

1st December 2004

Rail Planning Manager, BML RUS,
Planning Department,
Strategic Rail Authority,
55 Victoria Street,
LONDON,
SW1H 0EU

Dear Sir or Madam,

Please find enclosed, for your consideration, some notes that have been prepared on behalf of the Sutton Rail Users' Forum in relation to the draft consultation *Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy*. Due to the late preparation of these comments, and the imminent deadline for responses of 3rd December, they are being sent directly to you rather than to the Rail Passengers' Committee as requested. However, a copy will be forwarded to the London Transport Users' Committee in parallel.

The Forum is very pleased that the SRA is in the process of carrying out a review, in conjunction with several different organisations, of the service patterns to and from the London termini of Victoria and London Bridge. We understand the need for the changes outlined in the draft strategy, and welcome any proposals that attempt to address the problems of overcrowding and, at the same time, enhance the network by providing the same level of service all day. We accept, and indeed support, many of the changes necessary to achieve these objectives, particularly in regard to a restructuring of the timetable, and we approve of the aims to identify improvements in capacity utilisation, many of which we feel have been long overdue.

Although the proposed utilisation strategy will go some way in dealing with the conflicts of capacity issues that currently exist, it is noted that, in general, this is to be achieved without the need for expenditure on further infrastructure enhancement, and that demand and affordability criteria are to be key elements (at least in the short term). It is the Forum's belief that even greater gains could be achieved for taxpayers, as well as rail passengers, if additional investment was made available for modest improvements to rail junctions and interchange facilities, and if routes were consolidated in such a way as to improve marketability.

In our response, we have not attempted to comment on the whole strategy (although some of our underlining points are probably relevant to much of it), as we do not have the knowledge and capability to do this, let alone the time! We have focused instead on the strategic options relating to Suburban services, as outlined in Section 7.2.2 of the document. Specifically, most of our comments are in regard to option S5 that deals with the Horsham/Dorking to Victoria trains north of Sutton.

Shortfalls in the existing service pattern between Sutton and Victoria are highlighted. Although our suggested change in the service pattern for the route results in a small increase in overall journey times, it is hoped that a good case is made as to why this is not an overall dis-benefit.

We have endeavoured to give considered opinions as to why we believe that, whenever possible, services within Greater London should ideally be operated at regular intervals (fifteen, twelve or ten minute intervals in the outer zones), and that suburban services should predominantly be stopping services with the same pattern of service all day, where 'all day' includes evenings and weekends. In short, suburban services should operate with regular patterns and enhanced frequencies all day, even if, in order to achieve this, it is necessary to consolidate routes in the short term.

It should be noted that not all members of the Sutton Rail Users' Forum have had time to provide direct input to this response, and that consequently some of the comments detailed here may incorrectly represent, or under-represent, some members views.

We look forward to the publication of your final strategy, and would like to take this opportunity to wish all your staff every success in the future.

Yours faithfully,

Charles Martin.

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Sutton Rail Users' Forum

Comments from the Sutton Rail Users' Forum (SRUF), in response to the proposals outlined in the Strategic Rail Authority's draft consultation document *Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Study*.

1. Overview of the strategic options relating to the Suburban network:

Option	SRA response	SRUF response
S1: Regular pattern of suburban patterns in peak and off-peak hours	Recommended option, subject to further analysis	Agree. Highly recommended. Currently, irregular patterns of service provide anomalies in service provision ¹ .
S2: 10-minute frequency, all day, on corridors from Victoria and London Bridge, in the suburban area	Not a recommended option, unless any additional subsidy becomes available	This is a definite aspiration. Investment should be found for the appropriate infrastructure improvements required ² .
S3: Thameslink trains to run to Epsom/West Croydon	Subject to further analysis: so far, this does not appear to have a value-for-money case. Thameslink services are therefore proposed to continue to serve the Wimbledon Loop stations.	Wimbledon is an important interchange. For this reason, if no other, the Wimbledon Loop needs an enhanced frequency service. To provide this, consideration could be given to the introduction of a shuttle service between Wimbledon and Sutton with appropriate infrastructure changes at Sutton.
S4: Tattenham Corner and Caterham services	Subject to further analysis.	Do not agree with the statement that it is not justified to serve Penge West and Anerley with 4 trains per hour (TPH) ³ .
S5: Stops in Horsham/Dorking – Victoria trains north of Sutton	Recommended option (retain faster services), subject to further analysis.	Stopping services, at regular intervals, should replace the semi-fast services. See next section for full details.

