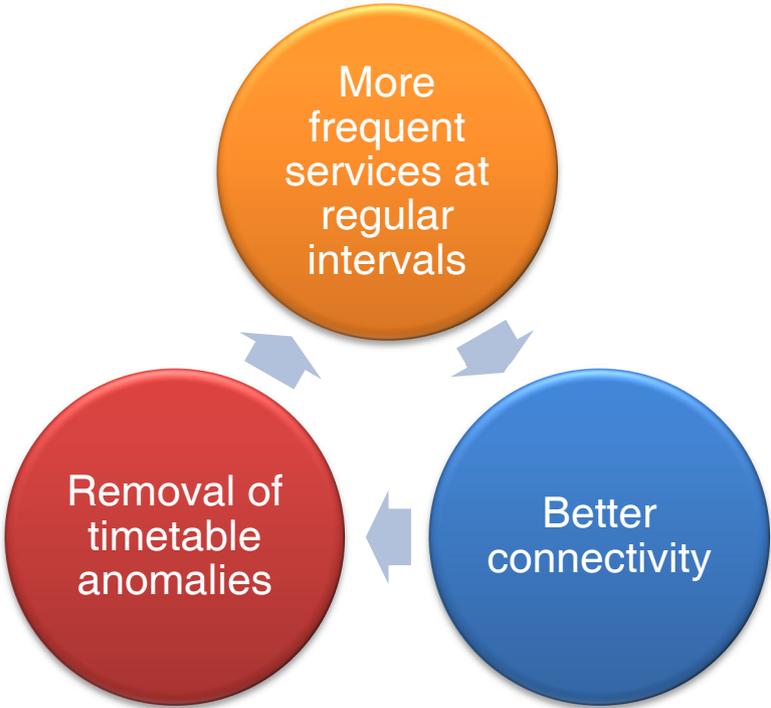


**A briefing by Sutton Rail Users' Forum
in relation to the **consultation on the
combined Thameslink, Southern and
Great Northern franchise (May 2012)****

*The new combined
franchise: a range of
challenges as well as
opportunities!*



The future suburban mix?

About the Sutton Rail Users' Forum

The Sutton Rail Users' Forum (SRUF) was formed in July 2002. In the intervening ten years there have been around 30 meetings held in Sutton's Civic Offices attended by regular commuters, occasional day-trippers, residents, rail representatives and managers. These events have become a valued opportunity for anyone with an interest to engage in discussion and debate about what we like, and about those things that perhaps we would like to see improved, on the railways.

Although 'rail' features in the title, we like to think that we are not just restricting ourselves to rail issues though. We are considering all modes of transport really, because when you take a train you have to get to the station, and that may involve walking, cycling, taking the bus, tram or tube, or driving or even skateboarding! So accessibility issues are important to us.

It is also essential to recognise that the Forum is not campaigning for a better rail service in Sutton at the expense of a less good service elsewhere. Indeed quite the opposite. Our campaigning, from a strategic viewpoint, could just as easily be on behalf of any part of suburban London or any other city that offers a comparable rail network where rail services play an increasingly important role in the lives of the citizens.

This document has been prepared on behalf of the Sutton Rail Users' Forum by Charles Martin. Not all regular attendees to the Forum have had a direct input into its production, and many have submitted their own separate response to the consultation.

Some extracts from “Consultation on the combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern franchise” (Department for Transport, May 2012) that are potentially rather good:

1.2, page 4: “There is significant change associated with the Government’s **£6 billion investment** in the Thameslink Programme, such as rebuilding London Bridge station and introducing new trains. As a result, the Government needs to ensure that programme and passenger benefits are fully realised. The Government believes that the most cost-effective way of managing the transition and its associated costs is **to merge the existing FCC and Southern franchises.**”

1.7, page 5: “The new franchise will need to **respond to current and future growth**”

1.5, page 5: “The Invitation to Tender will...require bidders to set out how they will...**improve the overall service to passengers**”, and “allow bidders to **develop and enhance services**”.

7.3, page 25: “The Government therefore intends to set the train service specification so that **operational and timetabling decisions are devolved to TOCs** where possible, while protecting key outcomes for passengers, the economy, and the taxpayer.”

1.6, page 5: “We expect bidders will **develop a suitable vision for this franchise**”

4.13, page 14: “...we will specify the new franchise in a manner which **allows the operator more commercial freedom**”

Introduction

This short response from the Sutton Rail Users' Forum to the Department for Transport's consultation on the combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern franchise is intended to be more strategic in approach than specific on detail, (although some comments contain relatively simple illustrations to highlight and emphasise the points being made). The focus is on the inner-suburban routes south of the river, and in preparing this document there is expectation that the new combined franchise will be an exciting opportunity and that it could act as a catalyst for change to the suburban rail mix.

