

Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (EDC) response to the Department for Transport (DfT) South Eastern Rail Franchise Public Consultation - 'Shaping the Future' - March 2017

1. Do our priorities correctly reflect your views?

The priorities listed, which in summary, include:

- Punctuality;
- Increasing capacity/space for passengers (highlighting High Speed routes)
- Improved passenger satisfaction levels on the route franchise (which are currently below London/South-East averages);
- Limiting numbers of late running (or cancelled) trains;
- Improving communication for passengers during delays;
- Infrastructure optimisation, new services, longer trains & reduced journey times;
- Ensuring opportunities to increase capacity and optimise service patterns are taken, on the back of the new Elizabeth Line (Crossrail).

Any or all of the above are difficult to argue against and are something of a default/starting position, albeit welcomed. Some of these commitments, whilst fairly generic and expected, should be strengthened. For example, under punctuality and reliability, improvements need to be linked to robust Key Performance Indicators and harsher (financial) penalties for failing to consistently meet or exceed these.

Within the main body of the document, emphasis is placed on thoroughly modernising ticketing systems, not least the way a ticket can be purchased and used. Indeed, the Secretary of State for Transport Chris Grayling MP highlights the need for smarter payment systems (including mobile phones) in his Foreword of the document, by way of three main ambitions he highlights.

Whilst two key Government aspirations (more space for passengers and reduced delays) are captured in the above, the third (ticketing) point is not and it needs to be. Additionally, more information should be presented regarding through-ticketing and seamless integration with other public transport.

The Proximity of Ebbsfleet Garden City to London will mean that it is attractive people who work in the dynamic, London-centric market. We would want to see the latest ticketing systems pioneered here to meet the latest ways of working for our commuters/ future residents. Many of whom may likely commute to the Capital perhaps 3-4 days/per week, whilst working at home or in future work-hubs in the Ebbsfleet Central area.

EDC suggests that we therefore need to see the commitment to season type fares/tickets which reflect the fact many modern-day workers don't travel every day, actually delivered (3.10 – bullet 2 – p.11), as it has been widely discussed

for over ten years. Ideally, smart-ticketing would see the ability of a customer to purchase a train ticket anywhere on the Kent Thameside Fastrack (express bus service) and continue their onward journey by train into London (or elsewhere) using that same ticket. That would amount to a truly “integrated” passenger transport experience.

From a human behavioural characteristic, this could actually bring about another benefit – encouraging home or “*local to home*” work habits (via work or community hubs with ultra-fast Wi-Fi) and can assist in reducing demand stress. Whereas if people think they have actually “pre-paid” for a journey to London (by way of a traditional monthly or annual season ticket) they will naturally be more inclined to make that journey - as opposed to save money by working from home one or two days per week.

2. Do you agree that more space is needed for passengers at the busiest times of the day?

Most organisations / commuters would concur this is a priority objective, at the same time as recognising the challenges facing delivering such.

EDC would encourage the potential of certain trains starting commencing their journey at Ebbsfleet International – even if that were just two trains in the morning peak such as a 7am and an 8am train. This reflects concerns that High Speed trains are already arriving at Ebbsfleet at capacity and although only a comparatively short journey to London of under 20 minutes, commuters wish to have a seat and to be able to work or relax for what amounts to over 90 minutes of weekly (into London) commuting.

It also reflects the fact that the next Franchise could span up to 2027 and by that point, the majority of 13,000 new homes within the EDC Planning Authority area and a further 2,000 homes in the broader Impact area, will be constructed within . Additionally, 560,000m² of business base will be built out with up to 32,000 new jobs spanning the Garden City area. Add to that the potential for a major new theme park/entertainments resort on the Swanscombe Peninsula and it is clear that the London-Ebbsfleet rail links will be under significant duress from a passenger demand perspective between now and 2027/28. Our developers and the EDC have firm plans to deliver 5,100 new homes by 2021 and many of these are already under construction, with a build out rate of about 1,000 new homes per year.

We feel that one dedicated Ebbsfleet to St. Pancras (AM) peak service should commence in 2019/20, with an additional service added in 2022/23 subject to demand and future patronage data, and closely monitor service provision across the lifetime of the next franchise.

