



**Submission by East Sussex Rail Alliance on behalf in response to ORR invitation Draft Determination (PR13)**

**1. ABOUT East Sussex Rail Alliance**

ESRA is an umbrella voluntary rail action stakeholder group comprising the five main rail user groups in East Sussex. These are:

- Bexhill Rail Action Group (BRAG)
- East Coastway Commuter Group (ECCG)
- MarshLink Action Group (MLAG)
- St Leonards and Hastings Rail Improvement Programme (SHRIMP)
- Three Oaks and Winchelsea (THWART)

We also work in partnership with the Counties MPs, Councils and Stakeholder rail action groups in Brighton, West Sussex, Surrey , Kent and London Borough of Croydon.

Dear Sirs,

While East Sussex Rail Alliance ( ESRA) supports the principle of investment by Network Rail in short, medium and long term in the primary route between Brighton and London, there is a rising concern that the key feeder routes for this traffic to and from London (including the Hastings-Tonbridge line), east and west along the Coast from Brighton, may be again sidelined in favour of a relatively very expensive upgrade of the existing and diversionary routes.

ESRA can cite short and medium term gains by converting the Coastal route to a through main line which would realise a far greater potential value in CBR terms, be attractive in growth terms to both passenger users, train and freight operators, as well as being a vital economic growth generator in line with Government's current policy aspirations.

Such a South Coast through route would provide substantial operating savings for a relatively small investment in infrastructure, bringing the prospect of much enhanced utilisation of stock, the potential of reduced resource costs and a clear alternative in time requirements to bring South Coast passenger users into St Pancras International by HS1 rather than the already massively overcrowded peak hour services which traverse the southern suburbs of the Capital.



*Putting Sussex back on the map*

As a first stage, ESRA supports the double tracking, electrification and resignalling of the Ashford (Kent) to Hastings section of the East Coastway, coupled with a re-installation of a through connection at Willingdon, north of Eastbourne, with a newly aligned chord. This would provide a full out-and-back service from St Pancras to Victoria via the Coast, providing a major advantage of better connectivity to HS1 and Channel Tunnel as well as alternative fast route in the event of a shortcoming on the Brighton main line, and bring positive benefits to passenger travellers in Brighton, Eastbourne, Hastings and Rye.

This latter would also enable freight traffic originating or near the Brighton Main Line, from such as Gatwick and Redhill without reversing procedures, to access the Channel route via HS1 at Ashford Kent. Further extension west of Brighton would enable freight to transfer from the Government's planned Midland Freight spine to and from Southampton.

Such an investment would enable the whole service to be provided with electric stock and therefore release the existing DMU of 2 and 3 carriage sets to be utilised where they would be more effective and the train operators therefore would be able to concentrate maintenance in fewer but more strategically and economically useful service depots. The load factors currently being achieved on the East Coastway militate against a further use of diesel sets, being too constrained in capacity and ability to accelerate to an enhanced line speed above the pedestrian 70 miles/hour, and much below, which pertain at this time. The lack of investment has effectively stultified real growth from the current latent pent-up demand, (currently provided by bus travel over totally inadequate, congested coastal roads).

In the background of a much required rail strategic development plan for East Sussex there are major concerns that the essential requirement for a through main line – ultimately from Exeter, through Southampton, Portsmouth, Brighton, Eastbourne, Hastings to Ashford (Kent and HS1) - might be lost in potentially more appealing but highly expensive other rail proposals, and of course on “tinkering” with current timetables and services for dubiously explained benefits. These concerns of the rail user groups are summarised as follows.



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1. A 'temporary' truncation of the strategic Ashford to Brighton service, currently being considered by East Sussex County Council, may end up becoming permanent with no guarantee that the line between Hastings and Ashford will ever be upgraded/electrified or resourced with additional diesel rolling stock.

