

Network Rail Sussex Rail Utilisation Study (RUS)

Response submitted and supported by:

Southern East Coastway Commuter Group
Bexhill Rail Action Group (BRAG)
Eastbourne Borough Council

1. Eastbourne is the fastest growing town in the South East, with a population of nearly 90,000, an increase of 25% since 1971. The average age of its residents is just 42. Additionally, due to tough Government housing targets, 4800 additional homes need to be provided between 2006 and 2026, this will increase Eastbourne's population still further. Despite these facts, the RUS focused on Worthing, Littlehampton and Chichester (West Coastway) whilst ignoring towns from Lewes down to Eastbourne, Bexhill and Newhaven (East Coastway). – refer Fig 6.1 (page 93) in the RUS document.
2. Passenger statistics and growth as shown in Fig 3.10 (page 37) demonstrate that the East Coastway route has continued to grow over the last 10 years and has a greater growth rate than the Brighton line. Bexhill and surrounding station commuters highlight that due to the extended journey times along the East Coastway, many commuters drive to Polegate or Battle to speed up journey times into London, skewing Commuter season tickets from those aforementioned stations.
3. Further improvements are discussed in the RUS to the Brighton Main Line of up to 8 services per hour into London when the current 6 services per hour appears more than sufficient to meet current and forecasted passenger needs. Consideration needs to be given to redirecting the planned additional Brighton Main Line capacity along the East Coastway to address passenger capacity issues. This would include improved train coach deployment and distribution amongst these services using existing and available stock to further improve capacity.
4. The Gatwick Express utilizes four fast paths per hour on the same infrastructure used by East / West Coastway and Brighton Main Line. Considering the population growth forecast. We request a review of how the Gatwick Express services could be further optimized. Potential integration into the high quality product now seen on Southern Rail Services to operate on services south of Gatwick throughout the day should be considered, with particular attention to services into Eastbourne and Bexhill along the East Coastway.
5. There is no information or data in the RUS which relates to the evening peak service from London on the East Coastway. We request that such information be made available as it is this service that has been impacted most since the new timetable of December 2008.
6. The RUS excludes stations and passenger data from St Leonard's Warrior Square to Ore, yet this is part of the East Coastway route.

7. There is an inconsistency in the presentation of data. The definition of the morning high peak in Fig 3.3 (page 29), are those trains arriving 08:00 – 09:00 in London – but in Fig 3.9 (page 36) the definition is 07:00 to 09:59. This needs to be reviewed in order that true comparisons of service are presented and can be evaluated. The percentage ranges shown in Fig 3.28 – Capacity Utilisation Index (page 61) are far too broad, 0-30%, 30-70% and 70-90% and therefore does not provide an accurate picture of capacity along the routes.
8. It is stated in the RUS that the DfT provided the franchise bidders the option of altering the East Coast timetable in December 2010 in consultation with National Rail but these proposals (p70 – 71 of RUS document) are confidential. This begs the question of what is the point of RUS consultation if user groups cannot gain access to the proposed timetable changes. Please provide this information in order that we can give due consideration to their response to the study.
9. There are no proposals in the RUS which endeavour to reduce journey times, make adjustments to the train timetable, or increase capacity on the East Coastway route. Figure 3.6 (page 33) East Coastway – Eastbourne to London used to have a journey time of 90 minutes. However, we are now quoted as having a journey time of 91-120 minutes, which is slower than prior to the December 2008 timetable and slower than the off-peak timetable.

Investment should be made to improve the signalling infrastructure between Hastings and Lewes, which would provide a faster service and greater capacity.

10. In addition, Fig 3 (page 160) – Fastest journey time matrix shows journey times London Bridge to Eastbourne as 92 minutes and London Victoria to Eastbourne 86 minutes in both directions. This is not the travel times that commuters are experiencing. Since December 2008, as our experience as regular users is that invariably journey times in both directions are in excess of 95 minutes.
11. The RUS has closed the option of Thameslink running a service down to Eastbourne or beyond. This is uncompetitive and flies in the face of the DfT and Government expressing the wish that greater competition would improve the quality of service for train passengers. This may also breach UK and EU Competition Law. There is some evidence of over-provision of FCC services to Brighton. Southern's proposed additional stopping service to Victoria from 2010 is based on the premise that passengers from Preston Park, Hassocks and Burgess Hill want more frequent services to Victoria. This rather implies that the current FCC/Thameslink stopping service is not meeting the needs of passengers from these stations. Moreover the current maximum length of these services is 8 cars, and is frequently just 4 cars. If the norm on the BML and for Coastway services to Victoria is 12 cars, the four FCC services waste a lot of capacity - at a minimum, the equivalent of 16 carriages every hour even if all four services were 8 car. In reality, the loss is even greater because some services are just 4 car. Rather than simply run yet more services to Brighton, the solution is either to reallocate two of the off-peak FCC paths each hour to new services to/from Victoria, or to divert two of the FCC services to other destinations on the East Coastway such as Eastbourne, Newhaven, and Ore.