3. What comments, if any, do you have on options for providing more space through: a) Longer trains; and b) Metro style carriages with larger entrances and more standing room and handholds?

Rolling stock serving the North Kent corridor (Dartford-Strood) and serving key stations strategically important to the Garden City (including Greenhithe, Swanscombe and Northfleet) is particularly dated. This line operates some of the oldest rolling stock in the south-east. It isn't uncommon to find seats/cushions that are in a poor state of repair or dislodged completely.

The DfT acknowledges that the 'Networker' rolling stock was introduced in the early 1990s and is now a quarter or a century old. Rolling stock that really ought to have been refurbished and see its lifespan genuinely/ actively prolonged over the course of the last Franchise period, simply hasn't. As such, it affords a (generally) poor public perception of rail travel in 2017.

If Networker (and to some extent, Electrostar stock) is to remain in service over the course of the next Franchise Period, then it should all benefit from a wholesale internal refurbishment of new seating, flooring and lighting. It is reminiscent of the old North London Line stock before "walk through carriages" were introduced, the very nature of old rolling stock, on occasions – very run down - fosters a perception of poor safety and security and can deter use at certain times of day.

To that end, EDC would specifically welcome new rolling stock with "*Metro Style*" carriages introduced on the North Kent Line so as to be operational by 2021/22. By doing so, this route can be made significantly more attractive to future Garden City dwellers and actively promoted by The EDC. Indeed, we are actively considering ways of improving connectivity to Northfleet Station.

4. Would you support removing First Class seating on the busiest routes to provide more space?

A modern, fit for purpose 21st Century rail network should offer a passenger experience befitting of an "all class" society whereby customers should expect a consistently high quality level of service/journey experience.

This is perhaps slightly different on long-haul or "*Inter City*" rail travel, whereby a passenger travelling for 3-4 hours may wish to pay a premium to secure an 'at seat' drinks/buffet service, a newspaper, or faster/free Wi-Fi. However, the south-eastern network does not lend itself to that style of travel.

What is unacceptable is a situation where by a 'non ' first class passengers have to stand, often cramped in a doorway area – presents a questionable situation on a 21st Century passenger transport system, that is finding it challenging to meet demand capacity.

The level of capacity required is going to require more strategic thinking beyond removing a small section of first class seats, if the demands from new housing both in Ebbsfleet Garden City and beyond are to be met.

5. What comments, if any, do you have on our plans to improve customer service and the overall passenger experience?

The EDC fully supports a wholesale improvement in overall passenger experience and we support the items listed.

Journey Planning could certainly be made easier/more accessible by way of a South-Eastern specific mobile app, as opposed to relying on options such as a National Rail Planner or Trainline.com. The on-board experience is very much a subjective/personal matter, but a consistent level of quality should readily be expected, such as trains free of litter, with clean and undamaged interiors.

Although quality standards are good on the new High Speed network, the same cannot be said for the North Kent line. It's common to find shabby interiors, damaged seat fabrics and sometimes dirty surfaces/window surrounds/rubber that customers would not want to brush against.

With respect to communication during incidents of disruption, quality standards seem to be high on the High Speed rolling stock. Clarity of the sound/tannoy system is excellent and train staff can (generally) appear noticeably keener to communicate with customers.

Customer experience with respect to communication quality on the North Kent line can be inconsistent. The ageing rolling stock means that driver/guard messages are often inaudible. When a service is experiencing a delay, whilst an explanation is usually given, updates are not always provided meaning passengers can become frustrated and irritable, particularly those without a seat. As part of any future mid/end of life refurbishment, on train intercom/communications systems should be upgraded to a modern system offering improved clarity.

With respect to compensation payments when delays occur, and the trigger point for such payments which is proposed to be decreased, this is welcomed.

However, paper copy forms should be simplified and more readily distributed by platform staff for customers alighting delayed services. Ideally, such compensation should readily be returned to customers by way of mobile phones/apps and associated e-tickets.

6. Do you have any other ideas or priorities for improving customer service?

We note that plan to roll-out on train Wi-Fi across the majority of the South-Eastern fleet before the end of 2018. We would expect to see a firm commitment to introducing this to the entire fleet and not “possibly” the whole fleet (3.10 bullet 2, p.11) to offer customers reassurance that their ability to work effectively and efficiently whilst commuting will happen sooner rather than later.