Table 1: Options for the suburban area

¹ One example of this is that there are fewer trains operating from Sutton towards Victoria in the evening peak than there are during the daytime.

² On Sunday mornings it is often necessary for passengers joining trains at Norbury or Streatham Common and travelling towards Victoria to have to stand, because only a thirty-minute interval service is currently provided on this main corridor and trains are only four coaches in length. During the early evenings on Sundays, trains travelling in the opposite direction are often full for the same reasons. Also, weekday rush hours do not end at 18.30.

³ This is not in the spirit of the Overground Network. The demand at Colliers Wood, on the Northern Line, probably does not justify 20 TPH, but it receives this level of service as part of a marketable entity. As a result it contributes to the success of the line and attracts business to the whole network. Integration, with publicity, is the key to success. In addition, Anerley and Penge West stations provide good interchanges with bus routes serving, amongst other locations in south London, Brixton, Crystal Palace, Bromley and Orpington.

2. Specific response to Suburban Option S5: Stops in Horsham/Dorking – Victoria trains north of Sutton.

The SRUF's view on this option is that four trains per hour (TPH), from Sutton towards Victoria at regular fifteen minute intervals, and stopping at Carshalton, Hackbridge, Mitcham Junction, Balham, and Clapham Junction, would be an improvement on the current two TPH stopping service and two TPH semi-fast service at irregular intervals⁴.

The reasons for supporting this view are outlined in the next four sub-sections. An overview of the current service provision between Sutton and Victoria is given, and the argument is made that the semi-fast service may not be as good as it is perceived to be. From there, the discussion is developed by considering the advantages and disadvantages of (i) retaining semi-fast services, (ii) the provision of regular interval, frequent pattern of services, and (iii) the provision of stopping services.

It is worth noting at this stage, that there appears to be some inconsistency in one or two of the details relating to this option in the draft consultation document:

- There is an inaccuracy in the description of the current service provision as given in option S5, section 7.2.2, on page 39. The description reads: "*On the corridor north of Sutton (Carshalton, Hackbridge, Mitcham Junction, towards Balham), the service provision is made up of four Thameslink trains per hour calling at all stations, and two trains from Victoria to Dorking/Horsham. These trains to Victoria are limited stop on this corridor, and this means that Hackbridge and Mitcham Junction do not receive a service to Victoria*". In fact, the service provision on this corridor is made up of only two Thameslink trains an hour, with four Victoria trains, two of which stop at Carshalton, Hackbridge and Mitcham Junction, and two of which are non-stop from Sutton to Clapham Junction.
- An anomaly also exists between the recommendation given for option S5, and the details given in the Suburban Train Specification Table of Appendix B, page 57. The Suburban Train Specification Table suggests that one TPH would operate between Victoria and Horsham, calling at Clapham Junction, Balham, Mitcham Junction and all stations to Dorking then Horsham, and that one TPH would operate between Victoria and Dorking calling at Clapham Junction, Balham, Mitcham Junction and all stations to Dorking. Whereas the recommendation includes the statement that "*The SRA would welcome any thoughts stakeholders may have on the optimum balance of service taking into account the constraints described above, although its present view is to retain faster services from Sutton and beyond*". Clearly a contradiction.

⁴ Also serving a new station at Eastfields, between Mitcham and Balham, if and when commissioned. The possibility of services calling additionally at Wandsworth Common and Battersea Park could also be considered. All four services could originate at Epsom (as Epsom facilitates an easy interchange with services to the south), and call at Ewell East and Cheam. Alternatively, two TPH could operate from Epsom, one from Dorking and one from Horsham.

2.1. Existing pattern of service between Sutton and Victoria

The existing pattern of daytime, weekday, direct services between Sutton and Victoria offer a total of eight departures an hour in three route options.

