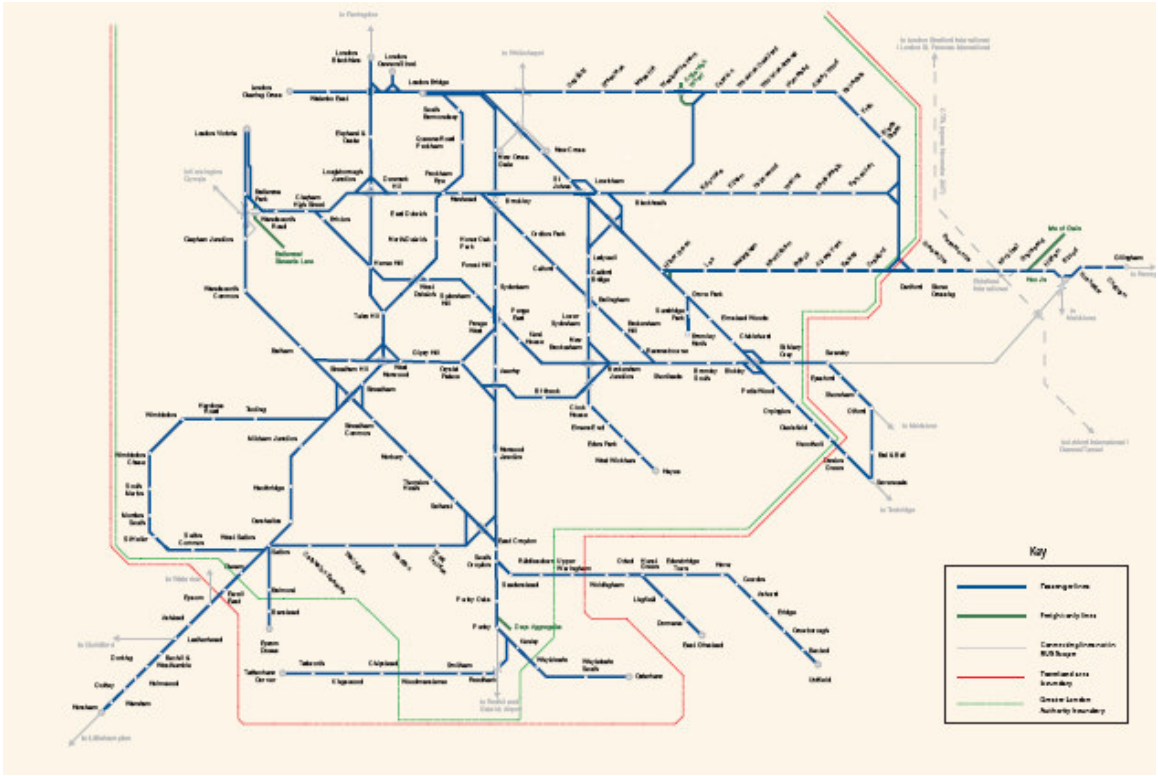
Executive summary

A. The draft South London RUS embraces the complex suburban lines of south and south-east London. The area is largely within the London travelcard area and covers suburban 'metro' services presently operated by Southeastern, Southern and the Thameslink section of First Capital Connect. However the area also includes the extensions of these services which operate as far as Horsham via Dorking, East Grinstead, Uckfield, Sevenoaks and Gillingham.



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B. As many of these lines are also used by longer distance trains running towards the Sussex and Kent coasts, the RUS also has a bearing upon the operation of these services. These include the Southern West London Line service between Brighton, Gatwick Airport and Watford Junction.

C. London TravelWatch considers that the draft RUS is a commendable and very thorough review of the most complex network of lines on National Rail. It clearly makes the case for investment in increased capacity, and points the way

towards a practical programme of train and platform lengthening to achieve this relatively quickly.

D. We particularly welcome the proposal to bring forward the East London Line Extension phase 2, i.e. the link from Surrey Quays to Queens Road Peckham and thence to Clapham Junction.

E. However we are concerned that the time horizon of the draft strategy - up to 2019 with a "gaze" up to 2026 is too short. This results in a too conservative view of some key projects which are essential if both current suppressed demand (i.e. people who don't use the trains because they are too overcrowded) and forecast future demand are to be met.

F. London TravelWatch believes the RUS should take a 30-year view and must embrace projects such as:

- More frequent peak trains throughout the network, using improved operating methods as well as investing in more track capacity
- 12-car trains throughout the radial network (i.e. trains to the London terminals and Thameslink) in the peaks
- A basic standard of 6 trains per hour (tph) throughout the Greater London area, with start and finish times which at a minimum match London Underground – including Sundays
- Off-peak train services to be planned so that no more than 70% of seats are normally occupied – to offer travelling conditions which can compete with the private car
- A rolling stock procurement plan to achieve a standardised fleet of 12-car trains designed for short station stop (dwell) times and high acceleration
- Longer trains than the 4-cars currently planned for the London Overground East London Line
- Track capacity improvements at Windmill Bridge Junction (north of Croydon)
- Major reconstruction at Tulse Hill and Herne Hill
- Increasing the passenger handling capacity at London terminals
- Policies to achieve level transfer between platform and train – as well as existing policies for step-free access from street to platform

- Recognition of the importance of Lewisham and the need for at least 4 tph on each of the main routes which serve it

- Proper recognition of the needs of the Redhill line

- Resolution of the perpetual uncertainty about the future of the Southern West London Line service. As a minimum this should be 2 tph between Watford and East Croydon and preferably continuing south to Gatwick Airport and north to Milton Keynes

- Re-examination of the case for a station at Camberwell Green

- High level platforms at Brixton to prevent the nonsense of London Overground East London Line trains passing through, but not serving, this important town centre

