

The Combined Franchise Replacement Sponsor  
Department for Transport  
Zone 3/15  
Great Minster House  
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London SW1P 4DR

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August 2012

Dear Sir or Madam

**Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern (TSGN) Franchise – Submission by Bexhill Rail Action Group.**

I am writing on behalf of Bexhill Rail Action Group (BRAG), a member of the East Sussex Rail Alliance. BRAG welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the public consultation.

I note from Appendix 3 of the consultation document that the Department for Transport has identified 33 key issues to be addressed. For economy of space, the issues in this submission are grouped together where relevant (**with numbers in brackets**).

BRAG responds to the issues as follows: -

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**Our first priority is for a faster journey time on the Ore – Victoria service, to be achieved primarily through the discontinuation of attaching and dividing of trains at Haywards Heath (22)**

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(a) **General**

This will be a very large franchise, containing disparate services. The East Sussex Coastway line will not, as things stand, benefit from services through the Thameslink core, and our concern is that our services and stations may become marginalised. The current Southern brand is a strong and positive one. BRAG suggests that the three main service groups (Southern, Thameslink core and Great Northern) could continue to maintain a separate corporate identity with devolved management (2).

(b) **Local Factors**

A new link road is likely to be constructed between Bexhill and Hastings during the course of the franchise. This is likely to lead to significant house-building and population growth in both Hastings and Bexhill. This will lead to a general growth

in traffic along the East Coastway, and may also increase demand for a new station at Glyne Gap **(3)**

**(c) Fares, Ticketing and Demand Management**

BRAG wishes to see the Southern/Go Via approach continued **(9)**. This has been to price customers *on* to the railway at quiet times, rather than has been the approach of First Capital Connect, to price them *off* at busy times.

BRAG wishes to see the following products preserved:

- Daysave
- Super off-peak
- Advance tickets

BRAG would deplore any attempt to restrict off-peak tickets either in the evening peak, or later into the morning, as has been the practice with some operators.

**(d) Franchise Specification**

BRAG wants the DfT to maintain a high level of involvement in the specification of franchise and service commitments. Otherwise, operators will invariably 'cherry-pick' the more profitable routes. BRAG wishes to see all existing services on the East Coastway to continue to be mandated on a seven days a week basis **(4, 5, 6)**. These are:

- Ore – Victoria via Eastbourne, hourly.
- Ashford International - Brighton, hourly
- Ore – Brighton local service, hourly (Mon to Sat)

**(e) Services from London to the East Coastway, Gatwick Airport, and on the Brighton Mainline (BML)**

There must be a rebalancing of service patterns on the Brighton Mainline **(11, 16, 20, 22)**. The current dual franchise and competition between operators has led to over-provision of services between London and Brighton at the expense of other passengers on the East and West Sussex Coasts: Southern and First Capital Connect have each aspired to run a 4x hourly 'Metro' service between London and Brighton saturating available paths. In contrast, north of Haywards Heath there are just two paths per hour combined for passengers from Ore/Eastbourne and Littlehampton/Worthing.

The Gatwick Express is part of this equation. It is now unfit for purpose, and an unattractive offer: It is over-priced (£5+ more per single journey than Southern or FCC); offers a minimal time-saving of just one or two minutes; and uses old rolling stock. Consequently, loadings on many services appear to be very light and falling. Conversely, the combined Coastway - Victoria services via Haywards Heath, along with the intervening Arun Valley Services, form a much cheaper 'alternative' quarter hourly Victoria – Gatwick service with a similar journey time and better ambience of rolling stock. They are frequently overloaded with mainline and Gatwick passengers [plus their luggage].

Other services originating/terminating at Brighton, some of which run non-stop between Brighton and East Croydon, are also often under-loaded and short-formed. There must be a full timetable re-write, with the following considerations.

- (i) The practice of dividing and attaching trains at Haywards Heath should be discontinued, and there should be a separate half-hourly service every standard hour off-peak between Victoria and Eastbourne (with one service continuing to Ore) and Worthing/Littlehampton. As part of the new arrangements, proper provision could still be made for mainline stations such as Wivelsfield, Burgess Hill, Hassocks and Preston Park.
- (ii) Extra seat provision to/from Brighton itself, where required, should be in the form of additional carriages on existing services rather than using up all available paths on the BML.
- (iii) The Gatwick Express should be re-evaluated **(16)**. BRAG is not against its continuation, subject to the following to make it effective:
  - A unified fare between London and Gatwick, to encourage airport passengers to use the Gatwick Express rather than other mainline trains.
  - Consideration to be given to stopping the Gatwick Express at East Croydon and/or Clapham Junction. This is because the origin points of airport passengers are now far more diverse than at the time of the original service's inception in the mid-1980s.

**(f) Other Improvements (21)**

**1. Ashford – Brighton service**

- (i) BRAG values the Brighton – Ashford service, and wishes to see this continue as a regular 7 day a week through service. The service adds value to the entire East Coastway and is important for the following reasons:
  - It is the only through east-west rail service between Kent and Sussex: This should be seen as a future growth market, and be given more active marketing. Ashford and the Thames Gateway are designated growth areas; and Canterbury and Brighton are significant educational, legal and cultural centres.
  - It provides good connections from Eastbourne, Bexhill and Hastings to High Speed 1 services and the whole of Kent.
  - It provides international connections at Ashford, obviating the need to travel via London. This saves time and potentially alleviates pressure on the Brighton Mainline. Although relatively few Eurostar services currently call at Ashford, it is likely that Deutsche Bahn will offer new services to Cologne and Amsterdam after 2015.

- BRAG believes that the line between Hastings and Ashford should ultimately be electrified. In the meantime, additional diesel carriages should be provided.
- (ii) BRAG, in common with other local user groups would like to see additional carriages on busy services. In other instances, overcrowding at the western end of the route could be alleviated by extending the Brighton – Lewes shuttle to Eastbourne.
- (iii) Higher line speeds could deliver shorter journey times, and better connections into High Speed 1 services at Ashford. For example, were the journey time between Rye and Ashford to be reduced from the current 22 minutes to 19 minutes, this could facilitate connecting times of 6 and 8 minutes to/from HS1 services off peak at Ashford.

***BRAG would strongly oppose any proposal to cut the service back to an Eastbourne- Ashford or Hastings – Ashford shuttle.***

## **2. Normans Bay**

Normans Bay is a small community between Pevensey and Bexhill with limited road access. The railway is a lifeline for the village, whose population swells in the summer months due to the presence of two large campsites.

Although the daytime hourly service is generally sufficient, there some gaps, which limit its functionality. BRAG would suggest the following:

- (i) Consideration should be given to stopping one or two services earlier in the morning and later in the evening at the station on weekdays.
- (ii) Consideration should be given to stopping a small number of Victoria – Ore Sunday services in the morning/afternoon during the summer to serve customers arriving/departing the campsites.

### **(g) Stations and Ticket Offices (29/31)**

- BRAG is extremely satisfied with the work undertaken by the current operator to restore Bexhill station.
- BRAG wishes to see staffing maintained at both Bexhill and Cooden Beach stations.
- BRAG would support the installation of automatic ticket gates at Bexhill
- BRAG believes that the SMART technology will continue to evolve, but does not wish to see this replace human contact at our stations.

Yours faithfully

Hugh Sharp

Chairman, Bexhill Rail Action Group

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