On train refreshments/trolley services are often well received by customers, particularly on longer journeys, for example, between London and coastal communities. However, these are challenging to operate on services where many customers cannot find a seat and therefore generally stand along the aisles of trains and within doorway areas, blocking the passage of a refreshments trolley.

7. What changes to the fares structure would be of benefit to you?

Ultimately, fare levels must be consistent and the removal of the fare penalty for Ebbsfleet users should be included. Nearly £33.00 for a peak time return ticket to London does appear high, or £38.60 with a Travelcard. This translates to an annual Season Ticket cost of £4,508.00 (saving £685 on the cost of buying a daily ticket) or £5,180.00 (saving £787) including all zones (1-6) Travelcard. This is comparable to the cost of travel from a location such as Maidstone, Kent's County Town, which is 20 miles beyond Ebbsfleet. The premium ticket price that secures a 17 minute journey into the Capital is, however, recognised, similarly, once the cost of a basic annual season ticket passes the £5,000 mark, it could be a deterrent to many customer/rail commuters on mid-level salaries to be able justify using High Speed services and commuting into London from Ebbsfleet Garden City.

We very much welcome the commitment to introducing ‘The Key’ smart card ticket in a way that would benefit customers, and enjoy the benefit of the saving associated with an annual season ticket, along with seamless travel, but don't necessarily commute to London on a daily basis. This will recognise future changing travel patterns of commuters who may work from other destinations/office locations on certain days of the week.

8. What else could be done to improve the way tickets are sold and provided?

The EDC would expect to see seamless travel between different modes of transport like Fastrack and rail services. Fastrack, the north Kent express bus service, is key to Ebbsfleet Garden City not becoming a car-centric place to live. By integrating bus and rail travel via a progressive, readily accessible ticketing system, the profile of bus and rail travel alike would be significantly raised.

Additionally, queues at ticket machines just before a train arrives are not uncommon. Ticket machines sometimes appear slow and screens can be

unresponsive. It would be ideal if ad-hoc travellers had the ability to purchase a ticket by way of an app whilst on board the train.

Similarly, The EDC recognises that there is a risk to a person passing the concourse barriers and entering the platform/waiting area, however ticket based entry systems on smart phones are now common in other transport industries such as aviation.

9. What further comments, if any, do you have on our plans to improve access and facilities at stations?

We welcome any initiative that afford an easier, less daunting and therefore more attractive journey experience for people with mobility, visual or learning challenges. We are proud that Ebbsfleet has a state-of-the-art railway station in Ebbsfleet International. Similarly, we recognise that some aspects of Greenhithe, Swanscombe and Northfleet require upgrading to ensure that the same level of service is delivered.

Northfleet Station is just over 300m from Ebbsfleet International, or 800m by foot. However, the existing walking route is somewhat convoluted and difficult to make, with natural surveillance lacking in parts of that walking route and a perception of poor safety and security which may lead to more vulnerable members of society such as older people, females, teenagers or those with the aforementioned personal challenges, more reluctant to travel by rail.

The theme of “interchange” between locations such as Northfleet and Ebbsfleet International is one that The EDC is particularly keen to engage with key stakeholders on, at the very earliest opportunity, as well as the generally poor/lacking passenger facilities at North Kent line stations.

10. What more could be done to improve access and provide facilities for those with disabilities or additional needs?

Whilst Greenhithe station affords step-free access, access at Swanscombe is via steps only, whilst Northfleet offers “some step-free access” (i.e. step free access only possible for services away from London and no step-free interchange between platforms). This is unacceptable on passenger transport within an urban location sitting just twenty miles from the Capital, in 2017. Similarly, all three stations are only staffed part time and only Greenhithe Station offers accessible toilets and either dual height or height adjustable ticket office windows. This is a far from ideal situation and not conducive to a rail system that is “open to all”.

11. How far do you support, or oppose, the extension of High Speed services from London St. Pancras to Hastings, Bexhill, and Rye, where this would represent value for money to the taxpayer?

Improved connectivity and opportunities for faster journeys to destinations for people in the south-east are generally welcomed by Ebbsfleet Development Corporation.