Rail services continue to improve, and it is hoped that the combined franchise, along with greater partnership working between Network Rail and the train operating companies, will immediately bring about some greater joined-up thinking and ultimately provide even better rail services for all existing users (whether commuter or leisure traveller) and, at the same time, encourage more people to travel by public transport, walk or cycle for part, or all, of some of their day-to-day journeys.

The step-change in capacity that the Thameslink Programme (Thameslink 2000) is intended to deliver is very welcome. There is a concern, however, that additional capacity will primarily be used to enable more routes to travel across London rather than provide any significant enhancements to existing services, specifically the relatively low-frequency, suburban routes. It almost seems that, in the race to provide a bigger, better railway, the investment can only be justified if more direct services, serving more places, are introduced even though this will result from the outset in an immediate constraint on further capacity enhancements. The Forum does not believe that long-distance services should take precedence over suburban services in the core section unless suitable alternative provision is made for 'metro' branded services.

Given that the combined franchise geographically covers a large part of the UK's largest (and growing) city, there are three over-lapping measures that if addressed could result in a more successful and dynamic railway for suburban London. These are:

- more frequent services at regular intervals
- better connectivity
- removal of timetable anomalies

Each of these inter-related topics will be addressed briefly in this document¹, and then Charles Martin, chair of the Forum, concludes with his personal views in an article titled "The dilemma that is Blackfriars".

¹ In March 2011 SRUF submitted a response to the London and South East Route Utilisation Strategy consultation in which the Forum suggested that if a true metro-style transport system for south London was to be realised the current Thameslink Programme did not go far enough, and that many more upgrades across the network would be required. For example, we supported the idea of a new tunnel linking outer London with central London for use by trains serving Gatwick Airport and the south coast, as this would free-up existing surface lines for suburban services. It was good, therefore, to subsequently note that the leader of Croydon Council and Transport for London backed the idea of such a tunnel in their responses to that consultation too.

More frequent services at regularised intervals

The Mayor's Transport Strategy (published in May 2010) aspires to a minimum of four trains-per-hour on all 'metro' services within Greater London throughout the day. The Sutton Rail Users' Forum would go further, and say that this should equate to maximum service interval of 15 minutes between trains (i.e. a regularised service not just a more frequent service) on any given route seven days a week from first to last train. Such a service model could have a range of beneficial outcomes including:

- encouraging greater use, particularly at off-peak times (as has been recently noted on those lines where the operation has transferred to the London Overground)
- promoting sustainable travel choices and lifestyles (ideas that are foremost in all London borough transport strategies)
- helping to remove congestion from the road network
- helping to spread travel demand away from the peak hours, and thus relieve over-crowding at busy periods
- encouraging journeys by rail that may currently appear too complex

Taking the routes between central London and Sutton (via Mitcham Eastfields) and between central London and Wimbledon (via Tooting) as examples, a 15-minute interval service operating throughout the day here would provide eight trains per hour to and from Blackfriars (instead of the current four) for passengers at Streatham, Tulse Hill, Herne Hill and Loughborough Junction thereby providing these zone 2 and 3 stations with a true "turn-up-and-go"² service. Ideally, the regularity of services on different routes would be harmonised in order to maximise efficiency of interchange between services across the network.

It is recognised that the rail network in south London is complex, and that the peak demand is considerable, and that the provision of frequent, evenly-spaced services is technically challenging given the limitations imposed by the existing infrastructure. But there is great potential for growth on under-utilised suburban routes (as has been seen with the conversion of the former Wimbledon to Croydon rail line to tram operation in 2000) and the demand for rail travel is continuing to grow too. Significant additional investment is needed which, although not carrying the kudos of a project such as Crossrail at £16bn, could, arguably, improve the daily lives of many more commuters. SRUF would like the Invitation to Tender to explicitly note that a more frequent and regularised service at all suburban stations is a requirement of the franchise, and to ask bidders to address the challenge of achieving this with the support of the DfT.

