Annex 1
April 2012

Train Services for Communities in

Tonbridge & Malling

Tonbridge Station

A Manifesto for Improved Rail Services

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
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Annex 1

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Introduction

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council has been advocating improved rail services on behalf of residents and businesses within our area over many years. Despite this, our experience is a consistent deterioration in the service offered to local residents, businesses and the local economy by the train operating company. This is despite the demand created from significant levels of economic growth within the Borough, a prime example being the major development at Kings Hill.

The quality of rail services has been regularly debated and there is a strong partnership between the Council and other local authorities, business interests and most importantly with well organised local rail user groups.

The constant theme has been deep dissatisfaction with the way services operate. For this reason, in advance of the tendering of the new franchise from 2014, our rail manifesto calls for what we say should be the range and quality of rail services provided for residents, businesses and local communities by the new franchise.

Specifically what we seek are:

- A fairer deal for passengers when fare increases are set;
- The new franchise must include peak and inter-peak Thameslink services from Maidstone East through Blackfriars and stations beyond. In addition, we would wish to see the inclusion of a true peak service to Cannon Street;
- Restoration of the direct rail connections between Tonbridge and Gatwick and two an hour service during off-peak times;
- Extension of the services to large population bases in Kent, specifically to Ashford and also to the Medway Towns along the Medway Valley Line;
- The Tonbridge to Redhill and Gatwick line reintegrated into the Kent Franchise;
- The new HS1 service to St Pancras stops at Snodland station;
- Monitoring and performance separates the classic service from the HS1 service.

We want to take this opportunity of setting out improvements as clearly as possible in the hope and expectation that we can influence the next franchise specification. We believe it is critical that the franchise tender has a detailed view of the local perspective and how best local growth can be supported by practical and achievable refinements in rail services.

In doing so, we are adopting an entirely realistic approach because we are fully aware of the financial constraints on the rail industry.

We realise that there is little point in pursuing aspirations that would be ruled out on cost grounds. For that reason, we are concentrating on proposals that represent pay-back as far as the wider community is concerned. So too do we recognise that this next franchise will need to recognise the major impact of planned works at London Bridge. Threading the considerable number of services that have to go through this most congested part of the national rail network, while it is also a construction site, will be a most critical challenge.

Nevertheless, we believe there are opportunities to address some of the current service deficiencies in West Kent and that the Department for Transport (DfT) should be made aware of these when preparing the specification for the next franchise.

An excellent starting point for describing improvement opportunities in this Borough and in West Kent generally is the **Rail Action Plan for Kent**. This was produced by Kent County Council last year in conjunction with the District Councils and rail user groups and was formally presented to DfT at that time. It is a major piece of work covering the whole of the franchise area and importantly it reflects this Council's improvement aspirations for Tonbridge and Malling, subject to one proviso on a point of detail related to the Tonbridge to Redhill line which we will return to later in this document.

In essence, this submission sets out the Council's aspirations for the new franchise in four sections.