2. As well as being part of the East Coastway timetable, the Brighton–Ashford service is a strategic Kent – Sussex link, serving different markets, ie:

Hastings– Ashford local traffic

Bexhill/Hastings– HS1

Brighton/Lewes- Rye

Brighton and stations west thereof ; to Ashford and stations east thereof.

A simple change at Brighton provides connections to/from Southampton; at Ashford to Canterbury, Folkestone, Dover, Maidstone and Ramsgate, as well as HS1 and Eurostar.

3. The Brighton– Ashford service is worth more than sum of its parts. Parallel roads (A27/A259) are poor. However, this service has never been resourced properly i.e. use of a small pool of 2 car diesel units, rather than electrification which would bring access to larger pool of rolling stock and more flexibility in meeting timetable and loading demands.

4. Curtailing the service at either Eastbourne or Hastings would mean loss of much East – West through traffic, as long-distance passengers would be reluctant to change trains – due to the time penalty, uncertainty about connections etc. It is a fact that the Kent – Sussex traffic is a real a growth area.

5. Such a move would effectively signify the downgrading of the East Coastway/Marshlink from a strategic route to two local ones. This runs counter to the strategy – which all stakeholders, including ESCC – have committed, which is to promote the route.



*Putting Sussex back on the map*

6. Travelling from Kent, Brighton (a city of 270,000 people) is a natural terminus while Hastings and Eastbourne (medium-sized towns of approx 80,000) are not.

7. Curtailing the service at Eastbourne would mean that Hastings/Bexhill lose a through train each hour to/from Polegate, Lewes and Brighton. Depending on the revised stopping pattern, intermediate stations between Bexhill and Eastbourne might lose all their off peak Brighton services and the university sites at Falmer/Moulsecombe might not be served directly.

8. Curtailing services at Eastbourne leaves a dilemma about the replacement: Do you (a) have 2 fast services connecting at Eastbourne, which is likely to be unpopular for through travellers or (b) have 2 stopping services connect there?

If (a) there could be pressure to truncate the service further at Hastings in favour of a through semi-fast Hastings –Brighton train, this would mean the likely loss of most through business between Kent and Sussex. It would also mean Bexhill losing its fastest connections to London, which are via HS1 – something that BRAG considers to be unacceptable.

If (b) there would be problems with timekeeping and acceleration for the diesel trains which would be required to make extra stops at intermediate stations. This would also make the service even less attractive to long-distance passengers travelling between Sussex and Kent. As already highlighted, intermediate stations would lose their through services to Brighton for much or all of the day. Again this would be likely to lead to further pressure from some customers to truncate the service at Hastings.

9. Truncating the service at Eastbourne or indeed Hastings would not resolve the core issue, which is overcrowding the length of the whole route. Between Eastbourne and Hastings overcrowding is as acute as between Eastbourne and Brighton, while this summer, there has also been significant overcrowding on the Marshlink the whole way between Hastings and Ashford on certain days/services.



10. The real need is for additional carriages the whole length of the route –the line should be electrified between Hastings and Ashford, and the Brighton – Ashford service, operated by a minimum of 3 or 4 car units. (ESRA supports proposals already put to ORR for a more comprehensive upgrade of the route which would facilitate extension of 'Javelin' HS1 services to Hastings, Bexhill and Eastbourne, reducing journey times and offering an alternative to the overcrowded Brighton Mainline).

It is recommended to ORR as a long term strategic plan that the route outlined from Exeter to Ashford (Kent for HS1) be considered as a single trans-authority entity to enable a full and complete assessment of the growth potential to be undertaken. The aim simply is to enable a through Coastal main line to deliver not only an economic growth generator for key commercial centres and both air and sea ports en route, but a major rationalisation of passenger and freight services more akin to the latent demands of the Coastal employers and population. Such a scheme also offers the prospect of potential savings in terms of allocation of and utilisation of train sets, servicing facilities and support resources.

We would like to thank you for taking the time to read our correspondence and look forward to reading and hearing about your conclusions.

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Yours Sincerely

Ray Chapman

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