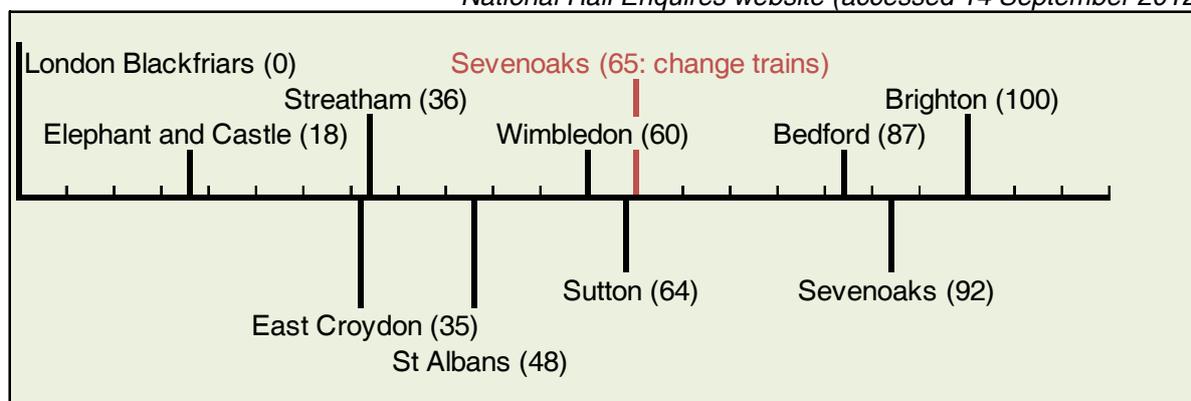
Figures 1a and 1b endeavour to illustrate the existing service provision between London Blackfriars and certain stations on the Thameslink routes for comparative purposes. The number alongside each station in the diagrams represents time, in minutes, and the scale is linear from 0 on the left (London Blackfriars) up to 115

² As discussed in SRUF's response to the London and South East RUS (March 2011), "turn-up-and-go", in the suburban context, could best be described as a service with a maximum interval between trains of ten minutes. Where there is a maximum 15-minute interval between services the term "metro-style" is possibly more appropriate.

minutes on the right. The times indicated are not journey times but rather the combination of the maximum (or worst case) waiting time and the journey time for a trip to or from London Blackfriars in the current timetable (May 2012). The timetable for the inter-peak Monday to Friday obviously differs from the peak, so these two periods are represented separately, with Figure 1a representing services at midday and Figure 1b the peak³.

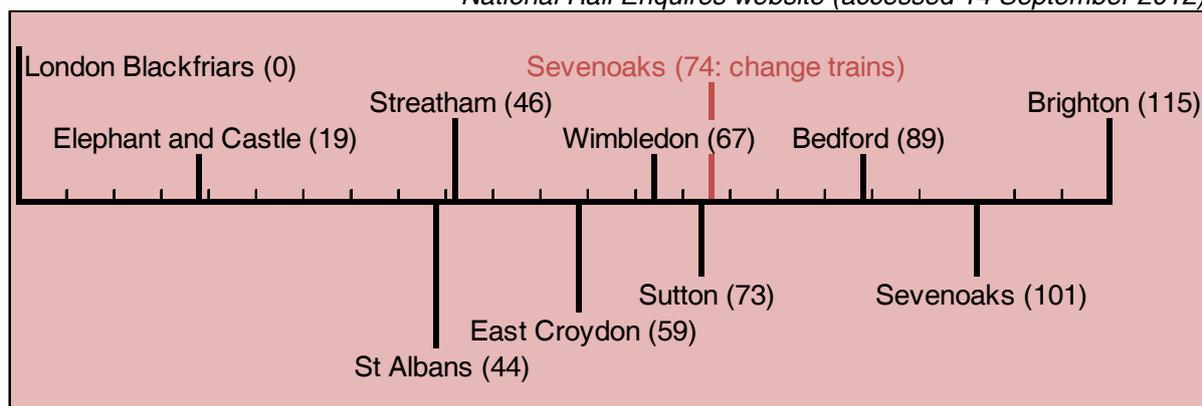
So, for example, in Figure 1a Wimbledon is represented with a cumulative time of 60 minutes, i.e. adding the 30-minute service interval to the 30-minute journey time. Hopefully passengers would plan their journey and avoid waiting for 30 minutes for a train (although this may be easier to do for the outward journey than the return journey and, in a sense, the wait cannot be avoided – it may just be at home or in the office rather than at the station), but the idea of providing cumulative (or overall duration) time is to demonstrate and compare the separation in time between the places served and the impact that service frequency, as well as journey time, has on overall accessibility. Clearly, if the service interval for trains to and from Wimbledon was reduced from a 30-minute to a 15-minute interval, and presuming that the overall journey time of 30 minutes remained the same (although it is believed that there could be some scope for a reduction on this), the cumulative time for Wimbledon (located at a distance of around 13km from Blackfriars) would be reduced from 60 to 45 minutes – a similar ‘time’ to that currently provided for St Albans (a distance of around 31km).

