

SEVENOAKS RAIL TRAVELLERS ASSOCIATION

Response to KCC Draft Report "Growth without Gridlock"

1. Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association (SRTA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the formulation of this strategy document.
2. SRTA represents the interests of commuters using **Sevenoaks** and stations nearby - **Bat and Ball, Dunton Green, Eynsford, Kemsing, Otford, and Shoreham**. In the year to March 2007, over **4.5 million train journeys** began or ended at our stations.
3. SRTA advocates an integrated approach to transport, specifically across the area we seek to represent. Despite Sevenoaks being one of the busiest stations on the SER network outside the London termini the town lacks any basic elements of an integrated network.
4. Sevenoaks has frequent train services to:
 - a. London via Orpington,
 - b. Hastings via Tunbridge Wells,
 - c. East Kent via Ashford.

The new HS1 service from Ashford will divert a small number of commuters away from the South East Main Line (SEML) but the growth in usage of SEML is such that the HS1 service will account for the equivalent of just the past 5 years growth. There is a longstanding problem with overcrowding on SEML especially on services to Cannon Street.

5. Bus services in the area are little used. Public information about bus services is very limited. The only commuter bus link provides just 3 runs in the morning and 5 in the evening. Consequently its impact is modest and is currently threatened with closure.
6. Apart from an inadequate number of cycle racks at the station no provision is made to promote the use of cycling. Similarly little thought appears to have been given to the needs of pedestrians around the station.

Railway Services

7. We welcome the introduction of HS1 but must point out that there will be no lasting benefit from displacement of existing commuters from East Kent to HS1 for those travelling on the SEML. SEML services cover the whole of West Kent from which substantially around 14,000 commuters a day travel into London in generally overcrowded conditions. Ebbsfleet remains unreachable except by using the very unpredictable M25 and most local residents travel to London to join Eurostar. SRTA supports campaigns to improve Eurostar services from Ashford which can be accessed by frequent train services from Sevenoaks and would be preferred to using St Pancras.
8. Many West Kent commuters need to access the City and Docklands. Recent proposals to replace current Cannon Street services by Thameslink services or Charing Cross services from 2012 onwards will significantly disbenefit large numbers of commuters. SRTA vigorously supports the retention of the existing services to Cannon Street. with some.
9. Access to Thameslink from the SEML will open up numerous new journey opportunities. However, the proposal that there should be no access via the SEML to Thameslink except by changing at London Bridge disbenefits large numbers of residents.

In the peak, SRTA strongly supports the retention of the existing Cannon Street services, with Charing Cross – Tunbridge Wells services being diverted to Thameslink and the remaining services continuing to serve Charing Cross.

With six **off-peak** fast trains per hour between Sevenoaks and London at least two fast trains per hour should run via London Bridge over the Thameslink route.

From 2017 the value of the Thameslink service will be further substantially enhanced by the completion of Crossrail providing access to Heathrow and eastwards into Docklands.

10. We support proposals to review train formations. However, SRTA studies have revealed that all available rolling stock is used each day on the SEML and that the morning peak services have the maximum number of seats on most services. Only major infrastructure works, mainly in inner London, can provide any significant increase in capacity for the SEML as outlined in the recent National Rail South London Route Utilisation Study (RUS).
11. We welcome proposals for the Transmarche Metro which would be a valuable addition to existing services.
12. SRTA supports improved through ticketing with Transport for London and the wider acceptance of Oyster Pay as You Go. We believe that Ticket Carnets would also be a useful additional facility.

Bus Services

13. Sevenoaks bus services are very limited in number. The services appear to be haphazard and have a very low profile.
14. Sevenoaks is one of the few larger towns in Kent which does not have a Quality Bus Partnership. We urge that this proven approach be introduced in Sevenoaks at an early date.
15. Despite the footfall of more than 3 million passengers at Sevenoaks station there is no information on bus services. We urge the early introduction of real time information displays of available bus services.

Access to Airports

16. SRTA is very disappointed at the omission of the need for public transport access to Gatwick Airport. Kent remains the only county in South East England without direct rail access to the airport.
17. SRTA calls for an investigation of the feasibility of a fast frequent shuttle service linking Gatwick Airport and Ashford thus providing an east-west high speed rail spine across the county.

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18. SRTA is disappointed by the lack of ambition in the proposals to address the issues identified.
19. Sevenoaks needs to adopt an integrated approach to public transport. A Quality Bus Partnership would be a major step forward.
20. We strongly support improved provision for pedestrians and cyclists.
21. There is a typo in that Sevenoaks has no rail link to Gatwick other than via London or very slowly (with 2 changes) via Tonbridge. Possibly the author meant Hastings or Tunbridge Wells?

Recommendations

1. Sevenoaks needs to provide an integrated transport service for its residents which will enhance environmental quality of life in Sevenoaks and has the potential to help address the important Air Quality issues arising from vehicle emissions at busy junctions.
2. A Quality Bus Partnership is needed to enhance the present very limited services and begin to achieve the improvement seen elsewhere in Kent after adoption of such schemes.
3. Real time bus information should be provided at Sevenoaks railway station to encourage bus patronage.
4. Improved facilities are needed for pedestrians and cyclists especially around the bigger railway stations in the Sevenoaks area.

5. Rail services, especially for commuters, are overcrowded. All peak trains must be of maximum length.
6. Train services to Cannon Street giving access to the City and Docklands are essential to local residents. These services must be maintained for the future contrary to some proposals for service patterns post 2015.
7. Completion of the Thameslink project in 2015 will open up major new journey opportunities. Two of the six services each hour off-peak on the SEML via Sevenoaks should run via London Bridge and Blackfriars. This will acquire even greater value with the completion of Crossrail in 2017 giving access to Heathrow and Docklands with just one change.
8. SRTA asks KCC to call for a fast frequent shuttle service linking Gatwick Airport and Ashford thus providing a rapid east-west rail spine across the county.