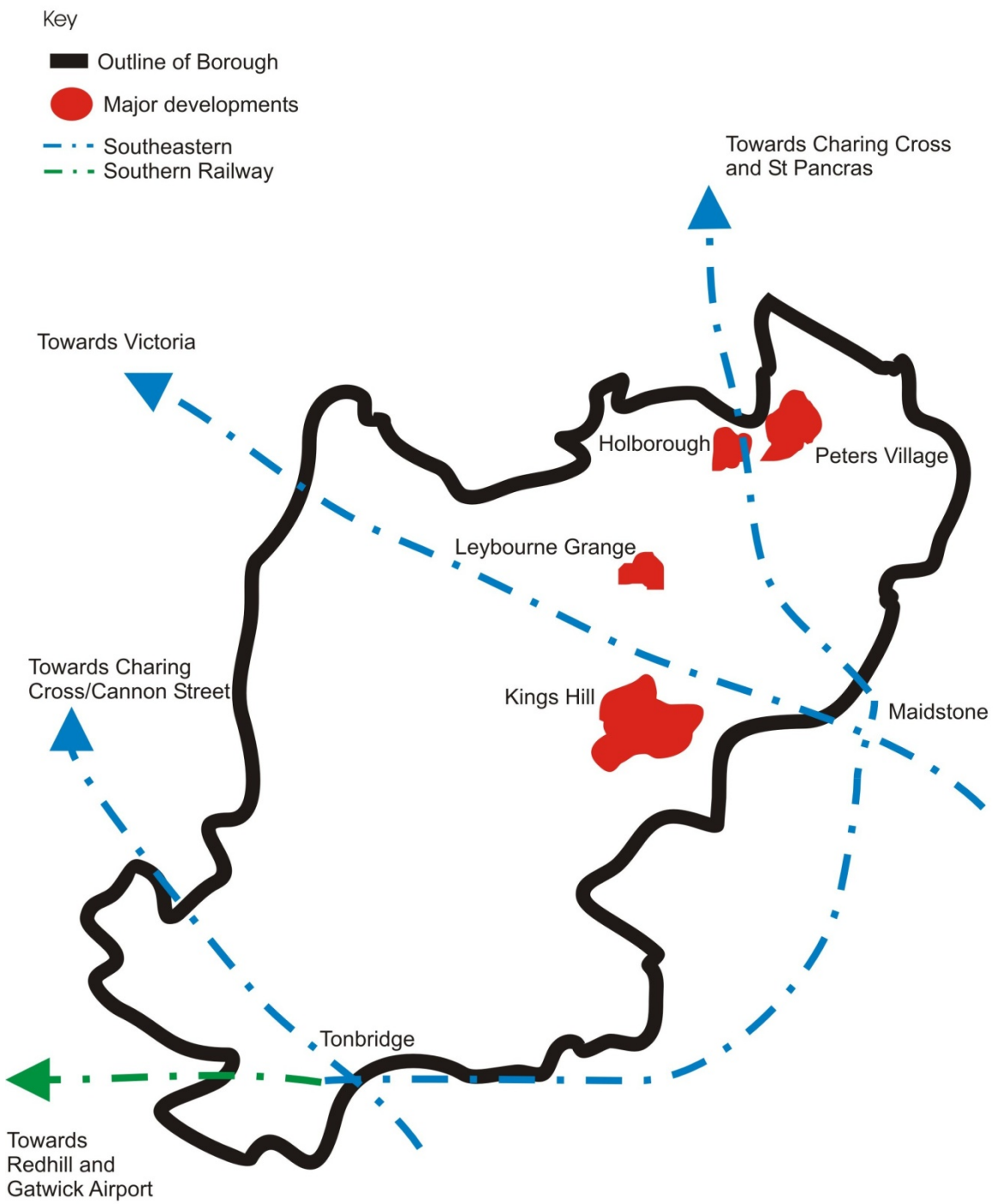
- We describe practical and achievable service developments and improvements.
- We look at issues related performance monitoring and passenger satisfaction.
- We consider policy on setting fares and
- We conclude with some consideration of other matters such as parking provision, station improvement and interference by Transport for London on Kent timetables and routes.

Mark Worrall

Leader of the Council

Nicolas Heslop

Cabinet Member for Planning & Transportation



Major developments in Tonbridge & Malling

Service Development and Improvement

Maidstone East/West Malling/Borough Green Line

The 2009 timetable changes have been a disaster for West and Mid Kent. For a great many commuters, Victoria station is an entirely inappropriate and very inconvenient city destination. We know from local rail user groups that many people now rail-head to the west Kent line to secure a seat to one of the city stations. Many more have had to change job at this difficult time for the local economy and lives have been seriously disrupted. Peoples' choices over jobs, schools and housing are long term in nature and are major life-time decisions. Set against this, the sudden and summary removal of services to the city on which many people depended has had an extraordinary impact on many people, families and commuters.

