

## RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT:

### **“A new approach to rail passenger services in London and the South East”**

#### PREAMBLE

[REDACTED]

#### 1. Context

This response from [REDACTED] concentrates on matters affecting the users of [REDACTED] and users of other transport modes in that area. Charlton Rail Station lies on the Greenwich line (London termini via Greenwich) AND on the Blackheath line (London termini via Blackheath and Lewisham) to Gillingham.

With many bus services running past and/or adjacent, Charlton Rail station has become a mini-hub for local transport services. It is also the overground station link to the O2 arena and the station for Charlton Athletic FC. Because Charlton residents and transport users travel to many parts of London and elsewhere these comments do NOT relate exclusively to matters that affect the London South East proposals.

The population of Charlton has been increasing for the past several years and continues to do so. [expand]

#### 2. Scope

Our response takes account of the announcement made on 21 January 2016 that responsibility “for inner London rail services that operate wholly or mainly within Greater London” will transfer to Transport for London (TfL). Although the precise services and geographical area are not specified, for the purposes of this response we have assumed it includes all train services through Charlton Station.

#### 3. Current Issues

The consultation document describes aspirations that are difficult to contest, but there is still too little detail. Whether those aspirations can be met will continue to depend upon factors outside of TfL’s control, for example that Network Rail will continue to be responsible for the infrastructure, and for the allocation of train paths. This has always been a limiting factor restricting operators from delivering service improvements.

The allocation of train paths is now a key issue and Charlton users feel strongly that their interests are often disregarded, in particular with regard to the diversity and timing of services to London Charing Cross and London Victoria. A key test of the proposed new structure will be how the demand for such services is addressed, given the conflicting interests of other mainline operators.

## RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS 1 - 6

For convenience, the six questions raised in the consultation document are set out below, together with the [REDACTED] response. Further comments then follow.

### Question 1

Do you agree with the principle of a partnership to better integrate the specification of rail passenger services across London and the South East?

Better integration of train services, ticketing and pricing is clearly a welcome objective. How effective the proposed arrangements will be in delivering this in practice will depend upon a number of things:

- i) how limited resources are prioritised;
- ii) how the competing demands of inner suburban rail users and longer-distance passengers is handled and addressed;
- iii) the formal structures adopted for consultation with users and user groups across the affected area;
- iv) how improved integration with other TfL services (both for transport services, *AND* crucially, ticket validity and pricing) is achieved;
- v) what relationship is formed with Network Rail to agree use of the infrastructure and the train paths to deliver train services;
- vi) what governance structures, management structure, operational procedures, and service delivery philosophy are adopted and how to make these appropriate to suburban services;

Of the above, items ii), iii) and iv) will be the ones by which users judge the proposed changes,

### Question 2

Do you agree with the principles that the partnership will work to? Are there any specific issues that have not been captured?

Three principles are set out:

- a) More frequent services, better interchange and increased capacity**
- b) Greater reliability for all passengers**
- c) High standards of customer service**

Whilst we agree with these principles, it is overly optimistic and possibly misleading to imply that they will flow automatically from the proposed partnership.

#### **a) More frequent services, better interchange and increased capacity**

Without significant and very costly investment, track capacity into the London termini will continue to be a severe restriction after the Thameslink programme is completed in 2018. Although there is some scope to improve off-peak services through use of spare track capacity, in the peak periods there is no such opportunity as lines serving Cannon Street and Charing Cross are already operating at maximum capacity. For example, there are very few services from Charlton to Charing Cross during the morning peak and there is no direct returning service whatsoever for over two hours (from 16:39 to 18:48) during the evening peak.

Intermediate services are vital both to Charlton and stations to the east, providing access to Gillingham/Medway through Gravesend, Dartford, Abbey Wood (for Crossrail), Woolwich Arsenal (for DLR), Charlton (interchange with Greenwich line), Blackheath (interchange with Eltham line) and Lewisham to Charing Cross. They also vastly improve local connectivity and a high frequency all-day service will achieve significant modal shift.

**b) Greater reliability for all passengers**

The partnership can have only a limited role in improving reliability. Disruption brought about by train failures or long wait times can be improved somewhat by the train operator, but disruption caused by failures in the infrastructure, over-running engineering work, or poor response to external factors (everything from adverse weather to terrorist threats) will still be partly under the control of Network Rail.

**c) High standards of customer service**

TfL stations do generally provide a better level of customer service than that provided by SouthEastern. Should the same standards be applied then that would be welcome. However, staffing every station all day raises major questions about resources, roles and responsibilities of staff, security should lone-working be adopted, and the future of ticket offices. We believe the Charlton station booking office to be a major community asset which could vastly extend the range of services available (topping up Oyster cards, selling Oyster season tickets, selling Thames Clipper and Emirates AirLine tickets etc.).

As things stand, suburban stations are rarely, if ever, staffed from late evening and never through the night. Charlton's ticket office closes at 1600hrs on Sundays assuming there is anyone to open it at all. Any improvements would be welcomed.

**d) A fourth principle**

This should be "high quality information and effective communication".

The existing customer service screens do not always provide passengers with the information they need. Common problems are:

- i) trains arrival times showing as due in one or two minutes, then suddenly becoming due later, and later still;
- ii) trains showing as slightly delayed which then disappear completely from the display without explanation;
- iii) the train due to arrive first suddenly changing, thereby causing confusion as to which service, route and destination is actually on the platform and about to leave;
- iv) no "live" information at all when services are suspended due to line closure, just a "welcome" message!
- v) utterly terrible advice at times of disruption, including bad or misleading advice on alternative routes and services on which tickets are valid

The provision of accurate information, linked to live running, must be a priority.