- Option 1 provides four stopping services via West Croydon and Norbury at 15, 22, 45 and 52 minutes past the hour with journey times of about forty minutes.
- Option 2 consists of two stopping services via Hackbridge at 00 and 30 minutes past the hour with journey times of twenty-eight minutes.
- Option 3: two semi-fast services calling at Clapham Junction only, at 23 and 53 minutes past the hour, with scheduled journey times of twenty-four and twenty-one minutes respectively.

A clock-face representation of the hourly departure time pattern is illustrated in Figure 1, where dashed lines donate services via West Croydon and Norbury (option 1), and solid lines donate either the stopping services (option 2) or the semi-fast services (option 3).

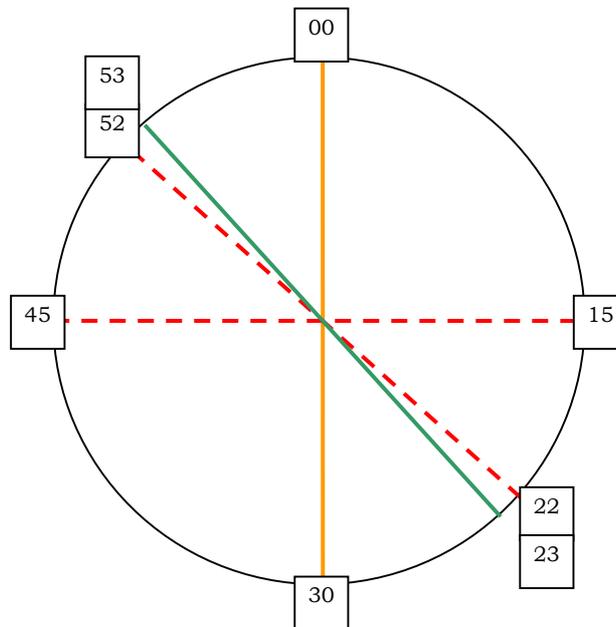


Figure 1. A clock-face representation of the minutes past the hour departure time of services from Sutton to Victoria.

Option 1: - - - - - Option 2: ————— Option 3: —————

- Although a total of eight services depart from Sutton each hour to Victoria, only four services (provided by options 2 and 3) are “net” services, and these operate with intervals of twenty-three and seven minutes⁵.

⁵ A map produced jointly by Transport for London, the SRA and National Rail, to promote the launch of the Overground Network in 2003, and entitled “High-frequency National Rail services in south London” identified Sutton as having eight trains an hour to Victoria. Although this is factual, it could be considered as disingenuous to users of the network. Eight trains an hour suggest a high-frequency turn-up and go service, whereas in reality passengers can potentially wait up to twenty-three minutes for a train.

The semi-fast services (option 3) are attractive to customers because they offer reduced journey times. The scheduled journey times are either twenty-one or twenty-four minutes from Sutton to Victoria, giving a typical average of about twenty-three minutes. However, in practice the actual journey times have found to exceed these scheduled times.

Table 2 details the timings, scheduled and actual, of semi-fast journeys from Sutton to Victoria for a series of journeys made over a period of about twelve months by one Sutton resident. For the fourteen journeys made, the journey times ranged from twenty-one to thirty-four minutes, with an average time of twenty-five minutes. (Note also that, although only one service was late departing Sutton, four services were late arriving at Victoria).

Date	Due departure time	Actual departure time	Minutes late departing	Due arrival time	Actual arrival time	Minutes late arriving	Scheduled journey time	Actual journey time
20031211	10:23	10:31	8	10:47	10:56	9	00:24	00:25
20031213	13:23	13:23	0	13:47	13:45	-2	00:24	00:22
20040110	14:23	14:24	1	14:47	14:49	2	00:24	00:25
20040306	14:53	14:53	0	15:14	15:14	0	00:21	00:21
20040320	13:23	13:23	0	13:47	13:46	-1	00:24	00:23
20040417	14:53	14:53	0	15:14	15:17	3	00:21	00:24
20040605	12:53	12:55	2	13:14	13:18	4	00:21	00:23
20040724	13:23	13:23	0	13:47	13:46	-1	00:24	00:23
20040731	10:23	10:23	0	10:47	10:47	0	00:24	00:24
20040814	10:53	10:53	0	11:14	11:21	7	00:21	00:28
20040824	13:23	13:23	0	13:47	13:47	0	00:24	00:24
20040904	14:53	14:53	0	15:14	15:19	5	00:21	00:26
20040911	15:53	15:53	0	16:14	16:27	13	00:21	00:34
20041008	14:53	14:53	0	15:14	15:17	3	00:21	00:24

Table 2. Timings, scheduled and actual, of semi-fast journeys from Sutton to Victoria. Average scheduled journey time 23 minutes, average actual journey time 25 minutes.

