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FOR COMMUTERS
FROM TONBRIDGE,
PADDOCK WOOD
AND HILDENBOROUGH*

*13 Streamside, Tonbridge, Kent TN10 3PU
<http://www.tonbridgecommuters.org.uk>*

10 September 2012

Tonbridge Line Commuters Response to the Department for Transport's Consultation on the South Eastern Franchise

Tonbridge Line Commuters (TLC) represents passengers travelling from Tonbridge, Paddock Wood and Hildenborough stations. According to the latest available figures from the Office for Rail Regulation a total of 2,870,122 passengers¹ enter our stations each year, with over 2 million passengers entering Tonbridge station alone.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the future of the South Eastern franchise, and trust that the Department will give full and fair consideration to our views, which are informed by our own consultation with our members. In particular, we conducted a full survey of our members over the period November 2010 to early February 2011. A total of 67 members responded, and our report on the results of the survey offers a clear indication of our members' top concerns. A summary of the results of our Members Survey is given as an Appendix to this document.

Our answers to each of the questions in the Department for Transport's consultation are given below. Some of our key points are also summarised at the end of our response.

Q.1 What improvements do stakeholders believe could be made on the combined franchise through partnership working between Network Rail and the new operator?

TLC would greatly welcome a stronger alliance between Network Rail and the operator of the South Eastern franchise. The Integrated Control Centre at Waterloo, with the staff of Network Rail and the operator working alongside each other on a permanent basis, should provide a model for the South Eastern franchise.

A major improvement resulting from Network Rail and operator working in partnership would be a step change in the accuracy and timeliness of information at times of disruption. Better management of services following severe service disruption (for example, as a result of a fire on the line or winter weather) was the number one concern identified by our members in our Members Survey (see Appendix). We note that the rebuilding of London Bridge during the timeframe of this franchise has the potential to lead to severe disruption, both planned and unplanned. It is essential that Network Rail and the operator work very closely together to minimise the effect of such disruption on passengers. Staff in the Control Room must take a passenger centred approach when dealing with disruption, and not the train centred approach currently favoured. Giving clear information to passengers should be a top priority.

¹ Office for Rail Regulation station usage data relating to the financial year 2010-11, the latest available (<http://www.rail-reg.gov.uk/server/show/nav.1529>)



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Another potential benefit of stronger partnership working would be better planning of routine engineering works. Network Rail currently seems to have a silo mentality with regard to engineering works on various routes, with the result that it is not unusual for both routes from Tonbridge to London (via Sevenoaks and via Redhill) to be blockaded on the same day. We believe that keeping passengers on trains, rather than buses, should be a greater priority. This is another example of how a joined up railway should think more in terms of the needs of passengers, rather than in terms of operational convenience.

Q.2 What, if any, changes to South Eastern services need to be made given the likely changes in demand?

We are not in a position to comment on services from Abbey Wood and Woolwich. However, we note that many commuters now work in Docklands and Stratford and welcome the greater access that Crossrail will give to these locations. It is important that Thameslink services offer easy interchange to Crossrail. Passengers from West Kent should have the option of reaching East London destinations by straightforward changes at London Bridge and Farringdon.

Q.3 Are consultees aware of any other rail or non-rail development schemes that might affect the new franchise?

We are aware of several housing developments, including:

- Approximately 600 new homes at Paddock Wood by 2026²
- 320 homes at Marden and nearly 200 each at Staplehurst and Headcorn, again by 2026³
- 11,000 new homes at Ashford by 2016 as part of the South East Plan.⁴ Moreover, Ashford Future, the agency overseeing the town's development, predicts the population will double by 2030 with 31,000 new homes.⁵

All these developments will increase demand on the mainline between Ashford International and Charing Cross, strengthening the case for long term increases in capacity on this core route. We believe that the Department should model the likely effect on demand over time, and factor this into the specification of this and future franchises.

There also remains the possibility of a second runway at Gatwick Airport, making it an even more desirable destination from Kent. As we argue later, direct services from Kent to Gatwick Airport must be restored.

² Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Core Strategy (2010)

³ Maidstone Borough Council's Core Strategy (2012)

⁴ Ashford Borough Council's Organisational Assessment (2009)

⁵ BBC News report dated 23 May 2010 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/kent/8699510.stm>)



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Q.4 What increments or decrements to the specification would stakeholders wish to see and how would these be funded?

Our ideas for new services, in other words service increments, are outlined in our response to this question. Proposed changes to existing services are discussed in our response to Question 6.

Three ideas are outlined below, the first two of which are high priorities for our members.

(i) Direct services between Kent and Gatwick (under the South Eastern franchise)

In December 2008 the Tonbridge to Redhill line was transferred from the South Eastern franchise to Southern and direct services to Gatwick Airport were lost. The service was reduced from two trains per hour, one to London and one to Gatwick, to just one train to London each hour.