We advocated strongly through 2009 that these timetable and service changes should be cancelled but to no avail. We explained what we felt to be compelling reasons from a development point of view for preserving these services to and from the city. This Borough has forecast provision in its adopted Local Development Framework for 6,375 homes between 2006 and 2021, many of which are focused on the Medway Valley and reliant on the services through West Malling Station. Specifically, there is planned provision for the following:-

- Kings Hill; major business park and residential development – 1446 units
- Leybourne Grange (Chase) – 723 units
- Holborough - 938 units
- Peters Village – 1000 units

West Malling Station

In parallel, Maidstone too has considerable planned development reflecting its Growth Point status - 11,080 houses during the period 2006 to 2026.

Kings Hill in particular requires access to the City destinations in both directions to support the considerable business investment and activity that takes place. We are talking about two million square feet of business space and over 5,000 jobs. It is a significant generator of city based rail services and its continued success will rely on its accessibility.

To constrain its economic growth potential is clearly contrary to prevailing policy of this Government.

Borough Green Station

The case for continued city services on the Maidstone East/West Malling line was rejected and the new timetable was introduced in December 2009. The DfT response we received at that time was dismissive of the case we made and appeared to suggest that rail heading activity was acceptable transportation behaviour. Moreover, it was fairly sanguine about the impact of the additional cost and time of under-ground travel back in the direction of the city and offered another option by suggesting a change of service at Bromley South to catch a connection to Blackfriars. This is simply an unacceptable position both in terms of public policy on economic growth and transport and in respect of the cost of personal disruption caused. It is an important route for communities served by stations at East Malling, West Malling and Borough Green & Wrotham.

Consequently, we are lobbying robustly for the next franchise to include peak and inter-peak Thameslink services through Blackfriars and stations beyond. In addition, we would wish to see the inclusion of a true peak service to Cannon Street.

Tonbridge to Redhill and Gatwick Line

The year before the 2009 timetable changes that did such damage to the services from mid Kent, we witnessed a similar reduction in service level on the line from Tonbridge to Gatwick. First of all the line was taken out of the Integrated Kent Franchise and subsumed within the Southern franchise where it could only ever be little more than a branch line cutting across the predominantly radial pattern of services radiating south out of London.

Our aspirations for the Tonbridge to Gatwick line are as follows:-

- direct rail connections between Tonbridge and Gatwick;
- restoration of the two an hour service during the off-peak that was removed as part of the transfer of this line from the Kent Integrated Franchise to Southern Railway in 2008. Currently it runs as a one an hour off-peak service;
- extension of the services to large population bases in Kent, specifically to Ashford and also to the Medway Towns along the Medway Valley line. This latter route requires a critical examination of stopping patterns to ensure a reasonable journey time;
- recognition of the important role the line plays in current and potential employment commuter trips (including to Gatwick) and significant number of school journeys each day;
- improved marketing of the line and the destinations along it. For example, many locals are surprised when they learn that the line also provides a good route for Kent based travellers through to destinations such as East Croydon;
- consideration of the role of the route as part of a strategic circumferential route around the south of London to destinations in the west towards Reading and beyond;
- At a fundamental level, it is important to recognise that the changes sought do not require fresh infrastructure. The lines are already in place.

Previous work by the operator of Gatwick Airport estimated that about 3 million passengers a year travel to the airport from Kent. Clearly there is a market but the travel arrangements for many of these passengers are already built around an established industry based on private taxi cabs. New rail services will now have to break into these embedded travel patterns and provide an attractive alternative in terms of access, timing and cost.

The slight qualification about the Rail Action Plan for Kent mentioned earlier is that the Borough Council considers that the transfer of this service out of the Kent Franchise and into the Southern area has been detrimental to it, especially as so much of the focus of the Southern Franchise is related to the London to Brighton mainline. **For that reason we would wish to see the line reintegrated into the Kent franchise**. We believe it would far better, especially if the aspiration for further extensions of the line to the Medway Towns and Ashford are realised.