Figure 1a: Cumulative times relative to London Blackfriars: inter-peak Monday to Friday
National Rail Enquires website (accessed 14 September 2012)



³ The peak here in fact represents the worst case services in either the morning or evening peak services. Peak time is defined as either trains arriving at London Blackfriars between 0700 and 0959 or departing from London Blackfriars between 1600 and 1859.

Figure 1b: Cumulative times relative to London Blackfriars: peak Monday to Friday
National Rail Enquires website (accessed 14 September 2012)



The times given in the diagrams are for direct services, which in most cases is the only and obvious journey option. However, in the case of Sevenoaks, where a much faster journey can be achieved through changing trains, the cumulative time is given for both the direct service (where the typical journey time is 62 to 74 minutes in duration) and for the indirect service⁴ (with journey times of between 43 to 45 minutes).

Another thing that is evident from these charts is the differences in the overall duration times for accessibility between the peak and off-peak schedules. Whereas there is little variation in the cumulative times calculated for Bedford and St Albans between the peak and the off-peak, (in fact there is a slight improvement for St Albans), there is evidently deterioration in the services provided for to and from many other, mainly suburban, locations. The cumulative time for Streatham, for example, which is no more than 36 minutes from Blackfriars during the middle of the day, increases to up to 46 minutes at peak times (due to the large 27-minute interval between the 06:49 and 07:16 departures from Streatham). Sutton's cumulative time increases from 64 during the off-peak to 73 minutes during the peak. This is due to the 63-minute gap in services from Sutton towards Blackfriars on the Hackbridge route between the 06:34 and 07:37 departures.

Two things really come out of this review. Firstly, although some extended journey times may be expected during the peak due to the number of people boarding and disembarking from trains, the overall expectation would be to see a decrease in the cumulative time as a result of an improved service, able to carry more passengers, being offered at these busiest of times. In actual fact the opposite can be the case, and, when the capacity constraints really start to appear, it is the services operating over longer distances that take precedence over the metro services. Secondly, the service level on offer to suburban stations is, comparatively, actually not that good anyway. The improvements for suburban services would not be to speed up the service to any great degree (although there is definite scope to reduce certain journey times), but to provide more trains.

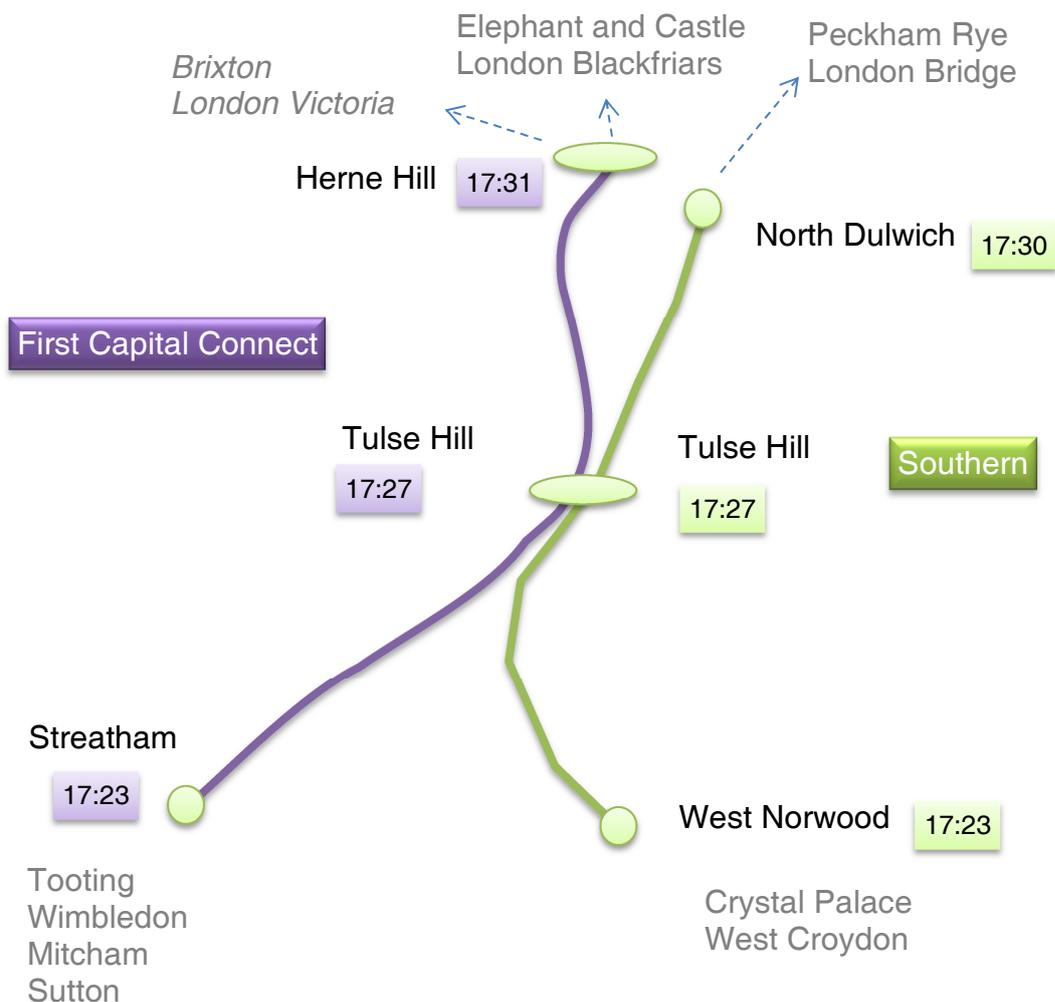
⁴ During the inter-peak interchange at London Bridge, during peak times interchange at Charing Cross using the District and Circle lines between Charing Cross and Blackfriars.

