

A new approach to rail passenger services in London and the South East

Response

In Croydon we have observed the beneficial effects arising from the London Overground service being contracted by the TfL. Consequently we are pleased to welcome the proposed London and South East Rail Partnership. It is also strongly welcomed because of the promise it offers in moving South London rail services to a much more metro type operation.

As well as supporting the establishment of the Partnership, we also support each of the principles it is proposed the Partnership work to.

Our more detailed comment on the proposed Partnership and wider content of the 'Prospectus' is illustrated by reference to an example Croydon station, namely Norwood junction (located on the Brighton Mainline just north of East Croydon). Around 2 million passengers a year enter the station, making it busier than Ashford International, Derby or Luton. The numbers interchanging are well over a million each year, putting it on equal footing with York.

It is vital that the London Local authorities have real influence via the partnership. For example, the GTR December 2015 timetable consultation document included (our underlining):

'To accommodate two Thameslink trains to Gatwick Airport, it is proposed that the current London Bridge to Tonbridge and London Bridge to Reigate are amended to operate to and from London Victoria serving Clapham Junction, East Croydon, Redhill and onward to Tonbridge (one train per hour) and Reigate (one train per hour). These trains will no longer serve London Bridge, Norwood Junction, Purley, Coulsdon South or Merstham. This will improve the journey time for passengers travelling beyond Redhill to Reigate and Tonbridge by up to eight minutes. Whilst retaining the fast journey time between Redhill and London Victoria.'

Whilst we objected to the service reduction at Norwood Junction, Purley and Coulsdon South, the reduction was implemented.

From reading the 'Prospectus', it is our assumption that Thameslink (at least the branch running the length of Croydon along the Brighton Mainline) would continue to be franchised by the DfT. Whether TfL or the DfT are responsible for franchising, it is essential that the London local authorities whose areas Thameslink runs through, are able to have real influence on the service specification and timetabling via the Partnership.

Thameslink has not benefited that part of outer and inner London between East Croydon and London Bridge. The lack of stops within inner/outer London contrasts with the Frequency of stops on Crossrail. Croydon has been going through considerable pain during the London Bridge works, in anticipation of considerable gain. In order to achieve that gain, passengers need to be able to access the enhanced Thameslink service. Therefore we are concerned by one of the objectives for the Partnership namely: *'No adverse impacts on the frequency, journey times or stopping patterns of longer distance services to and from London'*. We have been looking forward to Thameslink serving Norwood Junction upon completion of the London Bridge works. Not only to make-up for the recent decline in

service from Norwood Junction, but also to support the growth taking place in the northern part of the Borough. We see Thameslink serving Norwood Junction as an essential part of the re-timetabling in 2018. It should not wait until the GTR franchise is due for renewal.

As mentioned in the introduction, we see the introduction of London Overground as extremely positive. However, the resultant change to Southern services has increased the need for Thameslink to serve Norwood Junction, if inner south London is to benefit from an improved Thameslink. By way of illustration, if you were to enter one of the stations north of Norwood Junction into National Rail Enquiries Journey Planner in order to travel to Gatwick, you would generally be advised to take the Overground through Norwood Junction (one stop from East Croydon on the Brighton Mainline) to West Croydon, take Tramlink from West Croydon to East Croydon and there take Thameslink (or other service) to Gatwick. For example, if you wished to travel from Forest Hill to Gatwick between nine and ten on a weekday morning, National Rail Enquiries offers one service to East Croydon. The other five services / route suggestions are to go to West Croydon and then via tram to East Croydon. This illustrates just one of the problems for South London due to a lack of any interchange between Overground and Thameslink.

We agree with the statement in the Prospectus that:

***‘Accessibility** The rail network should be accessible for everyone. We want, as quickly as possible, to move to a railway where disabled passengers are able to turn-up-and-go like everybody else, with no requirement to book ahead. When it opens Crossrail will be fully step-free between the street and the platform, and many more stations on all parts of the rail network are benefiting from step-free access and other accessibility enhancements.’*

However, it is unclear how the Partnership or TfL rail franchising will ensure a rail network accessible to all. Only one of Norwood Junction's several platforms has step free access and there is no wheelchair ramp service. Station management being part of the responsibility of London Overground (whilst the station remains in the ownership of Network Rail) seems to be hindering, rather than assisting in making the station accessible. TfL taking on the ownership of at least some of the busier Overground stations may help ensure that accessibility and growth objectives are achieved.

Appendix I to the Prospectus indicates planned contract schedules for operators. We are concerned that the GTR services shown do not include Gatwick Express. It is critical that as part of refranchising, Gatwick Express services call at East Croydon to better link the growing Croydon Opportunity Area with Gatwick.

Finally, we would reiterate London Councils' concerns regarding the potential impact of rail devolution on the cost of Freedom Pass (London's statutory concessionary travel scheme for older and disabled people) to London local authorities.