**Question 3**

**Do you agree with the proposed governance arrangements?**

It is impossible to agree or disagree as there is a lack of clarity on how the proposed partnership would work, and what actual role and contribution local users' representative organisation will have. While we have many issues with SouthEastern's quality of service, we have found them very willing to engage with local user groups and, although a painful process, we have achieved some notable improvements to the services, timetable and station facilities. We do not have confidence that the local authority would necessarily represent our interests fully and/or accurately, and so we think there should be a built-in system within the governance arrangements either for user groups to have representation directly on the Board, or for a formal consultative group that embraces both the local authorities and local recognised user groups.

Until the mechanics are made clear in a public document we reserve our position on the proposed governance arrangements.

#### Question 4

What form do you propose the input from local authorities and LEPs could take?

A major question arises from the statement in the proposal document (p20):

All services will have the benefit of greater input from local authorities, including the ability to specify service enhancements depending on local priorities and funding arrangements.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has completely inadequate consultation arrangements for obtaining and understanding the views of residents. [REDACTED] has found it far more effective to directly lobby SouthEastern Trains or to go through our MP. If local authorities are to play a formal part we would expect there to be a very clear accreditation process that would commit them to meaningful involvement and inclusion of local user groups that represent local commuters and other passengers.

#### Question 5

Do you agree with the safeguards for transfer of inner suburban services to TfL, as set out here?

It is reassuring that the following commitment has been made (p22):

“The partnership will work to ensure that any transfer of services ensures the following:

- **No detrimental effect on fares**, either at stations served by TfL services or at other stations outside London”

However, this does not go far enough!

At a minimum we would seek to ensure that the existing franchise provisions on Southeastern as the operator, in so far as they affect services in our locality, are maintained or enhanced.

Furthermore, the proposed safeguards effectively give longer distance services a priority over the needs of London commuters. The provision that there is “no adverse impact on frequency, journey times, and stopping patterns of longer distance services” will have the effect of setting in stone the present ratio of long-distance and London suburban services. With no additional capacity for access to the London termini, and with population growth high in the London suburbs, it is essential that some mechanism exists for re-prioritising services to reflect changing demands.

Simultaneously, it is vital that through-service continuity from London termini all the way to Gillingham is maintained. It would be seen as a highly retrograde step if **all** journeys beyond, say, Dartford involved a change of train.

## Question 6

Are there other outcomes you might expect to see achieved?

We regard the following as absolutely necessary improvements that are long overdue under the current franchise arrangements:

a) ***Services to London Charing Cross***

As indicated above (response a) to Question 2) an improved service to Charing Cross during the morning peak and restoration of direct services from Charing Cross during the evening peak periods.

b) ***Services to London Victoria***

Addition of some regular services to London Victoria would be a most welcome addition to the current service.

c) ***Ticket Machines***

- i) There is just **ONE** ticket machine at Charlton station which regularly proves inadequate. A queue frequently builds up, not only at peak travelling times, but on many other occasions too, e.g. if the ticket office is closed or when there happens to be users with complicated ticket requirements, or unfamiliarity with the machine causes a delay. More machines are an urgent priority
- ii) The existing Southeastern machines are designed for use on National Rail services and have been altered to allow use with the Oyster card system. They lack some functionality, specifically the ability to access Oyster travel history.

d) ***Travel Information***

Poor travel information, or its total absence, is a constant complaint from users, as cited above (response d) to Question 2). It is time that modern display screen technology is introduced, coupled with intelligent systems for delivering useful advice when things go wrong, and backed up by staff who are:

- properly briefed on resilience procedures,
- knowledgeable about the network and alternative arrangements, and
- helpful and well mannered

The following are highly desirable:

e) ***Improvements to the Station Environment***

Charlton station, especially the ticket hall, is overdue for a major refurbishment. Ideally the prefabricated building (provided to replace the original Victorian structure that was destroyed in WWII) will be replaced with a high quality structure.

## Appendix II: Possible improvements in support of a London Suburban Metro

	South East London	comments
<b>Current service levels (excluding fast services)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8tph to Victoria</li> <li>• 39tph to Charing Cross/Cannon Street (including semifast)</li> <li>• 7tph to Blackfriars/Thameslink</li> </ul>	No Victoria services via Charlton and insufficient for Charing Cross
Short term		
<b>Planned improvements during current franchises</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of Crossrail interchange at Abbey Wood</li> <li>• More rolling stock – around 92 extra Carriages</li> </ul>	<p>Welcomed.</p> <p>Welcomed provide these have <b>adequate seating for longer journeys.</b></p>
Medium term: what could be delivered		
<b>Potential improvements under new train operator contracts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reliability improvements</li> <li>• All-day staffing, integrated fares, station deep cleans and refreshes, train refurbishment</li> <li>• Off-peak service enhancements</li> </ul>	<p>Welcomed.</p> <p>Very much welcomed.</p> <p>Welcomed.</p>
Long term: what could be delivered		
<b>Potential further improvements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New interchange at Brockley</li> <li>• Potential for other upgrades like Lewisham hub</li> <li>• Better signalling, new high-capacity trains on inner suburban routes</li> <li>• 12-car operation as the norm</li> </ul>	<p>Provided good access to Lewisham is maintained this is welcomed.</p> <p>Welcomed.</p> <p>Welcomed.</p>
<b>Total end result: service / capacity enhancements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reallocation of capacity released by possible Bakerloo line extension being developed by TfL</li> <li>• Service from Lewisham to central London increases from 23tph to over 70tph including Bakerloo and DLR</li> </ul>	<p>Potentially welcomed depending upon seating capacity – <b>see above.</b></p> <p>Welcomed.</p>

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18 March 2016