Better connectivity

It is hoped that a combined franchise will result in better use of the network. The ability to make straight-forward, easy and convenient connections, where interchange times are minimised, will give added efficiency to public transport by encouraging different types of journey to and from different destinations.

Smart-ticketing, the growth in availability of information provision to mobile devices, and continuing improvements to station interiors have all helped to make cross-network interchange and multi-modal journeys easier. But these opportunities are, to an extent, being stifled by the many examples of poor timetabling that still exist across the network and which discourage interchange, or just simply frustrate travellers. One such example takes place at Tulse Hill each afternoon around 5.30pm when passengers arriving from Streatham on a First Capital Connect service endeavour to race between platforms to connect with a Southern service towards London Bridge. Figure 2 shows the timings, and why the connection is possible only some of the time.

Figure 2: Making a connection at Tulse Hill around 5.30pm Monday to Friday
One example of how the network does not always work like a network.
Network Rail timetable (December 2011)



All that would appear to be required to enable passengers to make the connection is the implementation of a small timetable change⁵.

Poor connections are also a regular feature at Sutton station. Passengers arriving at platform 2 on services originating at London Victoria via Hackbridge are often seen desperately running towards platform 3 to connect with a service towards Carshalton Beeches and Wallington, or over the footbridge (or lift) towards platform 4 for a Belmont and Epsom Downs train, only to just miss the connection. And there are many other examples where, with just a little more care, the complete journey could be so much better, and rail travel made even more attractive.

Connections between different modes do not always work either. An example of this is at St Helier station where the current half-hourly rail service and the only bus service that directly serves the station (again at half-hourly intervals) can spectacularly manage to avoid each other!

Removal of timetable anomalies

Timetable anomalies, such as gaps in service provision, irregularity in stopping patterns, and journey times that vary considerably in length between any two stations, are all too commonplace on the south London rail network. On certain routes during peak times there can be fewer trains operating, or larger intervals between services, than there are at off-peak periods.

An example of where gaps in service provision can result in the network not performing very well follows on from the example of poor connectivity given in the section above for Tulse Hill around 5.30pm on a weekday. Passengers arriving from Sutton and Streatham on the First Capital Connect service at 17:27 who miss the Southern service to London Bridge (also at 17:27) have an 18-minute wait for the next London Bridge train at 17:45. However, the 17:27 train that they missed was only scheduled 5 minutes behind an earlier service to London Bridge at 17:22. So, this example not only shows that the network is not working as a whole, but is also a clear indication of the poor temporal distribution that can currently exist on certain routes.

Another striking example that illustrates that not enough is being delivered from the current suburban service provision is that although there are ten departures an hour from Sutton to London Victoria during the off-peak period (Monday to Friday), passengers at Sutton can still wait up to 23 minutes for a train to Victoria. This is due to a combination of timings, the options of three possible routes, and a variety of stopping patterns.