London TravelWatch's approach to the RUS consultation

a) London TravelWatch normally evaluates a draft RUS by reference to its *Requirement for Train Services – Principles* issued in May 2003 ([1]). This largely relates to service frequency and the times of first and last trains. However in the case of the South London RUS, whilst these issues are important, the focus has to be much more on relief of current overcrowding, catering for current suppressed demand and future demand growth, and coping with the detailed operational implications of investment schemes – notably the East London Line Extension and the Thameslink Programme - which have already been approved.

b) Consideration of this RUS is also affected by the sheer complexity of the rail network in the area - a cat's cradle of lines serving several central London terminals. There are many flat junctions which restrict line capacity and make punctual operation a real challenge.

c) Network Rail's method of developing a RUS is to identify gaps in the services currently provided, to propose a range of options to close those gaps, and to select a number of those options to be carried forward. The draft South London RUS conforms to this pattern, but the complexity of the area means that just nine identified gaps lead to no fewer than 97 options taking 90 pages to describe and assess. In addition, many of the options are interdependent; some have no fewer than 12 interdependencies.

d) London TravelWatch's normal response to a RUS consultation is to comment on all the options which affect our area. However, faced with

the scale and complexity of this draft RUS, it would be too time consuming – and ultimately unhelpful to the reader – to adopt this method on this occasion.

e) The main body of this response therefore limits its comments on options to those which raise issues of particular importance, and concentrates more on the broad strategic issues which we believe need to be addressed over the RUS analysis period to 2019 and its look ahead period to 2026.

f) Soon after the draft RUS was published, we contacted 42 MPs, 19 GLA members, 15 lead councillors for transport, 18 council transport officers and 10 rail user groups. We drew their attention to the publication of the draft RUS, advised how they could obtain a copy and explained that as the body representing London's transport users London TravelWatch is keen to ensure that our response is informed by the aspirations of users and stakeholders. We are grateful to the two MPs, six rail user groups and three councils who responded to our request to hear their views.

g) We have also discussed the draft RUS with Passenger Focus. Although our responses chose different topics to emphasise and there are variations in the amount of detail we go into, the two are mutually supportive and there are no significant differences of view between us as the two statutory passenger representative organisations.

h) Although this response is formally addressed to Network Rail, it is our intention that it should be read by a wider audience who may not be familiar either with railway jargon or with the principles which underlie the operation of busy urban railways. We have therefore attempted to write in terms which will help lay readers to understand the issues.

Response to the draft RUS

General

1. The draft RUS is a commendable piece of work. It is a very thorough review of the most complex network of lines on National Rail. It succeeds in identifying a coherent way ahead for the next 12 years, despite the complication that when it was being prepared it was uncertain if the Thameslink Programme would be authorised. Now that this has been given the green light, a substantial element of uncertainty has been removed.

2. At the same time, however, the Thameslink construction programme means that the South London system must cope with a complex eight year transition period which will significantly disrupt the operation of the network.

3. Also since the draft RUS was published there has been the welcome news that funding of Crossrail has been confirmed, with a projected opening date of 2017. Although construction of Crossrail will not significantly disrupt the network, its opening will affect the pattern of traffic in two ways.

- Demand on the Woolwich line – and to a lesser degree on the Bexleyheath and Sidcup lines - will change, as passengers (particularly for Docklands and the City) switch to the new route.

- On the Blackfriars and Thameslink routes, which at present have poor links to the West End, the advent of Crossrail at Farringdon will provide a good link to Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street. This may increase Thameslink demand if some passengers switch from Victoria and Charing Cross routes

4. However, as the draft RUS indicates, the South London network features suppressed demand, i.e. potential passengers are deterred from using it by the level of crowding. This, plus the effects of population increases as brown field sites are developed and low density housing is replaced by new higher density homes, means that any capacity created by running more or longer trains or by existing passengers switching to different routes may well be taken up very quickly and thus leave crowding levels much as they are now.

5. It is questionable how long commuters will tolerate this quality of service. Whilst there will probably always be an acceptance – albeit reluctant – that providing a seat for everyone in the peaks is an economic non-starter, it is quite another matter to assume that heavy crowding will remain politically acceptable in a world where living standards in all other ways continue to rise.

6. As railways in their nature have very long lead times for investment in both new technology and physical capacity – the latter being particularly difficult in urban areas - it is important that rail has a development strategy that enables it to keep “ahead of the game”.

7. Our main concern with the draft RUS, therefore, is that it does not look far enough ahead into the future, and it too readily discards options which appear too expensive in the context of present day political and economic considerations.

The RUS timescale – need for a 30 year view

8. The draft RUS identifies three time periods for attention, viz. up to 2009, 2009 – 2014 and 2014 – 2019. Given the various committed investment schemes already scheduled to come on stream during these periods, we believe that these time periods are appropriate.

9. In addition the draft states that it "… will gaze up to seven years further into the future in order to identify any major factors which might influence route strategy during the core study period."

10. For such a complex and busy network, where investments in the early years run the risk of inhibiting longer term needs if the two are not dovetailed, and where large projects may need a long payback period if they are to be justified, we believe there should be a longer and more systematic look ahead with a bold vision of where the railway needs to be in 30 years time.

11. It is only within the framework of such a long view that the more urgent and immediate projects can best be designed and assessed.

The long view

12. The overarching objectives are to:

- cope adequately with likely future traffic
- provide a margin for improved comfort standards which commuters of the future may reasonably demand
- provide services that are highly robust in the face of the inevitable disruptions which occur from day to day

13. This means that:

- the metro network should provide for 12-car trains on all routes into central London
- signalling systems, operating methods and crowd handling facilities should be developed to enable operation of at least 24 trains per hour (tph) on all metro lines into central London

14. Other objectives are to:

- provide 'turn-up-and-go' services (ultimately 6 tph) all day, every day

- operate at least the same hours per day as on London Underground
- continue to provide fast services to London where these are provided now
- make significant progress on step-free access to stations and level transfer between platform and train

Key issues to achieve the long view objectives

15. To achieve our long term objectives several work streams will be required, in particular:

- a rolling stock procurement plan to achieve a standardised fleet of 12-car trains designed for short dwell times and high acceleration
- plans to make all routes suitable for 12-car trains
- plans to eliminate track pinch points which constrain timetabling flexibility and service operation during and after disruption
- investigation of new operating methods to increase frequencies on existing infrastructure
- increasing the passenger handling capacity at London terminals
- level transfer, platform to train - equalisation of standards for car floor and platform heights

We now discuss these in turn

A rolling stock procurement plan to achieve a standardised fleet of 12-car trains designed for short dwell times and high acceleration

16. The draft RUS recommends use of high density rolling stock on South London metro services. This is a sensitive issue for passengers, because it means fewer seats and more standing. However London TravelWatch recognises that the metro trains on the South London network, which for good reasons were designed to minimise the loss of seats compared with the slam door trains which they replaced (3+2 cross seats), are not suitable for present (or likely future) operating and crowding conditions.