12. The RUS excludes stations and passenger data from St Leonard's Warrior Square to Ore, yet this is part of the East Coastway route. It is also noted that there is complete lack of vision for the Brighton, Eastbourne to Ashford International East Coastway route that could be utilised for a new fast alternative route from St Pancras to Eastbourne via London Docklands, Thames Gateway, Ashford, Hastings, Bexhill using HS1. In addition to this the RUS completely misses that this line is part of Trans Europe Network and therefore should be eligible for EU funding. These include:
 - a. Proposed planned transfer of East Sussex County Council's offices to Polegate.
 - b. Expansion of University of Brighton whose properties extend along the East Coastway route.
 - c. Substantial increase in Lewes Tertiary College in Lewes and also the Sussex Downs Corporation.
 - d. Opening in 2011 a new 22,000 capacity football stadium by Falmer Station on the East Coastway and growing popularity of Eastbourne FC.
 - e. Additional 4,000 student places at University Centre, Hastings part of University Of Brighton. These students will be travelling between the University hubs of Eastbourne, Hastings and Brighton
13. The South England plan proposes some 30,000 new homes within the catchment area served by the East Coastway route. This potentially gives rises to additional 50-60,000 commuters over the next ten years whether locally using cross-coastal, or up line to areas of employment such as Lewes, Haywards Heath, London and the suburbs. It should also be noted that mixed used developments are contained within the plan to assist in the re-generation of employment within the area.
14. The current direct service from Hastings via Bexhill and Eastbourne into London must remain together with the additional existing connection onto Eastbourne to London services at Hampden Park, with reconsideration to the reopening of the short piece of the rail track known as the Willingdon Chord, delivering further capacity for freight traffic on the East Coastway.
15. Planned Regeneration together with the building of the Bexhill - Hastings Link Road (BHLR), the local plan envisages growth of the population of Bexhill from the current 45,000 to around 68,000 by 2026. There is also likely to be growth in the population of neighbouring Hastings through new building associated with the BHLR, as well as brownfield and town centre re-development. Much of this will be London-bound commuters, and although the Tunbridge Wells line is likely to take some traffic, there is likely to be growth in traffic along the East Coastway due to the pull of Brighton, Ashford and the Thames Gateway (Ebbsfleet International) as employment centres.
16. According to passenger numbers Fig 3.15 (page 43), there are approximately 35,500 travelling up line to/from Bexhill, Newhaven and Eastbourne to Wivelsfield against some 22,800 passengers travelling to/from Littlehampton up line to Three Bridges, a comparable journey. This represents a third more in terms of passenger numbers travelling on the East Coastway, yet the West Coastway Littlehampton route has an evening service of 4+ trains per hour against two per hour on the East Coastway down to Lewes, Newhaven, Eastbourne and Bexhill.

17. However, the figures from point 15 above do not include the considerable 'casual' rail use by holiday makers, second home owners, and local workers, an overview of which is provided below:

Eastbourne (figures provided by Eastbourne BC)

- (a) Hotel bookings up 23% on 2008
- (b) 7,500 bedspaces in Eastbourne accommodate tourists, conference delegates etc.
- (c) Value of tourism to Eastbourne = £173m each year
- (d) Employment in tourism- 7500 people
- (e) Over 4,000,000 visitors each year
- (f) 23% increase in bookings via the website from 2008 to 2009
- (g) Conference income £5.5m
- (h) Event income £15m
- (i) 25 Language schools attracting overseas visitors

Bexhill & Hastings (figures provided by Rother DC)

- (j) 23 Visitor Attractions
- (k) 82% of the District is classified as AONB
- (l) 400+ Accommodation providers - including serviced and non serviced properties
- (m) Value of tourism to Rother - over £195 million (Stats are from 2006)
- (n) Tourism in Rother supports 5,647 actual jobs (Stats are from 2006)
- (o) 5,347,689 trips per annum (513,689 staying trips, 4,834,000 day trips) (Stats are from 2006)
- (p) Total number of bed nights in Rother = 2,092,019 (Stats are from 2006)

18. The new timetable resulted in a reduction of 7% in seats during the evening peak period (figures supplied by Southern). The old timetable had 3,122 standard and 336 first class seats in 56 carriages while the new timetable has 2,899 and 312 respectively in 52 carriages.

East Coastway is the only part of the network to suffer a reduction in services and we insist at the very least on the reinstatement of the original seating capacity.

19. Eastbourne Borough Council and Rother Council are unanimous, across the Party divide, that the DfT and Southern Rail has to improve both the capacity and journey times on the service to and from London, and increase capacity on cross-coastal routes. It is their strongly held view that Eastbourne has long received less attention than it deserves from both the DfT and Southern Rail. A recent motion passed unanimously by the full council reads:

'This Council calls upon Southern Rail to urgently review, and then address, the concerns raised by Eastbourne Rail Users, following the recently awarded rail franchise, from the DfT to Southern Rail. These concerns include timetable changes, overcrowding and journey times.'

20. The Dft's White paper of July 2007 '*Delivering a Sustainable Railway*' confirms the Government's policy and commitment to facilitate significant growth and continuing investment. We do not believe that this RUS supports this statement.
21. In view of the timing and significant impact of future rail services in South East England, we strongly recommend that a more co-ordinated approach to both the Sussex and Kent RUS.
22. With regards to the splitting and joining of trains at Haywards Heath, there is reference in point 7.10.3 of the RUS to that it is unlikely this practice be abandoned. We do not accept this, and ask that more serious consideration is given to the practice both in terms of running a faster service up and down the line, and all the alternatives that could be offered with or without this practice, such as diverting the Gatwick Express to Eastbourne.
23. We strongly support and request the re-instatement of the fast Eastbourne service non-stop from East Croydon to Haywards Heath which will reduce journey times by approximately 10 minutes.