Journey times can range quite markedly too. The welcome additional services that have been incrementally introduced into the mid-evening on the Thameslink line south towards Mitcham Eastfields and Sutton (clockwise on the Wimbledon loop), with the last departure from Blackfriars now at 21:00, are an example. The

⁵ Recognising that the rail network across south London is complex and that small changes to the service timings at one location could have major effects elsewhere is all the more reason why a combined franchise with partnership working, plus investment, is required.

scheduled journey times between Blackfriars and Sutton, which during the inter-peak is 36 minutes, increases to 40 minutes during the evening with extended dwell times at many intermediate stations making the journey feel quite slow. All journeys through the core section are quite slow as well.

An improved railway would be one that offers a true metro-style service off-peak, but that can then be supplemented by additional trains to meet the peak demand comfortably. Although the network is complex and requires investment, there would appear to be scope in the shorter term to recast the timetable (as South West Trains did in 2005) to provide a more equitable, marketable and commercially viable product. And this could be the right direction to take en route to the future suburban rail mix.

Final thoughts

The front page of the consultation document displayed a map showing the large geographical area covered by the new franchise - from King's Lynn in the north to Southampton in the south, a distance of nearly 300 km. That would be expected, and there is nothing wrong with that.

But in this document, in our response, we show one map too. But ours is just from Herne Hill and North Dulwich in the north to Streatham and West Norwood in the south – a separation of only about 5 km. This is only a very small part of the puzzle, but the picture would not be complete without it.

We ask that those responsible for the growth and the development of the network give attention to detail at this scale, for those everyday journeys that many already make and many more could take, in addition to the big picture. After all, for London to continue as a great driver of the economy, the links within it, as well as the links to it, matter as well. The question is perhaps whether our urban transport needs are best suited by heavy rail or whether other traditional or perhaps new and emerging transport options would be better. But that is another part of the challenge...

Finally, Sutton Rail Users' Forum would always welcome more engagement from politicians at a strategic level. We would like to receive councillors' ideas and hear what they would like to see improved on the railways throughout the year. At the moment we only seem to hear from them when things go wrong or when there are rumours of change!

Good luck to all concerned with progressing the consultation and we look forward to reading the summary of the outcome of the consultation process later in the autumn.

Charles Martin, chair Sutton Rail Users' Forum
charles.martin@sruf.org.uk
25 September 2012

The dilemma that is Blackfriars

#savethethameslink perhaps, but not #savethethameslinkasitis

A personal view by Charles Martin, chair Sutton Rail Users' Forum

There is almost no doubt that the single biggest issue that will be associated with this consultation, certainly from respondents in south and south-west London, is the realisation that Network Rail had previously recommended that, from around 2018, Wimbledon loop services should start and terminate at Blackfriars rather than continue to directly serve the core section stations including City Thameslink, Farringdon and St Pancras International. The idea that a direct link, something that many value, may be taken away, has sparked a controversy from residents in communities across Lambeth, Wandsworth, Merton and Sutton. The possibility of the loss has been felt even more keenly in a way, given the understanding that there are to be more trains, not fewer, through the core section. As a result, the Save the Thameslink Loop Line campaign was established across social and broadcast media, involving public meetings and days of action supported by many local councillors and politicians.

It's unfortunate in some ways that the whole consultation process from a south London perspective appears to have been dominated by this one issue. Sutton Rail Users' Forum wants the railway to change and to improve, as set out in this document. It is time that our lines across south London offered a much better product, and so the current service – even one that provides direct trains through central London - needs to get better (because it only offers a limited service frequency) in order to become a more compelling product. It is important to look strategically over the longer view about what we are aiming for and what we are trying to achieve, and to look beyond the immediate impact of one particular proposal.

Nevertheless, it is quite understandable that, if the proposal to start and terminate trains at Blackfriars goes ahead, many will consider the need to change trains there as an inconvenience, and therefore a total dis-benefit compared to the current through-service on offer. This will perhaps be especially the case for those travelling to and from Streatham and Tulse Hill, situated as they are closer to the city and where alternative travel options are perhaps more limited. It has also been suggested that the physical disconnection on the railway map at Blackfriars could act as a detriment to the economy of locations south of the river, and that severing the route could put into reverse the potential for the regeneration of areas served by the line. These would all seem to be quite logical assumptions and concerns, but are they all actually foregone conclusions and do they have to be the case? Well, these are not easy questions to answer.