17. All except the small batch of Southeastern Class 376 units have doors which are too narrow for rapid alighting and boarding, and have little standing space away from the doorways. Standing passengers largely crowd into the doorways, rather then spread themselves more comfortably down the aisles. All this means that trains stand too long at stations (excessive dwell time), which in turn means slow journeys and limits the number of trains which can be operated.

18. It is only the Southeastern 376s, which were designed with wide sliding doors, draught screens set back from the doors to increase the circulation space, 2+2 cross seats and several multi-purpose spaces, which are really suitable for today's peak period metro conditions.

19. A development of the Class 376 is the forthcoming new Class 378 design, due to enter service for London Overground (LO) in 2009. This creates yet more circulation and standing space in two ways. The first is by opening up the inter-car gangways in a manner similar to Docklands Light Railway trains. This is a sensible and acceptable development.

20. The second is by replacing all cross seats with side seats, similar to most London Underground trains. This gives about 36 seats per car (52 if 'perch' seats are included) and contrasts with 44 (69) seats on 376s and 88 seats on Southeastern's Networkers. LO justify their arrangement by saying that the service is an orbital one where most passengers make short journeys and the high turnover at each station means longer distance riders will get a seat quite quickly. London TravelWatch is not convinced by this argument. However the 378s are now being built and it is too late to change them, so time will tell.

21. What we are clear about is that for true radial routes – i.e. all South Eastern and Thameslink services and almost all Southern services – where passenger numbers increase as trains approach central London, the LO concept is not acceptable. We support the high density principle, but that means the 376 design philosophy, not the 378.

22. Having agreed with the RUS proposal to use high density rolling stock on South London metro services, and thereby reduce dwell times, it is important to take any further available measures to minimise journey times and maximise line capacity.

23. As much of the South London network is characterised by closely spaced stations and low speed junctions, a key factor in quick journeys and effective use of line capacity is rapid acceleration. All the more so with longer trains, which will take longer to clear the many critical junctions.

24. As well as providing maximum insurance against rising traffic and rising expectations about levels of crowding, standardising on 12-car trains has

operational advantages which will feed back into passenger benefits. These include:

- flexibility in timetable compilation, so that a train can be scheduled to arrive in London from one route and depart on another

- flexibility during disruption, so that any train can be sent onto any route

25. Further, if we ultimately have rolling stock with standardised coupling and control systems across the South London (including South Western) network, as the old Southern Railway and Southern Region did so successfully from the 1920s to the 1980s, then more benefits flow:

- universal driver knowledge – minimising staff training requirements and maximising flexible use of staff

- flexibility in allocation of stock – trains can easily be transferred from one operator to another either in emergency or to meet shifting patterns of demand

- substantial commonality of spare parts – thus simplifying maintenance and reducing costs

Plans to make all routes suitable for 12-car trains

26. Creation of 12-car routes must clearly be a phased programme, and on less heavily loaded lines this may well extend beyond the 2019 time horizon for the RUS. This is one reason why we believe it is important to take a 30-year view.

27. We suggest that early priorities should be the Norbury line to Victoria, and completion of the 1990s programme for the routes into Charing Cross and Cannon St.

28. We accept that to provide 12-car platforms at some stations in the South London RUS area would be very expensive. In most such cases, Woolwich Dockyard being an example, we believe selective door opening (SDO) would be acceptable. There are also some relatively lightly loaded sections of line where it would be acceptable to operate with up to four cars switched out, examples being West Sutton to Wimbledon Chase and the Epsom Downs branch.

29. There are, however, some places where the traffic volume or pattern would make SDO difficult or where 12-car trains standing at a station would foul a key junction close to the platform. In these instances London TravelWatch

believes that, although any solutions may be expensive, some lateral thinking must be applied to ensure that the maximum benefits are obtained for the money spent. Obvious examples are Tulse Hill and Herne Hill, and as these are key stations and junctions on the South London network we discuss some possibilities for this area in the Appendix to this paper.

Plans to eliminate track pinch points which constrain timetabling flexibility and service operation during and after disruption

30. The draft RUS identifies some locations where the track layout restricts the number of trains which can be operated. Unfortunately there are some instances where we consider the draft RUS too readily rules out possible solutions. There are also some places which the draft RUS does not discuss. Robust operation of longer and more frequent trains makes it important to address these issues, and again this illustrates the need for a 30-year view.

31. Examples of what we have in mind are:

- East Croydon / Windmill Bridge Jct. – a key issue which must be grasped. We see that London Borough of Croydon have offered to safeguard land from current redevelopment proposals, and we recommend that Network Rail takes up this offer immediately.

- The Wimbledon single track section, which constrains the scheduling of Thameslink trains. This would require relocation of the Tramlink platform.

- Tulse Hill and Herne Hill junctions – see Appendix

- Uckfield line electrification – to eliminate non-standard rolling stock which constrains train diagramming – and substantial re-doubling. Although this line is beyond London TravelWatch's Oxted boundary, we comment on it because the constraints it imposes affect the South London routes all the way up to London. Electrification would also allow paths between East Croydon and London to be released if Uckfield trains can be coupled to East Grinstead trains at Oxted.