Also, there are some operational resilience factors that support the line being with the Kent Franchise and these relate to driver training and expertise on the route when services are

occasionally rerouted from the west Kent line for maintenance reasons. Currently both franchises are operated by companies from the same Govia stable. If that is not the case in the new franchise beyond 2014, then operational difficulties could arise during such maintenance.

Medway Valley Line

The Borough Council has been a funding contributor and supporter of the Medway Valley Line Community Rail Partnership for many years and we have been pleased to note the increased patronage on the line. We will continue to welcome service enhancements and assist through the partnership.

Snodland Station

The change has been the recent introduction of HS1 services from Maidstone West to St Pancras. However, disappointingly, this has had little positive impact on this Borough because there is no stop within it. We had hoped for a brief halt at Snodland, desirable in the context of the town as it now is but also because of the further development at Holborough Valley with the 938 housing units mentioned earlier and a further 1,000 homes soon to be constructed at Peters Village near Wouldham.

We will press for the new service to stop at Snodland through direct representations and through the Rail Action Plan for Kent. However, we hope that you are able to include this in the franchise specification when it is initially issued.

The current HS1 has not had any positive impact for the reasons just stated. More to the point, it has contributed to a great deal of local frustration in that the level crossing in Aylesford now has to be closed for inordinate periods to accommodate the new service. We realise this is not strictly speaking a franchise service issue but we would ask that the DfT be

made aware of the extent and depth of local feeling on this matter and we would seek at least an examination of options to deal with this problem.

Service Performance and Monitoring

The performance monitoring regime has been a source of great passenger dissatisfaction during the current franchise. The day to day experience of many people is that the current model does not accurately reflect the service they have been receiving and the penalty regime seems weighted in favour of the train operating company.

A prime example of this was the operator's performance during the severe winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11 when communications failed almost completely and the service offer was meagre to say the least.

Encouragingly, we perceived a step change in the commitment to deal satisfactorily with these winter conditions from both Network Rail and Southeastern when they came to a local rail Forum we organised in October 2011. This does provide an indication that lessons have been learned and we would like to see some real emphasis on performance and meaningful target setting and monitoring in the next franchise.

One particular area of dissatisfaction and frustration relates to the combining of performance figures on the new HS services with those on the classic services. There is a fundamental difference between these two independent operations not the least because a new 'train set' running with new technology on recently installed lines will inevitably have better service performance than the classic lines with its old infrastructure and trains.

The concern of passengers in west Kent has been that the aggregated performance of the new and the old has lifted the apparent performance of the classic services which are the staple of the services in this Borough. Last year the penalty performance threshold was missed by a fraction of a percent, wholly as a result of the beneficial impact of the better HS1 results. Without the HS1 factor the results would have reflected a miserable performance.

We will be insisting strongly in the consultation period for the new franchise that the classic service be monitored separately from the HS1 service.

Fare Setting Policy

The most iniquitous aspect of the current franchise relates to the fare setting mechanism. The RPI+3% formula has been applied since the start of the franchise and only this year has there been a reprieve to RPI+1%. However, the increases have not been evenly applied and some passengers have experienced increases in their particular fare of several points above the average. Even for those who have not experienced such anomalous increases, the compounding effect over six years has been quite staggering.

We note the Government is on record as stating that the disproportionate increases built into the Integrated Kent Franchise did not result from any cross-subsidy of the HS1. However, there has been a consistent belief in Kent that this was the original intention and it explains why rail users have such a level of frustration and concern when, if anything, they have seen no benefit for West Kent from HS1. Indeed, the experience of some is that there has been service deterioration in West Kent to accommodate the changes required to integrate HS1 into local service patterns.

We consider that a stage is being reached when there will be a direct and consequential adverse reaction to fare increases. Passengers will no longer be able to tolerate the increase and will 'vote with their feet' and this could have the perverse impact of driving revenues down, resulting in a need for even more subsidy on this franchise area.

We urge the tender exercise to pay the most serious of attention to the issue of the fare increase mechanism in the next franchise and express our concerns that we may now be reaching a tipping point as far as passenger tolerance of fare increases in excess of RPI is concerned.