The same passenger logged the journey times for the stopping services (option 2) that they made during the same period, and these are detailed in Table 3.

Date	Due departure time	Actual departure time	Minutes late departing	Due arrival time	Actual arrival time	Minutes late arriving	Scheduled journey time	Actual journey time
20031116	10:29	10:29	0	10:59	10:58	-1	00:30	00:29
20031217	20:27	20:27	0	20:56	20:59	3	00:29	00:32
20040305	10:30	10:30	0	10:58	10:59	1	00:28	00:29
20040311	19:28	19:48	20	19:56	20:20	24	00:28	00:32
20040403	11:30	11:30	0	11:58	11:57	-1	00:28	00:27
20040509	11:59	12:00	1	12:29	12:33	4	00:30	00:33
20040530	09:59	09:59	0	10:29	10:27	-2	00:30	00:28
20040613	07:59	07:59	0	08:29	08:41	12	00:30	00:42
20040706	17:58	18:00	2	18:27	18:27	0	00:29	00:27
20040721	19:59	19:59	0	20:28	20:26	-2	00:29	00:27
20040928	19:29	19:29	0	19:57	19:57	0	00:28	00:28
20041005	17:58	17:58	0	18:27	18:28	1	00:29	00:30
20041007	18:57	18:57	0	19:26	19:27	1	00:29	00:30

Table 3. Timings, scheduled and actual, of stopping services from Sutton to Victoria. Average scheduled journey time 29 minutes, average actual journey time 30 minutes.

For these thirteen journeys, with a scheduled time of twenty-eight minutes, the actual times ranged from twenty-seven to forty-two minutes⁶, with an average of thirty minutes. (Note here that one service was late departing Sutton, with only two services arriving late at Victoria. This could suggest that reliability is better for the stopping services).

- For the existing patterns of service, the typical saving of a semi-fast train, average 25 minutes, compared to a stopping service, average 30 minutes, is in practice only five minutes.
- The reliability of stopping services is, in general, better than the semi-fast services.
- Given the irregularity in train interval and the potential waiting time of twenty-three minutes at Sutton for a Victoria service, it is likely that a more regular pattern of stopping services, with shorter intervals between trains, could actually reduce overall journey times.
- Taking the above three points together, and given that the promoted, or timetabled, saving for the semi-fast services is up to seven minutes, it could be concluded that the advantage of the semi-fast service is not as good as it at first may be perceived to be.
- Regularity of service could be achieved by changing the semi-fast services to stopping services and re-timing them to operate in synchronicity with the existing two stopping services, i.e. offering a regular service at fifteen minute intervals.

⁶ On 13 June 2004 engineering works had closed part of the line from Sutton to Victoria. Additional trains were being provided via Hackbridge, and one of these was the 0759 departure from Sutton. Unfortunately, this train developed a fault with a safety interlock and had to be taken out of service at Balham. The un-typically long journey time of 42 minutes recorded for this journey was therefore due to the requirement to change trains en-route. If the details for this journey were excluded from the statistics, the average journey time for the stopping services would equal the scheduled time of 29 minutes.

2.2. Advantages and disadvantages of retaining semi-fast services

Section 2.1 concluded that for journeys between Sutton and Victoria, the semi-fast service only offered a typical saving of five minutes compared to the stopping service. Also, changing from an irregular pattern to a regular pattern of stopping services from Sutton could bring an overall improvement for passengers.

This section looks at the advantages and disadvantages of retaining the semi-fast services, not only users of Sutton, but from other stations on the line. The points are summarised in Table 4.