Investigation of new operating methods to increase frequencies on existing infrastructure

32. Our call for increased frequencies – beyond those already proposed in the East London Line Extension 2009 proof of concept timetable – implies some changes to existing operating methods.

33. To take one instance, the present peak services on the Southern slow lines into Victoria is just 15 tph – one every 4 mins. Even allowing for the complexity of the network, this seems a very low utilisation of the line – just 50% of the frequency scheduled by London Underground on its no less complex Circle / Hammersmith & City / Metropolitan line route between Baker St. and the City.

34. Network Rail's Rules of the Plan, which specify the minimum headways between trains, allow 3 mins. (2 mins. in the 'to London' direction), so the average actual headway indicates substantial spare capacity. London TravelWatch would go further, and argue that the Rules of the Plan themselves are conservative because (if we understand them correctly) they are based on the premise that trains should be timetabled in such a way that a driver only sees green signals – a practice which we suggest may not be necessary on low speed suburban lines.

35. Even without pressing the latter point, we submit that it would be reasonable to ask that the am peak service on this line should be increased to at least 20 tph, and we have little doubt that the same principles could be applied to other routes on the South London network.

36. Of course there are other factors to take into account when assessing how many trains can be operated on a route, and an important one is the number of platforms available to accommodate them at the London termini.

37. In the case of Victoria the draft RUS identifies greater use of platform 8 for Southern metro services as a means of increasing capacity utilisation, whereas it flags up a problem caused by the Thameslink programme which will reduce the number of terminating platforms at London Bridge.

38. London TravelWatch suggests that an immediate solution to the London Bridge problem is to adopt the London Underground (LUL) practice of "stepping back" the train drivers. Under this system, instead of the arriving driver changing ends and taking out the same train, a second driver is waiting at the country end of the platform to board the train, which can then depart as soon as passenger duties have been completed. Meanwhile the arriving driver walks to the country end of the platform and is in position to take out the next train to arrive at that platform, i.e. he steps back from one train to another and hence the description "stepping back".

39. On LUL the effect of stepping back is that a train can be scheduled to depart 1½ mins. after arrival compared with the normal minimum allowance of 4½ mins. In cases of late running, the turnround time can be reduced to about 60 seconds. The system enables a two-platform terminus, such as Brixton or Elephant & Castle, to handle 30 tph, i.e. 15 tph per platform.

40. Stepping-back does of course require close supervision, and LUL practice is to provide a crew supervisor at the terminus to liaise with the signal control centre regarding trains running out of their proper sequence or into a different platform from that scheduled, and to re-direct the drivers as necessary. The general principle for dealing with disruption is that trains are reformed to whatever service the outgoing driver is scheduled to take – and this is an important reason London TravelWatch advocates that all metro trains should be formed of rolling stock of a type and length which can operate on any route on that network.

41. We do not suggest that National Rail could achieve the LUL rate of 15 tph per platform. A National Rail 8-car train is longer than an LUL train, so when it departs it takes longer to clear both the platform and the points outside the station (the “throat”) and thus clear the way for the next arrival. A 12-car train would take even longer – but of course it would also take longer for conventional reversing as the driver has 50% further to walk when changing ends, whereas stepping back gets round this problem.

42. We believe that stepping back is not new to National Rail, having been used by British Railways at Liverpool St. when the peak Shenfield service was more frequent than it is today. It can of course be used at any terminus whenever it is desired to increase the number of trains above the frequency achievable with the arriving driver changing ends and taking out the same train.

Increasing the passenger capacity at London terminals

43. Longer trains carrying more passengers will place additional strain on passenger capacity at the London terminals, and most critically on the arrival platforms and barrier areas in the morning peak. All the London terminals covered by the South London RUS experience some congestion in these areas, and at the busiest times it can take several minutes for each trainload of passengers to clear the barriers and reach the concourse.

44. This is undesirable in itself, and although it is unlikely to be economically feasible to eliminate all such delays it is important that they should not be allowed to get worse than now.

45. As well as being an issue of what is reasonably acceptable for commuters, it can also become a key operational problem if more frequent services mean that an incoming train arrives at a platform which is still full of previous passengers queuing to get through the barriers. The effect of this is that passengers towards the front of the second train will be unable to alight and delay will then begin to spiral cumulatively.

46. If stepping back is being used, this could actually negate the benefits as its no use having a driver ready to take the train out quickly if incoming passengers are still on the train because crowds on the platform prevent them from alighting. More generally there is also a problem for the increasing number of peak contra-flow passengers actually getting onto the platform and then boarding their trains.

47. London TravelWatch therefore considers it essential that the RUS very clearly spells out the need for London terminal barrier lines to be altered to increase their capacity for clearing passengers from the platforms.

48. We also believe that efforts should be made to siphon off some of the load from the normal barrier lines by creating additional exits towards the country end of the platforms. The reconstruction plans for Blackfriars and London Bridge already provide for this, and we believe that this concept would be very beneficial at Charing Cross (a new downward exit to give easy interchange to Embankment LUL station) and at Victoria (an enlargement of the existing Gatwick Express exit to Eccleston Bridge). As well as assisting platform clearance, such exits (and entrances) would benefit many passengers by taking them closer to their ultimate destinations. They would also encourage more even loading of the trains, as the 'full at the front, empty at the rear' phenomenon gets worse as trains are lengthened.

49. Adoption of fares and ticketing policies which encourage the use of smartcards should also help with capacity through barrier lines, as experience with Oyster cards shows that these operate the gates more quickly than magnetically encoded tickets.

Level transfer, platform to train - equalisation of standards for car floor and platform heights

50. Although National Rail deals with accessibility issues through other channels than Route Utilisation Strategies, there is one aspect which is directly linked to the efficient operation of frequent and heavily loaded metro trains. This is the need for level transfer between platform and train.