Clearly there is a limit to the throughput of services on the core Thameslink route. Currently there are ten trains-per-hour (tph) in each direction during the Monday to Friday inter-peak period, between them serving effectively four routes. When the Thameslink programme is complete, this will more than double to 24 tph at peak times. Separating routes on a constrained network can help provide more resilient services, as well as optimising capacity. All of which are good things to have. In fact, the main reason cited for the need for Wimbledon loop trains to terminate at Blackfriars is to provide a high level of reliability for all the services using the station by reducing the number of track crossovers.

One relatively recent example of where there have been changes to service provision requiring passengers to change trains, where they did not need to previously, is on the London Underground Northern Line at Kennington. A decision was made to separate the services so that all trains to and from Morden would operate via the Bank (the City branch), and trains serving the west-end (the Charing Cross branch) would terminate and start from Kennington. This was to provide a better overall service offering higher frequency and

improved reliability. So, one dis-benefit for many passengers was actually providing a benefit for all passengers (even those having to change).

There are obvious differences between the situation at Kennington and that at Blackfriars of course. At Kennington not all passengers have to change, and for those that do, importantly, the interchange is about as easy as it can get. In either direction interchange between trains is simply facilitated by a near seamless cross-platform connection. Clearly, it is a pity that the layout at Blackfriars has not been configured to provide cross-platform interchange for all proposed connections in both directions, southbound as well as northbound. Such a design would have avoided building-in the potential for some conflict of movement for passengers, as well as for trains, from the outset. But again, given the complication of the site - and it has to be remembered that the platforms at Blackfriars station are suspended above the River Thames - the engineering challenges would have been considerable as would, no doubt, have been the price-tag. The opening of new access and egress to the south side of the river is fantastic news, and this will help with interchange too. And, crucially in my view, the service frequency through the core section will, like the Northern Line at Kennington is today, be very high. Consequently, the idea that the journey will necessarily take longer, as a result of the change of trains, is marginal at best and will often not be the case.

Having said that, the Northern Line is still subject to extreme crowding and this is one good reason why the through services on the Thameslink line could be considered for retention and enhancement. The existing Thameslink route serves Morden South, Tooting, Elephant and Castle, St Pancras International and Kentish Town. The Northern Line serves Morden, Tooting Broadway, Elephant and Castle, Kings Cross St Pancras and Kentish Town too. The difference is that the former offers an infrequent service and is consequently relatively under-utilised, whereas the latter provides a very high level of frequency but also gets very busy. The National Rail service could perhaps, if sufficiently upgraded, provide a useful alternative to its sister service. Interestingly, it has been suggested that an option for Crossrail 2 (originally configured as Hackney to Chelsea) could be to route the line from Wimbledon through Tooting Broadway before heading north towards central and north-east London, in part to reduce pressure on the Northern Line.

In my opinion, the argument that the Thameslink route has potential to offset demand on the Northern Line is a stronger and better reason for keeping the through service than the often cited argument that without the link it would no longer be possible to take a direct service from the south London suburbs to St Pancras International. After all, prior to 2007 the Eurostar services operated from London Waterloo, and consequently anyone with a direct link to that mainline terminus could easily connect with trains to Paris and Brussels. So, if residents from Andover or Battersea, Kingston or Richmond or from Bournemouth to Winchester could not make the case to retain the connection, but instead have to take the Bakerloo and Victoria lines via Oxford Circus or the Northern and Piccadilly lines via Leicester Square to access St Pancras, then what chance have Streathamites got? The other thing to remember is that many more people will have direct access to St Pancras once the Thameslink Programme is complete. One person's loss is another's gain.

Of course the move to St Pancras was made to improve the service, make use of the High Speed 1 line, and relieve suburban tracks (including those through Herne Hill) of international trains, thereby giving everyday commuters a better service. All of this makes a great deal of sense, and of course everyone has gained anyway through shorter journey times and better connectivity to Kent, France and other parts of Europe. Furthermore, it was only until very recently that services on the Wimbledon loop began to operate through the core section at weekends again on a regular basis. Consequently, when returning to St Pancras International on a Sunday from a weekend in Paris or in Canterbury, prior to May 2012, it would be often be necessary to use alternative routes home from central London

anyway. Also, even when direct trains are running, the frequency of the service coupled with the relative slowness of the journey often makes alternate routes quicker and more attractive⁶.