General Matters

Franchise length

Recent policy statements from the DfT have indicated a presumption in favour of longer franchises with far greater control of lines and infrastructure within the franchise. We would wholeheartedly support this. A longer franchise and integration of the infrastructure and service provider would encourage longer term investment by the train operating company and it would also assist in overcoming the deficiencies that arise currently at the interface between Southeastern and Network Rail. We acknowledge that things have been improving between these two organisations in recent years, but there is only so much that can be done to overcome the fundamental structural problems created by having the rail service and the rail infrastructure under separate ownership and management. This being so, we would urge that this model for integration during the next franchise period is reviewed.

Parking

In recent weeks we have learned of rail industry plans to increase the amount of parking at Tonbridge Station. It is our experience generally that parking at most of your stations is problematic because, simply put, there is not enough of it. For this reason we urge the tender exercise to look beyond Tonbridge and consider resolving the serious under-provision at other stations in the Borough.

Hildenborough station provides a paradigm example of the problem. Some 20 years ago, the 'overspill' from the station car park was shown by a few commuter cars parking along Noble Tree Road. The immediate neighbourhood of the station, even by that time, had to be protected by waiting restrictions. In the years that followed, rail heading to the station grew consistently to the extent that, today, considerable lengths of Philpots Lane, Nizels Lane and Lower Road are semi-obstructed by commuter vehicles for much of each work-day.

This pattern is repeated to a lesser extent at stations across the Borough and we believe there should be specific requirements within the next franchise to deal with station parking capacity. This is not simply about resolving traffic disruption at stations. There are also good transportation planning reasons for providing sufficient station parking because it would help support service growth during the inter-peak period that is currently stifled by lack of parking.

Transport for London

On occasion during the current franchise we became aware of proposals to introduce changes in the stopping patterns and timetables of Kent services within the capital. There are also issues related to fare setting and the passing on of the impact of lower increases within the metro area to Kent passengers.

We appreciate that there has to be some balance between the needs of passengers within London and those coming in from outlying areas and that rail capacity and infrastructure have ultimate limitations.

What we are very keen to ensure is that any sharing out of scarce resources, rail paths and opportunities generally is carried out as transparently as possible. It should not be at the whim of the Mayor and TfL and we would wish to see overt mechanisms within the new franchise to ensure fairness for Kent passengers. What we cannot accept would be significantly increased journey times for travellers from West Kent nor any further increases in fares as a result of changes in London.

Station Improvement

We have already mentioned parking at stations and we would like to extend this specific aspiration to a more general wish for a direct commitment by franchisees to station improvement.

We have been impressed by the willingness of the rail industry to engage with us to promote a current scheme at West Malling Station. The project involves a major remodelling of the forecourt and approach road and we believe this provides a model way of working. Disappointingly, financial contributions from the rail industry and the DfT have been absent. Nevertheless, we are looking to fund works through creative use of Section 106 monies from developments in this area.

Artists impression of new interchange at West Malling Station

We will wish to engage with potential train operating companies during the tender period for the new franchise and we will be keen to hear what they have to say about the standard and maintenance of stations and their environs, customer service, cleanliness, comfort and security and passenger information. We are hoping that there will be specific stipulations requiring investment on these elements of the new franchise in the tender documentation.

Recent improvements to Tonbridge station are also welcomed. Representatives from both Network Rail and Southeastern gave presentations to the Borough Council.

Train Capacity

Rail patronage has been increasing consistently over the years despite the economic recession in recent times, resulting in considerable over-crowding on peak services from this Borough. There is standing room only for many passengers departing from stations where this was never a problem in the past.

We realise there is no prospect of additional train paths during this next franchise period to introduce additional capacity. This makes it all the more important that the measures related to increasing train lengths outlined in the Route Utilisation Strategy a couple of years ago are

brought forward as swiftly as possible. **We need, as soon as possible, 12 car capability at all stations on the west Kent line and 8 car capacity on the Maidstone East/West Malling line. Ideally this should be through station enhancement but selective door opening options should be pursued in the interim.**