51. For many years London TravelWatch has been trying to raise interest in this matter, mainly from the point of view of passengers with mobility problems – including heavy luggage and buggies. The benefits for the many people in these categories are obvious to anyone who has spent more than a few seconds observing on the Docklands Light Railway, on Heathrow Express, the Jubilee Line Extension, or the Tyne & Wear Metro (this including stations on Network Rail lines) but so far the response of almost all with whom we have raised it has been to instantly consign it to the 'too difficult' box.

52. For busy metro trains, level transfer is important for another reason – dwell time. Where trains stop frequently, and where another train is running close behind, getting passengers off and on quickly is a vital component of efficient operation and maximising the use of capacity. This is the main reason why London TravelWatch supports the use of high density rolling stock with wide doorways.

53. But wide doorways are not enough. With hundreds of passengers getting on or off, and at key stations such as London Bridge and Clapham Junction there are hundreds doing both, a split second reduction in the time it takes each passenger to board or alight adds up to a significant contribution to the overall capacity, journey time and punctual performance of the system. This affects everyone, however physically nimble or otherwise. Everyone will join or leave a train more quickly if they don't have to step up or step down.

54. LUL have recognised this, and the forthcoming new trains for the Metropolitan, District, Hammersmith & City and Circle lines will provide level transfer at almost all the stations they serve by the simple expedient of designing the car floor height to match their standard platform height.

55. Now London TravelWatch recognises that National Rail's historic legacy has given them a much wider range of platform heights than on LUL. However they do have standards for new construction, the Thameslink Programme and the South London RUS will mean many platform extensions will be built to these standards, and gradually over the years old platforms will be renewed likewise. On the rolling stock side, the South London RUS, the Thameslink Programme, Crossrail and – taking our 30-year view – replacement of the existing metro fleets, will mean the acquisition of a huge number of new carriages. Just by ensuring that platform height and car floor height are specified for the same level, then gradually – it may take many years, but some key locations such as London Bridge could be done in less than ten – we will achieve near universal level transfer to the benefit of everyone.

56. Just one industry group – the small team working on the Network RUS – has recognised that this is an issue which merits serious consideration. The South London RUS and the two major projects which have been authorised in the last few weeks mean that this issue must be pushed forward with all speed.

Further issues

Off-peak crowding levels

57. In the off-peak, when passengers have more options in their choice of travel mode, it is important on all routes that a proportion of seats are spare so that passengers in family or other groups have a reasonable chance of sitting

together and without everyone feeling hassled and hemmed-in. It is also necessary to provide reasonable capacity to cope with demand fluctuations arising from the many sporting and other special events which take place around London, and for transfer of traffic when nearby routes are disrupted. We agree with the Passenger Focus view that to achieve this, off-peak frequencies and train lengths should be planned on the basis of no more than about 70% utilisation of seats – as indicated in the government's White Paper "Delivering a Sustainable Railway."

Fares

58. We note with interest that the draft RUS suggests some use of differential peak/shoulder peak fares to alleviate crowding by encouraging spreading of passengers' travel times. London TravelWatch does not object to the principle of differential pricing, provided it is done by reducing shoulder-peak fares rather than increasing high-peak fares.

59. However we do not think that great reliance should be placed on this as a means of controlling crowding, as the ability of passengers to take advantage of it depends on the extent to which their employer – and their domestic commitments - enables them to change their working times. Although some firms allow flexible working times for all their staff, by and large we believe that those who have most choice are those on higher incomes who would be less motivated by price, whilst lower income passengers who would welcome the ability to save some money are less likely to be able to do so.

Service frequencies and engineering access

60. London TravelWatch's policy is for services in and around London to meet the following minimum standards:

- Within Travelcard zones 1-6 a minimum of six trains per hour (tph), at regular ten minute intervals where possible (6 tph is the minimum standard for a 'turn up and go' metro service, i.e. one where passengers do not need to refer to the timetable when planning their journey.)

- At stations beyond the zones and extending to the London TravelWatch boundary a minimum of 4 tph, at regular 15 minute intervals where possible.

61. These minimum frequencies should apply seven days per week, between the following first and last train times:

> First arrival in London by no later than 06.00 (Sundays 07.30)
>
> Last departures from London (all days) no earlier than 00.30 to stations in the zones and 24.00 to other London TravelWatch stations.
>
> These times are based on London Underground (LUL) practice, and will need to be adjusted on Fridays and Saturdays when LUL introduces the Mayor's new policy for weekend services.
>
> Where earlier or later trains operate at present, these should continue.
>
> In the peaks, frequencies should be increased as necessary to carry the traffic within the PIXC guidelines. In the off-peak, frequencies should be increased if necessary to meet the 70% seat utilisation principle.

62. Sunday services on many South London routes are poor, due in large part to Network Rail's policy for engineering access.

63. We believe that Network Rail must press forward as quickly as possible with its plans to improve availability of the tracks on Sundays. Present Sunday service levels are barely acceptable today, and if rail is to achieve its potential of being the transport mode of choice it will be quite unacceptable both politically and commercially within the lifetime of the RUS.

Why 6 tph ?

64. London TravelWatch adopted its target service standards in 1999, but at that time we recognised that 6 tph 'turn up and go' throughout the zones could only be regarded as a long-term proposition. Pragmatically, therefore, we have so far pursued a policy of 4 tph 'near turn up and go', and this has been adopted by the Mayor as his objective for TfL to achieve.

65. In 2007, however, when considering a RUS which aims to identify needs up to 2019 and which also looks beyond that, we consider it is now time to remind the industry of the case for 6 tph as the standard for metro type services. We believe that 20 years and more from 1999 is more than a reasonable time in which to achieve a standard which is the minimum needed to counter the attraction of the instantly available private car.

Automatic Train Operation (ATO)

66. A feature of present operations on National Rail is the total dependence on manual driving. On metro routes with very frequent trains, where the speed of one train dictates the speed of the next one, this has two disadvantages.