When it comes to service changes, it is important to take a broad view and to consider the potentially advantageous consequences that can result, even though they may initially be less evident, rather than be too concerned and focused on the immediate, more obvious and seemingly less favourable outcomes. One example of a recent service change that, when proposed, may have been expected to cause a little disquiet was in 2010, when the off-peak direct service between London Bridge and Sutton (serving intermediate stations on the Forest Hill line) was rerouted to operate as the London Victoria to Sutton service via Crystal Palace. There are probably a number of reasons why this change was not met with any great concern. The most obvious may have been because the quickest way to get to London Bridge for passengers travelling from intermediate stations between Sutton and Norwood Junction before the service amendment had been to travel using the direct service towards London Bridge as far as Norwood Junction and then to change to the fast service from there. This same journey can still be made, and there was (and still is) an option for passengers starting or ending their journey at Sutton to travel via Balham and the Northern Line. In other words, the direct service for London Bridge was not the quickest route, so its loss was not as greatly felt as could have been the case⁷.

At the same time, the displacement of this London Bridge train enabled additional capacity for London Overground services from West Croydon and Crystal Palace towards New Cross, Canada Water and Dalston Junction (and now extended to Highbury and Islington). This means that travellers from Sutton and stations to West Croydon can now travel to intermediate stations to, and including, New Cross Gate, four times an hour (albeit by same-platform interchange at West Croydon) rather than twice an hour (or less at peak times) as was previously the case. The London Overground has provided greater connectivity across south London – much more so than previously offered by Southern – and has proved to be a very popular service.

Although it is recognised that the number of people affected by the need to change trains during the off-peak to and from London Bridge would be fewer in number than that at peak hours at Blackfriars, it is nevertheless another example where the need to change trains can potentially have better outcomes. I expect that if the suggestion was now made to reinstate the direct service to London Bridge at the expense of the London Overground trains, the public reaction would not be good.

One answer to the Blackfriars dilemma, given where we are with the physical arrangement of track and platforms at Blackfriars and the public response, may be to operate, in the short term at least, a 15-minute interval service from Wimbledon and Streatham to continue beyond Blackfriars through the core section and for this service to be supplemented by another 15-minute interval from Sutton, Mitcham and Streatham that terminates at Blackfriars. This would retain 4 tph from Streatham through the core section as now, but would also provide a much enhanced service (8 tph) to Blackfriars. Passengers from Sutton and Mitcham travelling beyond Blackfriars could avoid a change at Blackfriars if they so wish by changing at any intermediate station from Streatham to Elephant and Castle. A

⁶ First Capital Connect timetable introduced 19 May 2012 (valid to 8 December 2012) : On Saturdays the last service from St Pancras International to Streatham, Wimbledon and Sutton departs St Pancras at 2336 (arriving Sutton 0035). On Sundays the last departure is at 2105 (arriving Sutton 2201). On Monday to Friday evenings it can be as quick to change at East Croydon and then at Norwood Junction than it is to take a direct train to Sutton. Personally I would rather have to change at Blackfriars if this provided more and quicker journey options including later services on Sundays!

⁷ It is worth adding that ways of facilitating interchange improvements at Norwood Junction would be welcomed too.

service level such as this may just keep everyone happy, especially if a similar mix was possible from south-east London too. This would all depend of course on whether Herne Hill and Streatham Junction were able to accommodate a high rate of train throughput. Unfortunately, probably not (and there is some disappointment that the capacity constraints at these locations appeared not to have been addressed in the London and South East Route Utilisation Strategy last year).

Everyone would agree that with up to 24 tph using the core section in each direction when the Thameslink Programme is complete, up from around 10 tph as is currently provided off-peak, is a network improvement. So, ultimately it is probably more of a question of how the project is to be delivered, rather than whose train runs through, that will matter most. And if, on completion, the delivering receives a silver medal rather than a gold one, will it be us, or future generations that really notice?

I have no doubt that by the time the Thameslink Programme is completed, and the new combined franchise is in place, we are going to have a better railway overall. I would like to think that the inconvenience of changing trains at Blackfriars is a relatively small price to pay for the overall benefits of improved frequency and reliability that are to be delivered. My hope for 2018 is that most people, if asked then whether they would like to revert to the 2012 timetable will, on reflection, say no.



This is the view that greeted me on arrival at London Blackfriars from a terminating train from Sutton, on Sunday 23 September 2012. On this occasion the train from Sutton had arrived at platform 3, and a connecting northbound train was waiting on the adjacent platform 2. Obviously this was not rush hour and, conveniently, my terminating train had arrived on platform 3 and not platform 4. Also of course it has to be said that it is not possible to interchange with quite such ease in the south-bound direction (i.e. from platform 1 to platform 3 or 4). Nevertheless, presented with this view, I could not help thinking whether, in the big scheme of things, we should be quite so worried about Blackfriars after all.