However, our concerns remain as to the ability of High Speed Service to meet capacity demand for the existing network of stops/destinations and the future housing needs.

It is critical that the DfT take a measured approach with respect to the future expansion of the High Speed Network, focusing on meeting (and expanding) service provision across the existing network. Particular attention needs to be given to areas of significant future growth areas such as Ebbsfleet Garden City, over the next decade, adding to customer demand for High Speed services – particularly into and out of the Capital.

12. How far do you support, or oppose, reducing journey times to key destinations in Kent and East Sussex, by reducing stops at less well used intermediate stations to create hourly fast services?

The EDC feels that it does make sense to rationalise services at less well used destinations across the network in favour of locations that are either currently unable to cope with existing customer demand - or which can present clear evidence of a massive increase in future passenger demand.

Some Kent routes offer particularly slow trains which – if limited stop services were introduced – might take some pressure of existing (alternative) networks routes. The trend of “rail heading” is very real involves people driving in from destinations further afield, to benefit from shorter travel times (and sometimes cheaper fares). Whilst this is human nature, it means that destinations closer to London will potentially come under significant additional future pressure from customers. This is reason in itself to improve service quality from destinations across Kent, particularly within the morning and evening peak periods.

We feel that this should be done in such a way to take a holistic review of the reduction of any services on the existing community.

13. If you support this proposal, which services do you think would most benefit from this approach?

The EDC has no specific view on specific routes beyond North Kent.

We fully support the extension of the Elizabeth Line to Ebbsfleet as this will add huge benefits to those living and working across (and beyond) the Garden City.

EDC very much welcomes engagement with key stakeholders such as the DfT, Network Rail and the Crossrail team on this exciting proposal.

14. Which journeys do you make today which are difficult? a) By rail? b) By road, which would be easier by rail?

Traditionally, north-south journeys are particularly challenging to make by passenger transport across Kent, reflecting the fact multiple (historic) railways companies operated services to multiple London terminals.

However, rail infrastructure would be extremely challenging to improve from a north-south perspective and would not necessarily reflect where existing (and indeed) future passenger demand is. However we do welcome Network Rail's proposal to look at long term solution to connect south London to Ebbsfleet.

Journeys which involve interchange are particularly challenging for customers. For example, the interchange between Ebbsfleet International and Northfleet Station does not lend itself well to a genuinely integrated transport policy/customer experience.

We would like to see increased support from both Network Rail and TOCs alike, to facilitate/strengthen our ideas for how improvements could be made at locations such as this, where two lines run in close proximity to one another, yet at the same time, are quite detached and operating in isolation.

15. Which additional services would you wish to see provided in the next franchise?

As referenced earlier in EDC's response, we would like to see:

- i) Clear plans to cater for increased passenger demand from Ebbsfleet International to central London destinations as Ebbsfleet Garden City is built out over the course of the next Franchise
- ii) More efficient and accessible – not least better promoted – service provision on the North Kent Line, for reasons already presented in our response.

16. How far do you support, or oppose, options to simplify the timetable?

We are mindful of the fact that rail timetabling is a particularly challenging aspect of rail planning. To that end, any measures that might be taken which could help passengers more readily understand what time their local rail service departs to their destination of choice, is welcomed by The EDC.

As previously referenced, a rail service that offers Ebbsfleet Garden City residents, a service which commences its journey into London St. Pancras from Ebbsfleet International would be strongly welcomed. This could be a showcase

service, significantly raising the profile of both the operator and the Garden City – if those services departed at 7am and 8am respectively, which would offer a huge boost with respect to catering for expected demand from the area over the duration of the next franchise.

17. How far do you support, or oppose, options to reduce the choice of central London destinations served from individual stations with the aim of providing a more regular, evenly spaced timetable, and a more reliable service?

This is perhaps more of a consideration for rail users using stations further into Kent. Excellent connectivity to north/central London terminals from Ebbsfleet International (and indeed the North Kent Line) includes St. Pancras/Kings Cross, London Charing Cross, Canon Street and London Bridge.

This affords a convenient mix of London terminals that onward journeys – if required – can be made to a very broad range of destinations either by London Underground or Bus, in addition to a further Overground Rail service, should that be required.

18. How far do you support, or oppose, plans for the train operator and Network Rail to form a close alliance with the aim of reducing delays and improving performance?