67. The first is the inconsistency of human beings. However good the training, some drivers will drive faster than others. It only takes one slow train to build up cumulative delay to the service as it loses time and encounters more and more passengers waiting for it at each station.

68. The second is the need for drivers to approach red signals with extreme caution to avoid overrunning (a SPAD), and then to stop sufficiently far back from the signal to see it clearly when it changes. Then there is a reaction time delay (which varies from driver to driver) between the signal changing and the driver actually starting the train.

69. On many parts of the network this second issue is not a problem. However in the South London RUS area - where seconds count - it can have a serious effect at the many tight junctions and short signal sections, as a train creeping slowly up to a signal and then stopping a car length short can easily impede a train behind. This can either be a following train which has to stop two signals back instead of just one. Or it can be a train which is scheduled to cross a junction behind the first train, but which is blocked by the rear of the latter.

70. This issue of stopping at red signals can easily be seen by observing from platform 6 at London Bridge – where trains are stopped by red signals on the adjacent non-platform through line, and following trains stop at signals outside the station. There must be several other instances on the network which cannot be so easily seen by the general public.

71. Each of these problems arising with red signals will get worse as more and longer trains are operated.

72. By eliminating the human element, automatic driving – under operator supervision as on LUL's Victoria and Central lines – would eliminate these weaknesses and, by reducing the margins which have to be built into the timetable to allow for them, enable more trains to be scheduled and to be operated successfully.

73. It is surprising that the draft RUS does not discuss this issue, but we know that it is one which is beginning to be considered elsewhere in the industry. However this consideration is being given in the context of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) and the European Train Control System (ETCS). These are more a set of harmonised standards for future systems across Europe – aimed at achieving market freedom and avoiding the

emergence of a monopoly supplier – than actual designs which can be bought off the shelf.

74. Both ERTMS and ETCS are based on new concepts for railway signalling, using radio rather than conventional track circuits to ensure the safe separation of trains. They are a 'high tech' – and therefore high risk - solution to future needs. Only a very few trial designs are yet in use, and the first trial in Britain will not start operation until 2009. This will be on the rural Cambrian lines in Wales – deliberately and very sensibly chosen because it is a localised network which, if the trials go pear shaped, will not cause too much disruption to the rest of the railway.

75. The relevance of this to South London – which in complexity and the arduous nature of the operation is the polar opposite of the Cambrian and just about the last place one wants to introduce new technology until it is absolutely proven - is that ERTMS and ETCS are (or should be) very many years away. London TravelWatch would suggest that we are talking here of the very end of our 30-year time frame.

76. In the meantime we believe the benefits of ATO, on the busiest parts of the South London network closest to the London terminals, are such that the industry should be looking urgently at existing products which are designed to be compatible with existing conventional signalling systems. As they are capable of being overlaid on these, the technical risk is low as any failures – or any need to use trains not equipped for ATO – are simply by-passed by reverting to manual driving.

77. If these systems are investigated with a view to installation within (say) 5 years (which could include the Thameslink core route where punctual operation of the planned 24 tph is regarded as quite challenging), this would enable ERTMS and ETCS to be developed at a measured pace, installed on progressively more difficult sections of the railway, but without the temptation to hurry it along to try and solve pressing problems on London metro services where conditions are particularly difficult and where the consequences of failure would be very high.

78. London TravelWatch therefore urges that this proposal be included in the South London RUS.

Comments on specific services

Thameslink

79. Now that the Thameslink Programme is approved, London TravelWatch believes that detailed consideration and consultation on the proposed service pattern must start now. In our response to the East Coast Main Line RUS consultation, we recorded our view that the central core of Thameslink needs to be served as far as possible by high capacity trains operating a simple and therefore reliable service pattern.

80. A major issue which must be addressed is the loss of capacity via Tulse Hill when the present peak Brighton trains which are routed this way are diverted onto the main line via London Bridge.

South London Line and East London Line Extension phase 2

81. Loss of the route via Battersea Park would be regrettable, but we recognise the conflict between retaining this route and extending Battersea Park's main metro platforms for longer trains. We also note the issue of the reduction in terminating platforms at London Bridge as a result of the Thameslink Programme. Taking these points together with the fact that of all the services in the RUS area these are the least used, it is difficult to argue with the conclusion that the South London Line service cannot continue in its present form.

82. We therefore support the draft RUS's proposal that East London Line Extension phase 2 should be brought forward so that the Queens Road to Wandsworth Road section can be served by 4 tph running between the East London Line and Clapham Junction, giving twice as many trains as now and same platform interchange at Peckham Road or Queens Road for London Bridge passengers. Our support for this would be conditional on these London Bridge connections being well timed.

83. We would also support, as an essential part of the package, arrangements to enable other trains (possibly but not necessarily from the Nunhead line as suggested in the draft RUS) to call at Clapham High Street and Wandsworth Road and thus retain the link from these stations into Victoria.

84. To best protect the interests of South London Line users of Battersea Park, and as the Wandsworth Road – Battersea Park link is a quite separate section of railway from that over which the replacement service would operate, it would be essential for this to be dealt with as a closure under the terms of the Railways Act 2005. To help identify alternative routes this must be supported by a full origin and destination survey of all existing users.

85. We agree with the draft RUS proposal to retain a South London Line platform at Battersea Park to provide a diversionary route should the line to Clapham Junction be blocked for any reason.

Catford loop

86. We have concerns about the draft RUS proposal to link the Catford loop with a revamped South London Line service. London TravelWatch certainly agrees that the Catford loop needs more trains, but we do not think that new instances of services being divided between two London terminals should be created. Either all Catford loop trains should go to Blackfriars (as now) or Thameslink, or they should all go to Victoria. In the latter case, new interchange platforms would be needed at Loughborough Junction to maintain the link to Elephant & Castle and the City.

2009 Southeastern timetable

87. We share the concerns expressed in the draft RUS that the 2009 service pattern specified in Southeastern's franchise agreement may not accurately reflect demand and may also over estimate the number of trains which can be routed through Lewisham.