Advantage of semi-fast services	Disadvantages of semi-fast services
They are perceived by passengers as 'fast', and are therefore attractive. ⁷	They limit the potential for a regular pattern of service to intermediate stations.
They enable scheduled journey times to be shorter. (Note, however, that in practice journey times often exceed the published times (see table 2) so this is more of a perception than a delivery ⁸ . Furthermore, if semi-fast services limit the potential for a more frequent and regular pattern of service, the benefit of a quicker individual journey time may be lost on the overall journey due to increased waiting time at the beginning of each trip or at interchanges on route.)	They are a detriment to users of the intermediate stations at Carshalton, Hackbridge, Mitcham Junction and Balham.
	They reduce the interchange options with bus, tram and rail at all stations, but particularly Tramlink at Mitcham Junction, and the Northern Line at Balham.
	They impede the marketing of services, as more complex mapping is required along with a less simplified structure.

Table 4. The advantages and disadvantages of the provision of semi-fast services.

⁷ It might well be considered that the extra five minutes travelling time required on the stopping service would be most disadvantageous to passengers travelling the greater distances. However, for passengers travelling from Dorking to Victoria using the existing semi-fast service with a nominal journey time of 48 minutes, the extra five minutes would be equivalent to about a 10% increase on their journey time. Whereas, for passengers from Sutton, the extra five minutes equates to about a 20% increase. Furthermore, passengers travelling from Epsom and stations to the south of Epsom can travel to Victoria in under 50 minutes by using South West Train services and changing at Clapham Junction.

⁸ The schedules suggest a saving, in relation to the stopping service, of between four and seven minutes. In practice the saving is typically only five minutes.

2.3. Advantages and disadvantages of regular, frequent pattern of services

One of the disadvantages sited in Table 4 for retaining a semi-fast service between Sutton and Victoria, is that this limits the potential for the development of a regular, frequent pattern of stopping services. This is developed further in Table 5.

Advantages of regular frequent pattern of services	Disadvantages of regular frequent pattern of services
They spread the demand for services over longer time periods, thereby creating a more even loading on services and, at the same time, reduce the likelihood of pressure on ticket sales at half-hourly intervals ⁹ .	They potentially prevent the development of faster services due to lack of capacity.
They benefit users of Carshalton, Hackbridge, Mitcham Junction and Balham stations.	Increasing the frequency on some routes will require consolidation of other services. This will require a change of trains for some journeys.
They improve interchange options with bus, tram and rail for passengers at all stations, but particularly Tramlink at Mitcham Junction, and the Northern Line at Balham.	
They provide improved marketing of services, with simplified mapping.	

Table 5. Advantages and disadvantages of the provision of a regular frequent pattern of services.

⁹ At Sutton station, the majority of passengers intending to travel to Victoria arrive at the station only a few minutes before the semi- fast trains are due to depart. This leads to longer waiting times for tickets, and consequently increases the likelihood of missed trains (and subsequent delay, and frustrated passengers) at these crucial times. Other periods are much leaner at the ticket office.

2.4. Advantages and disadvantages of stopping services

Finally, Table 6 suggests the advantages and disadvantages provided by the Sutton to Victoria, via Hackbridge, stopping services.

Advantage of stopping services	Disadvantages of stopping services
Stopping services potentially provide a more regular service pattern to all stations ¹⁰ .	Stopping services give slower journey times.
They benefits users of Carshalton, Hackbridge, Mitcham Junction and Balham stations, and will benefit passengers to a new station at Eastfields, near Mitcham, as and when this is developed.	They are perceived to be slow, and unattractive, especially by passengers travelling greater distances.
They improve interchange options for passengers: Mitcham Junction with Tramlink; Balham with the Northern Line	
They provide improved marketing of services, with simplified mapping.	

Table 5. Advantages and disadvantages of stopping services.

¹⁰ Improved reliability could also result.

2.5. Further points and overview

On balance, the arguments set out in the preceding sections suggest that there are many more advantages to withdrawing the semi-fast service and increasing the frequency of stopping services between Sutton and Victoria via Hackbridge. It has been demonstrated that the advantage in time savings of the existing semi-fast services over the stopping services is not as good as it is probably perceived, or promoted, to be. Furthermore, the irregularity of service interval, possibly as a result of the requirement to run semi-fast trains, produces potential waiting times at Sutton of up to 23 minutes, despite eight services an hour departing from the station to Victoria.

