

WEST LONDON LINE GROUP

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13 November 2006

Brighton Main Line RUS Implementation Consultation Manager
Department for Transport (Rail)
Great Minster House
Zone 5/27
76 Marsham Street
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Dear Sir or Madam

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BRIGHTON MAIN LINE ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY (RUS) - CONSULTATION DOCUMENT - SEPTEMBER 2006

I am writing on behalf of the West London Line Group in response to your consultation on the above document. The Group regards this document as a significant step forward following the publication of the 'final' Brighton Main Line RUS in February 2006.

The present document is particularly welcomed by this Group insofar as, unlike its predecessors, it does not rely on flawed demand analysis and passenger counts to justify the proposed curtailment of the existing West London Line (WLL) Southern Watford to Brighton service south of Clapham Junction.

Before presenting service development options, the latest consultation document (page 9) accepts the continuing role of cross-Clapham WLL services on the slow lines to East Croydon, in line with the proposals set out in the final Cross London RUS published by Network Rail in August 2006. This acceptance represents a major and welcome advance in DfT and Network Rail thinking and follows a pro-active campaign by the Group and other stakeholders against the Watford-Clapham only proposals promulgated by the former Strategic Rail Authority in the September 2004 draft Brighton Main Line RUS.

Less positively, the document re-iterates the DfT's stated preference that the WLL service should not operate on the fast lines south of Clapham (page 9).

However, we are pleased that one of the proposed service options – namely Option 4 – involves the retention of an hourly Watford – Brighton service on

the fast lines after the morning peak, whilst not precluding WLL services to/from East Croydon before 0945 on weekday mornings.

In our view, Option 4 is justified by: -

1. growth in passenger numbers, including Gatwick Airport – WLL traffic, and that generated by other key recent developments such as Empress State Building at West Brompton;
2. further growth realistically anticipated from new developments along the WLL corridor, including the White City Shopping Centre, the new Wembley Stadium and plans for hundreds more hotel bedspaces;
3. the designation of West Brompton as a tube/rail interchange for Gatwick Airport;
4. the significant and increasing two-way commuter flows throughout the WLL;
5. the opening of Shepherd's Bush WLL station alongside a tube and bus interchange;
6. the impact of the Congestion Charge Zone western extension in diverting traffic from road to rail;
7. the Exhibition Centres at West Brompton (Earls Court) and Kensington Olympia; and
8. the planned withdrawal of the Virgin Cross-Country service between Brighton, the WLL, Birmingham and Manchester.

Recent research by Southern and the Railway Consultancy on behalf of London TravelWatch has confirmed the growing strategic importance of the WLL on the inter-regional and national rail network. We are convinced that, irrespective of the outcome of the Gatwick Express debate, the WLL Watford – Brighton service can and should play an increasingly important strategic role in the rail network without impinging on passenger services or performance elsewhere on the Brighton Main Line

On this basis, the Group: -

1. Supports Option 4 (pages 29 and 30) and does NOT support Options 1, 2 or 3;
2. Supports the restoration of the cross-Clapham morning peak service to and from East Croydon or Selhurst;
3. Requests that the DfT ensures that the service development proposals affecting the WLL in the Brighton Main Line RUS are fully congruent with those proposed by Network Rail in their Cross London RUS and

the forthcoming South London RUS. We note that these include a second train each hour between East Croydon and Shepherd's Bush;

4. Requests that the DfT ensures that Network Rail and the relevant TOCs timetable the Southern WLL and other services such that (i) connections between the Southern WLL and key WCML services are retained, developed and strengthened to a high standard in terms of passenger convenience throughout each traffic day, and (ii) journey times via the WLL are kept to a minimum, to ensure highest passenger satisfaction and optimum stock utilisation;
5. Requests that those responsible effect the restoration of the WLL Southern service at least as far north as Milton Keynes. This is a particular requirement if the proposals relating to the stopping of WCML trains at Watford as from the December 2008/January 2009 timetable are to be implemented, so that the best returns in terms of passenger convenience and network utilisation can be achieved.

We trust that serious consideration will be given to the Group's representations in the development of the Brighton Main Line RUS and I should be very grateful if you would keep me informed on progress on these issues. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

Mark Balaam
Chairman

cc (by e-mail): Peter Foot, DfT
Richard Eccles, Network Rail
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