88. However we are confident that this is an issue which Southeastern are currently addressing through a sound programme of demand research and operational analysis, and feel that the RUS team should work with them on this rather than attempt to deal with the matter separately.

Lewisham

89. Looking beyond the 2009 timetable, we are concerned that much greater recognition needs to be given to Lewisham's position as the commercial and administrative hub for a wide surrounding area. As such it needs a basic off-peak service of at least 4 tph from each of the main routes which serve it, i.e. Bexleyheath, Sidcup, Orpington and Hayes, plus trains covering the Charlton – Blackheath link. This is a significant increase on the 2009 franchise plan, let alone on whatever level of service actually emerges from Southeastern's present work.

90. London TravelWatch looks to the RUS to identify a way of achieving this within a reasonable time frame. We note that authorisation of the Thameslink Programme means that the Tanner's Hill flydown will now be doubled, and this should make it easier to achieve our objective.

Purley Oaks and South Croydon

91. The options for Caterham / Tattenham Corner services put forward in the draft RUS lean rather heavily in the direction of more peak trains joining and splitting at Purley, and also to a reduction in the number of these trains which run fast from East Croydon to London.

92. The weakness of these proposals is that the service at Purley Oaks and South Croydon would be reduced (with some passengers switching to Sanderstead), and the increased journey times to London would result in some passengers from the two branches switching to other nearby stations such as Coulsdon South and Upper Warlingham. The net result could be unhelpful as it would transfer traffic onto trains which are busier than the trains these passengers are currently using.

Redhill line

93. We have previously expressed our concern that the South London RUS excludes consideration of the Redhill line, and that it is not sufficient to leave this section to be dealt with by the forthcoming Sussex RUS.

94. All the recent history of the Redhill corridor is that it falls between the two stools of the metro services on the one hand and the coastal services on the other, and as a result its services are akin to the crumbs left from these tables and not determined by its own specific needs.

95. A brief hope that this might be changing when the DfT announced that Southern's December 2008 timetable would provide additional peak trains on this route has seemingly been dashed by the contents of Southern's recently issued consultation draft.

East London Line

96. We deduce from the draft RUS that Sydenham line trains to the East London Line may become overcrowded quite soon after the currently planned service of 4-car trains is introduced, and we understand that there is a wider view that the same might apply to the line as a whole – even after additional trains run on the core section when phase 2 has opened. We therefore consider that TfL must start to address the difficult question of longer trains and platform lengthening before too long.

West London Line

97. The future of the Southern Brighton – Gatwick - West London Line - Watford service is becoming very confused.

98. Both the Cross-London RUS and now the draft South London RUS call for the service across Clapham Junction to continue, albeit operating on the slow lines as metro trains and not running south of East Croydon.

99. TfL's planning supports this, but is unclear whether such trains would continue to Watford or whether they would go to Willesden Junction. These are two very different propositions so far as passengers' journeys are concerned.

100. Meanwhile the DfT and Southern are proposing that from December 2008 the service should be totally revised to become Clapham Junction to Milton Keynes. The effect of this would be to break the now well established link across Clapham in exchange for a rather speculative partial reinstatement of the Rugby service which was withdrawn several years ago.

101. London TravelWatch has long advocated running from Croydon (and preferably Gatwick) to Milton Keynes, but we do not support the idea of exchanging one for the other. We have also accepted the operation of these trains on the slow lines south of Clapham Jct., particularly so that they could call at the important interchange station at Balham. The service should be increased to 2 tph.

102. With the financial support of Passenger Focus and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, and the operational support of Southern, London TravelWatch will shortly be undertaking a fresh survey of passenger journeys on the Southern West London Line service, and we will share the results with the industry with the aim of securing a sensible future for this service.

103. There may be a need for different short and longer term solutions, particularly regarding the issues of fast or slow line and operation to Gatwick. We are therefore concerned that the need to lengthen the platforms at Balham for longer metro trains will mean removal of the present slow – fast crossover north of the station. We would object strongly to any scheme which failed to replace this with an alternative. Our preference would be to install a new crossover between Balham and Streatham Common. This would enable the trains to call at Balham regardless of their ultimate routeing. Also as this section of the line is straight, it may be possible to design the crossover for higher speeds than at present and thus reduce the operational impact of using it.

New stations and platforms

104. We comment as follows on the draft RUS options for new stations.

Eastfields

105. We have long advocated this station and are pleased that it now seems to be going ahead. We understand that scheduling a full range of services poses some difficulties within the present timetable, but we hope the industry accepts that if it has not been resolved sooner then it is essential that the December 2009 timetable must fully address this issue.

Camberwell Green

106. We note the draft RUS conclusion that timetabling considerations mean that a new station here would have to be at the expense of closing Loughborough Junction station. Although the distance between the two locations is not too great, it is sufficiently far that we doubt this is likely to commend itself to the local communities.

107. However now that the Thameslink Programme is going ahead, the opportunity will be available to reschedule trains on this route, and they will eventually be operated by rolling stock with better performance characteristics – both acceleration and dwell time.

108. We therefore consider that this issue should be re-examined as part of the development process for the new services. It may also be possible for Catford loop services to call once these receive new rolling stock.

Brixton High Level

109. It is obviously nonsense, once East London Line phase 2 opens, that London Overground trains should run non-stop over Brixton town centre and also fail to provide a connection between Southeastern's Herne Hill line trains and Clapham Junction. High level platforms at Brixton simply must go ahead.

110. For years we have been told of the difficulty – and therefore high cost - of building platforms at this site which are fully compliant with the latest design standards, and the draft RUS seems to take the same stance. We question whether this is a case of the best being the enemy of the good.

111. Also, we understand that the London Borough of Lambeth takes a very positive view of the regeneration benefits of high level platforms at Brixton, and that they may be able to facilitate some third party funding in recognition of these wider benefits.

112. We believe that a concerted effort must be made to see if high level platforms can be built here to acceptable, but not necessarily ideal, standards.