It is appreciated that stopping services may be less attractive to users of Sutton and Cheam stations initially, but this could soon be seen as an advantage if more regular-interval services were introduced (so that for example the maximum waiting time was 15 minutes as opposed to 23 minutes), and if the potential benefit of greater interchange options at Balham were advertised. It could also be argued that journey times of thirty minutes from Sutton to Victoria compare favourably with journey times of typically twenty-seven minutes for journeys taken between Morden and Victoria on the Northern and Victoria Lines.

Travellers from Horsham and Dorking would also experience typically 5 minutes extended journey times. However, it has been noted that passengers from Horsham could reach Clapham Junction and Victoria more quickly by direct train via East Croydon, and that passengers from stations between Epsom and Dorking can reach Clapham Junction and Victoria almost as quickly as the Sutton route by travelling on services operated by South West Trains and changing at Clapham Junction (although it is appreciated that there will be increased journey times on this route too from next month). Again, making use of journey comparisons, a total of twelve intermediate station stops for Dorking to Victoria stopping services (a distance of about 31 km), compares favourably with twelve intermediate station stops for services between Carshalton Beeches and London Bridge via West Croydon (a distance of about 15 km).

Finally, it is worth noting that island platforms at Epsom station facilitate easy interchange. Consequently, it could be suggested that a longer-term aim would be for all Southern services to terminate at Epsom, and for stations to the south to be served by South West Trains. Passengers travelling to and from the south of Epsom towards Sutton and Croydon would require a change at Epsom, but given the ease of interchange at this station, this slight disadvantage would be offset by a further improvement in frequency, regularity, and reliability of services. This is probably a contentious issue, but one worth making.

2.6. Conclusions

- o The preferred option for the corridor north of Sutton towards Victoria is for a regular interval stopping service. It is appreciated that in order to accommodate this it will be necessary to re-aligning the existing semi-fast services from Horsham and Dorking to a stopping service pattern. However, it is believed that the benefits of doing so outweigh the resultant disadvantages. The arguments proffered in this document have attempted to illustrate the reasons for this conclusion.
- o Semi-fast services, in comparison with stopping services, only reduce journey times between Sutton and Victoria by typically five minutes.
- o Semi-fast services limit the potential for a regular pattern of service to intermediate stations. Consequently, intervals of up to twenty-three minutes currently exist at Sutton, despite eight trains departing for Victoria each hour.
- o Stopping services improve interchange options, and these are most beneficial at Mitcham Junction (for Tramlink), and at Balham (for the Northern Line).
- o Stopping services provide improved marketability of services through simplified mapping. Use of intermediate stations becomes more attractive, and usage rises.
- o Frequent services, at regular interval patterns, spread the demand with time. This improves throughput at ticket offices by distributing the demand for sales, and results in a more even loading on trains.
- o An extra five minutes travelling time on journeys between Sutton and Victoria equates to a 20% increase in journey time. This increase is a relatively small price to pay for reduced waiting times, regularity of service, increased journey opportunities and a more rugged network.
- o Journey times of thirty minutes between Sutton and Victoria for stopping services compare favourably with twenty-seven minute journey times between Morden and Victoria on the Northern Line.
- o An extra five minutes travelling time on direct journeys between Dorking and Victoria, would equate to a 10% increase in the journey time. However, one positive aspect of this would be the ability to change with the Northern Line at Balham (which is fairly straightforward), and thereby actually reduce total trip times to destinations in central London (by avoiding a more potentially complicated interchange at Victoria).
- o A total of twelve intermediate station stops for Dorking to Victoria stopping services (a distance of about 31 km), compares favourably with, for example, twelve intermediate station stops between Carshalton Beeches and London Bridge via West Croydon (a distance of about 15 km).
- o Currently, semi-fast services are only available during the daytime on weekdays, and do not operate during the evenings or on Sundays.

- o If a regular-pattern stopping service becomes more reliable, thereby reducing the practical journey times from Sutton to Victoria from 30 minutes to 28 minutes, there will only be a loss of three minutes in comparison to the current average journey times of the semi-fast service.