In accordance with the results of our Members Survey, we believe that the restoration of direct services from Kent to Gatwick Airport is a key priority and that the line should be transferred back to the South Eastern franchise to facilitate this. Our specific reasons for wishing the line to return to the South Eastern franchise are as follows:

- If the line is absorbed into the South Eastern franchise then services on the line can be more easily combined with other services within the South Eastern franchise area, improving connections between Kent destinations and those in Sussex.
- We believe a South Eastern franchisee would also be more likely to show greater commitment to a through service between Kent and Gatwick Airport.
- Transferring the line to the South Eastern franchise would facilitate driver training so that the line could be used as a diversionary route to London when the direct line via Sevenoaks is blocked.

Instead of restoring the stopping service between Tonbridge and Gatwick Airport, we propose that there should be a new semi-fast service between Gatwick Airport and Ashford International via Redhill and Tonbridge. Between Redhill and Ashford these trains would only stop at a limited number of stations. Tonbridge would definitely be served, and we are open to calls other major stations such as Edenbridge, Paddock Wood and Staplehurst. There is a balance to be struck between serving stations which might contribute to demand and ensuring that the service is fast enough to be an attractive alternative to driving.

Kent is currently the only county in the South-East which has no through train service to and from Gatwick. The M25 and M23 are frequently congested and a direct train service would help to alleviate this as well as giving Gatwick passengers coming from Kent (previously estimated by the operator of Gatwick Airport to number about 3 million a year) an additional option for travel to and from the airport.



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Incoming holidaymakers would also benefit as Tonbridge, a historic town in its own right, has convenient connections for the spa town of Tunbridge Wells, and Ashford has good connections for Canterbury and Dover; both stations also have good connections to other likely holiday and business destinations in Kent (and parts of East Sussex). In the other direction, Gatwick provides a good interchange for many destinations on the South Coast.

Our proposal would result in several economic benefits:

- Easier travel to Gatwick would be a major boost for businesses based on Kent.
- Increased incoming tourism to destinations in Kent.
- Alleviating congestion on the M23 and M25 would reduce the number of working hours lost by delays and also cut down pollution caused by road traffic.

Rather than requiring additional funding through subsidy, we believe that the semi-fast service proposed would be potentially profitable. There is an untapped market for such a service, which would be more attractive to passengers than the slow service to Gatwick which was lost in December 2008. Provided the service is properly publicised, it has potential to generate additional revenue by properly utilising pre-existing assets.

(ii) Boxing Day services

Up until Christmas 2009 Southeastern provided a reasonable Boxing Day service on its core routes, including an hourly service between London and Ashford via Tonbridge. This service was not specified in the franchise agreement, but was instead run as a commercial operation. From Christmas 2010 the service disappeared, without public explanation.

Investigations by TLC revealed that the Revenue Support mechanism within the existing franchise agreement was primarily to blame. As the Department will be aware, this comes into play when a train company's revenue falls significantly below the targets in the franchise agreement. This happened to Southeastern in April 2010, with the mechanism providing additional public subsidy to the operator from that date. This has the effect of disincentivising the operator from generating fare revenue. In fact, in the words of Southeastern Managing Director Charles Horton, the Revenue Support system "creates a situation whereby any revenue generating scheme needs to achieve a rate of return in excess of 5:1 to be viable financially".⁶ In other words, it places the company in a similar position to someone who finds it more lucrative to be on benefits than to find a job.

The upshot is that the Boxing Day service has become artificially unprofitable since Christmas 2010, when Revenue Support became part of the equation. This creates a rather unpalatable situation for would-be passengers. In themselves, the services are profitable or at the very least break-even. However, because of Revenue Support it is better for the company not to run them and keep its hands on the taxpayer's money. This is a lose-lose situation for both the passenger and the taxpayer.

⁶ Letter from Charles Horton to Sir John Stanley MP dated 5 January 2011



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Our understanding is that the Department is seeking to introduce alternatives to the existing Revenue Support and Revenue Share arrangements. We would strongly encourage the Department not to place the existing Revenue Support provisions into the new South Eastern franchise, as these provisions force the operator to behave in a non-commercial way to the detriment of its passengers. We believe that greater commercial risk, alongside commercial opportunity, should be carried by the private company rather than the taxpayer.

In order to ensure that Boxing Day services resume under the new franchise, we urge that they should be specified in the franchise agreement. Previous experience shows that Boxing Day services on core routes would break even or be profitable, especially if properly publicised. Boxing Day is now a major day for shopping and sport, creating significant demand for travel. It is perverse for the railway not to tap into this demand.

The key Boxing Day service we wish to specify is an hourly service between London and Ashford International, calling at key stations including Orpington, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Paddock Wood and Staplehurst. However, it would be sensible to specify all services that ran successfully up until Christmas 2009. For reference, these are as follows⁷:

- London to Ashford International via Tonbridge and return (hourly)
- London to Orpington via Herne Hill and return (half hourly)
- London to Slade Green via Lewisham and Woolwich Arsenal and return (hourly)
- London to Slade Green via Lewisham and Bexleyheath and return (hourly)

This “increment” would be self-funding, as the service has been demonstrated to be at least break-even.