Brockley High Level

113. We note the conclusion that the benefits would be low, and that most of the journey opportunities these new platforms would provide are catered for in other ways.

114. To gain a full understanding of this conclusion, London TravelWatch would like to see the analysis on which it is based.

Conclusion

115. This draft RUS is an immensely complex piece of work. Pressures of time, and a wish to avoid overwhelming the readers of this response with comments on every aspect of the consultation, mean that we may not have covered all the issues on which people might like to know our views.

116. If this is the case, we would be happy to respond to any questions. These should be addressed to:

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Reference

[1] *Requirements for Train Services – Principles*, available on the London TravelWatch website at Requirements for Train Services - Principles, or by phone to London TravelWatch Publications Officer 020 7726 9997 or by e-mail to publications@londontrawatch.org.uk

Appendix

Tulse Hill and Herne Hill – an example of the long view

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A. Tulse Hill and Herne Hill are busy stations at the heart of the South London RUS area. As can be seen from the diagram above, they are situated at key locations on a complex web of lines.

B. Tulse Hill is served by Southern services from various origins via Streatham and Crystal Palace to London Bridge, and by FCC (Thameslink) services from Wimbledon and Sutton via Streatham to St. Albans and Luton.

C. Herne Hill is served by Southeastern services from Orpington via Beckenham Jct. to Victoria (plus some peak trains to Blackfriars) and the same FCC services as at Tulse Hill.

D. The two stations are only 1 mile apart. Both are on viaducts, have eight-car platforms and flat junctions at each end of the station. Tulse Hill has road underbridges at each end of the station, and Herne Hill has an underbridge at one end. Neither station has step-free access. At Tulse Hill the entrances, subways, stairs and platforms are all very narrow and quite unsuited to the present day volume of traffic.

E. The draft South London RUS examines the case for extending the platforms to take 10-car trains. For Tulse Hill it concludes that that this would be very expensive, and largely for this reason it recommends that further work is based on the option of continuing with 8-car trains.

F. For Herne Hill the draft RUS concludes that extending the platforms within the constraints of the junctions at each end of the station is impossible. It therefore looks at removing the junctions by carrying the Thameslink line on a viaduct over the Southeastern line. This would not only enable platforms on both lines to take longer trains, but would also remove a major train frequency and operational constraint as it would eliminate the flat junctions

between the two routes. The draft RUS considers that the estimated cost of £200m is too high to be value for money and that this option should not be pursued in the short term. However it does suggest it "…. may be appropriate for a potential alignment to be identified and protected from trackside developments which would render it impossible later." Given the nature of the area – residential and with a major park adjacent to the Thameslink line – it may be expected that a new viaduct above the existing one would face considerable opposition.

G. The effect of these draft RUS recommendations is that key routes on the South London network would remain limited to 8-car trains for the foreseeable future, as selective door opening (SDO) on as many as two coaches (the draft RUS concept of 10-car trains) or 4 coaches (the London TravelWatch preference for 12-car trains) would not be a practical proposition at either station.

H. Taking its proposed 30-year view, London TravelWatch is very concerned that all South London routes should be developed to take 12-car trains. For all services this is to take account of forecast demand growth and also of presently suppressed demand, and to gain the operational and timetabling flexibility benefits of running similar trains on all routes.

I. For Thameslink there is an additional factor. The central core is planned to operate 24 tph. For National Rail this is widely regarded as a very challenging task, and a key factor will be keeping station dwell times down. With most Thameslink trains to be 12-cars, limitation of some trains to 8-cars will prejudice the dwell times because the differing lengths of train will adversely affect the degree to which passengers spread themselves evenly along the platforms. This will be a particular problem at the central core stations, which is where short dwell times are most important.

J. 8-car trains will also limit capacity at a time when interchange with Crossrail at Farringdon will provide a new route to the West End and thus further increase demand on the Streatham / Tulse Hill corridor.

K. London TravelWatch is therefore firmly of the view that the South London RUS must take a long term and possibly radical view of how to provide for 12-car trains at Tulse Hill and Herne Hill, and remove at least some of the junction conflicts which limit both capacity and efficient operation. Account must also be taken of the need to expand the passenger handling capacity and amenities of Tulse Hill station, and to provide step-free access at both stations.

L. To achieve these objectives, some new thinking will be necessary. Possibilities to consider might include the following, either singly or in combination:

i) Re-locate Tulse Hill station south of the A215 Norwood Road. This would likely mean severing the western connection to Streatham Hill (the Leigham spur). This spur is currently used by just two passenger trains per day, both in the same direction, and – presumably – by empty rolling stock workings. It might also require severing the West Norwood spur. This carries 4 off-peak tph London Bridge – Crystal Palace and beyond, but only 2 tph or less in the peaks due to the difficulty of scheduling very complex service patterns at times of high capacity utilisation. The link could be provided at much higher frequencies if this new Tulse Hill station included interchange with new platforms on the Crystal Palace – Victoria line which crosses overhead just south of this site.

ii) Drive a tunnel for the Thameslink line from south of the A215 Norwood Road to north of Herne Hill, with new underground platforms at both locations. The above ground lines would be reconfigured using the space released in order to provide 12-car platforms. The existing route between the stations would be released for other uses.

iii) As ii), but with the new Herne Hill platforms located in the open slightly north of the present site.

iv) The draft RUS proposal for a flyover at Herne Hill, designed to be as least intrusive as possible to minimise environmental objections. Account to be taken that this is necessarily a low speed route, so structural design standards can take account of this.

M. Whatever solution is ultimately devised, the point to be understood is that the Tulse Hill – Herne Hill section is a key area which needs to be solved in order to unlock new capacity for much of present Southern / Thameslink metro network, and it must be considered in the context of a 30-year development strategy.

N. Failure to take a long view, both here and at other constrained locations, will mean that today's problems will re-surface in just a few years time. The opportunity to achieve a major step-change in the capacity, frequency and quality of National Rail services in south London must not be missed.