It is commonly accepted that – historically – Train Operating Companies and the national rail infrastructure provider, Network Rail, have significant potential to form a closer alliance more conducive to delivering excellence across the national railway network.

The EDC therefore welcomes and encourages improvements in collaborative working between the range of TOCs and N.R. – we are looking forward to being invited to future stakeholder forums and working groups where we can more readily engage with both N.R and the future Franchise Operator, along with fellow stakeholders/Local Planning Authorities which often have a significant expanse of knowledge and advice they can impart with a view to facilitating both service and infrastructure improvements.

As an aside - improved collaborative working and more robust alliances would undoubtedly be more successful and forthcoming if franchise time periods were **15-20 years** in length as opposed to the existing 7-10 years. Extended franchise periods would encourage long-term investment (particularly in new trains/rolling stock) and foster greater confidence of a financial return for the Train Operating Company.

19. What are your views on how this alliance should be incentivised and held to account for its performance?

Transparency here is critical to a better understand about the rail industry by all users and interested stakeholders.

A raft of Key Performance Indicators can be confusing and inaccessible to those beyond the rail industry. All stakeholders are expecting to see improved collaboration between rail infrastructure and service providers alike, plus better public promotion about how they collaborate. To that end, a set of shared/joint KPI's would be justified and certainly promote joint working, where success (and the financial pain of failure) was shared.

Customers (and stakeholders) do pick up on “finger pointing” from time-to-time, for example, infrastructure failure such as frozen points being announced by a driver or guard. The customer isn't interested in who is responsible, they simply need to know what has happened and how it is going to impact on their journey plus – perhaps more pertinently – how they may be compensated for any inconvenience.

Performance figures should be readily shared on station platforms and even on trains. Where performance is seen to be lacking, communication with customers relating to short/medium term remedial actions needs to be highlighted. Robust and transparent Key Performance Indicators are critically important, as well as being slim-lined and easy to understand / share with those beyond the rail industry.

20. How would you prefer the next South Eastern operator to engage with you: a) As an individual? b) As an organisation (if appropriate)?

B. As an organisation – The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (The EDC).

21. What approaches to customer service in other companies could be adopted by the next South Eastern train operator?

The EDC would encourage the DfT to produce a report into TOC “best practice” relating to customer service, highlighting the very best examples from across the rail industry. It would make sense to promote example of excellence to those bidding for future rail franchises, so they can build on previous “lessons learnt” from others' experiences.

It is also important to look beyond the rail industry for examples of excellence in the customer service sector, for example, the Utilities sector, Transport for London, aviation/ automotive industries and even retail / digital industries sectors where – sometimes – young and dynamic start-up companies can teach larger, more traditional organisations – new ways of doing things. Ultimately, customer service improvements must clearly be linked to strong Key Performance Indicators.

22. Where do you think private sector investment would be of most benefit to the railway?

Arguably, wherever the “interface” with customers occurs. In general, this means train stations and some particularly poor waiting facilities beyond Central London. The images of passengers shivering on a station platform in the middle of winter, with a service cancelled or delayed, is one many regular rail users will be familiar with. Rolling stock is another key area for quality improvements, whereby some services/lines are operating rolling stock that – towards the end of this next Franchise – will be approaching 35 years old.

23. Should we consider using the more lightly used sections of the railway in a different way? If so, how should this be done?

The EDC does not have a particular view on this.

24. Looking to future, beyond this franchise, what, if any, benefits do you consider there would be for passengers from a franchise with a different geographical boundary?

As per question 23, it is not possible for The EDC to offer a detailed view without further detail as to the possible changes to (potential) geographical boundaries of future franchise operators.

It is – however – recognised in the rail industry that TOCs with smaller, more focussed networks (Chiltern Trains is a good example) appear to have much improved performance data than some of the larger, more dispersed franchise areas. It may – therefore – make sense to split the likes of Southern and South-Eastern areas into smaller component parts, beyond this next Franchise, if The DfT had confidence that this could facilitate an improved/more efficient operational railway and see a better all-round customer experience. This could form an important work-stream for consideration by a multi-agency Key Stakeholder Engagement Group/Plan, in the future. The EDC would welcome the opportunity to be part of such a Group.