

From: Steve Craddock [mailto:Steve.Craddock@sevenoaks.gov.uk]

Sent: 30 August 2013 11:18 AM

To: Consultation on draft determination (ORR)

Subject: Sevenoaks District Council response to Draft determination of Network Rail's outputs and funding for 2014-19 - 30082013

Dear Sir/Madam,

Officers at Sevenoaks District Council endorse the proposal that consideration should be given to additional capacity and electrification of the Uckfield line in the attached response to the Draft determination of Network Rail's outputs and funding for 2014-19 prepared by Railfuture. This is consistent with the Council's formal response to the Sussex Route Utilisation Strategy in 2009 (also attached).

Kind regards,

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Ch.9 Enhancements expenditure: Sussex Route – extra capacity into London Bridge from Wealden line

A scheme consistently carried through from the Sussex and London & South East Route Utilisation Strategies, the Initial Industry Plan, the High-Level Output Specification, the Strategic Business Plan, and most recently the Draft Determination on the SBP for Control Period 5, 2014-19, is the conditional output of train lengthening on Uckfield line services to deliver the requirement for extra peak capacity into London Bridge, especially from East Croydon. Thus far the conventional approach adopted has been to plan for longer platforms to be built at eight Uckfield line stations in order to accommodate longer, diesel, trains of the type operated on the route for the past several years.

There is however considerable uncertainty about any operator's ability to source additional compatible diesel passenger trains within the forthcoming Control Period, a condition recognised in the above documents at various stages of the PR13 process. Attempting to release passenger rolling stock of the same type from the only other line on which it operates, East Coastway/Marshlink services between Ashford International and Brighton, by reconfiguring those services would almost certainly be neither sufficient nor free of public and political controversy.

That sourcing uncertainty contrasts with the continuing supply of new dual-voltage [both as supplied and conversion-capable] electric passenger rolling stock and of a type widespread across the current South Central franchise area, most recently at the end of July through a further order with a growth option. The latter part of CP5 will then witness the arrival of the new Thameslink fleet. It is clear that approaching the end of CP5, when the Uckfield line train lengthening output must have been delivered, there will have been both a significant injection of additional electric rolling stock to the new Combined Thameslink franchise area and an as yet unknown cascade of passenger rolling stock around and beyond that franchise.

An alternative approach to delivering the Uckfield line train lengthening output by 2018-19 therefore appears to merit proper consideration before the draft Delivery Plan is published this December and finalised before next April.

By way of introduction, para. 9.80 of the Draft Determination sets the context: "Electrifying the railway will bring many benefits for both passengers and freight users, most notably the ability to run more frequent trains with shorter journey times and less environmental impact, such as noise and diesel fumes." Mention should also be made of the benefits for passengers of a more reliable service with more punctual journeys, and of the operational efficiencies accruing to the operator of a more homogenous fleet of rolling stock and the lower running costs of electric units. Mention must be made too of the particular importance to local stakeholders of the environmental benefits of eliminating the noxious emissions of diesel fumes from local areas of sensitive and protected landscape such as the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty [AONB] and the Ashdown Forest. The various benefits of removing diesel trains from the new London Bridge station should also not be over-looked.

An operational limitation of the diesel units is their lack of inter-unit corridor connections which combined with their mixed 4- and 2-car formations necessitates full platform lengthening to avoid passengers being marooned in a unit stopped beyond a platform. With their inter-unit corridor connections this, together with the use of Selective Door Opening, need not be an issue for the use of electric rolling stock.

The proposition is therefore that the ORR should require Network Rail to give urgent, active and serious consideration to electrifying the 25 route miles of the Uckfield branch line within CP5 as the preferred, higher-value means to deliver the train lengthening output, re-examining the need for and extent of any associated platform lengthening. It is noted that a 'Significant interface' already identified in the Initial Industry Plan [Definition of proposed CP5 enhancements] stated "The scheme should make passive provision for future electrification of the route served by 12-car x 20m vehicles." For these purposes the particular electrification technology to be deployed is immaterial. Network Rail's apparent preference for 25kV overhead rather than third-rail power is understood and should present no operational issues in a south-east network already used to dual-voltage operations on HS1, Thameslink, the West London Line and the west end of the North London Line.

A direct consequence of electrifying the Uckfield branch line would be the release for cascade of around 30 modern diesel passenger carriages. One beneficiary must be the increasingly crowded East Coastway/Marshlink services mentioned above, to improve passengers' journey experience with more seats and accommodate rising demand.

In putting forward this proposition note is taken of the late-June announcement of funding for the infill electrification of the Gospel Oak-Barking Line, and the early-August announcement of the probable electrification of the Windermere branch line. It is a proposition which can confidently be expected to command widespread support across a range of stakeholders as supporting the delivery of their economic and environmental as well as transport policy objectives.