(iii) Night-time services between London and Ashford International

Globalisation of commerce has brought about an increasingly 24-hour society and more and more office staff, such as computer specialists and market traders, start work early and/or work well into the night. Running a core train service through the night would enable them a realistic chance of a reasonably relaxing train journey to work or home rather than having to drive their cars at a time when most people would normally be asleep. (Many commuters use the train journey for catching up on sleep.)

Night-time services would also be a boost to shift workers on relatively low pay, such as nurses and other health workers. Such workers are currently forced to live near the centre of London, where the cost of living is prohibitively expensive. Providing more night-time services would give them the option of cheaper accommodation, with perhaps low priced “night-time” season tickets offering an affordable commute.

⁷ Level of service run on 26 December 2008, taken from an archived version of the Southeastern website accessed using the Way Back Machine Internet Archive (<http://archive.org/web/web.php>)



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As an initial step in this direction, we suggest introducing an hourly night-time service between London Charing Cross and Ashford International calling at key stations including Orpington, Sevenoaks and Tonbridge. Trialling night-time services on this route would have several advantages:

- It is a core route serving major centres of population, and therefore likely to be the most financially viable route for a night-time service.
- Services already start very early and finish very late, incorporating empty stock movements between Tonbridge and Ashford (in particular, the 00:15 service from Charing Cross runs empty from Tonbridge to Ashford). It is more efficient to keep the trains in service rather than sending them to the depot for only two or three hours.

In short, we believe that there is an untapped market which could be captured with suitable publicity, and that the service would be an efficient use of existing capacity. This increment would not necessarily need funding, as there is compelling evidence that it could be profitable on this core route. The idea of 24 hour services attracted a significant amount of support in our Members Survey.

Q.5 Which aspects of the specification, other than those services operating on the HS1 network, would stakeholders wish to see mandated and which aspects of the specification could be left to the discretion of the operator?

Tonbridge Line Commuters understands the Department's aspiration to allow operators the right degree of commercial freedom. For that reason we believe that some aspects of the service should be left to discretion of the operator. In our opinion that would include:

- Provision of on-board catering
- Provision of first class accommodation

However, many aspects of the service do need to be mandated in order to protect the interests of passengers, particularly for commuters in what is effectively a captive market. We have set out these aspects below.

(i) Frequency of trains

The train service specification must set out the frequency of trains on each route, and that frequency should be at least the current frequency. The route would define the London terminal in each case, as it is greatly disruptive to passengers if the operator switches the London terminal served. Many commuters base their choice of home on easy access to a particular part of London.

Attention must be paid to service frequencies during the rebuilding of London Bridge. Our particular concern is what will happen during the period January 2015 to April 2016, when we understand at least some Charing Cross trains may be unable to call at London Bridge. Given that Cannon Street services to Hildenborough, Tonbridge and Paddock Wood only



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operate in peak hours, we are concerned about how passengers from London Bridge would reach our stations outside peak hours.

(ii) Days of operation (including Boxing Day service)

The specification must make clear the days on which services operate, including the level of service on weekends and public holidays.

It is important that a service on Boxing Day is mandated, including hourly trains between London and Ashford International. This service would call at major stations including Orpington, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Paddock Wood and Staplehurst. As explained in our answer to Question 4, such a service ran on a commercial basis up until Christmas 2009, when the perverse influence of the Revenue Support arrangements made it artificially unprofitable. Our answer to question 4 outlines the other routes where a Boxing Day service ought to run, in line with the previous service offered.

(iii) Hours of operation

Train services must run for at least the existing number of hours each day. Rather than stating the exact time of the first and last train, we believe this should be specified as follows:

- The latest time by which the first train of the day is required to reach its London terminal (or other destination)
- The earliest time by which the last train of the day leaves its London terminal (or other point of origin)

As set out in our response to Question 4, we also propose an hourly night-time service between London Charing Cross and Ashford International via Tonbridge.

(iv) Journey times

Maximum journey times must be specified in the franchise agreement. As shown by our Members Survey, passengers from our stations want quicker services. The following journey times, amongst others, should be specified:

- London Bridge to Tonbridge in under 30 minutes
- Charing Cross to Tonbridge in 35 minutes
- Tonbridge to Ashford International in under 30 minutes (in 2010 fast services only took 22 minutes; the new Gatwick Airport to Ashford semi-fast service we propose should bring back a reasonably fast service between Tonbridge and Ashford)

In proposing these journey time improvements, we are not suggesting that any current station stops should be omitted. Rather, services should be speeded up removing the “padding” from the timetable which has crept in over many years and leads to services being unnecessarily slow. We take the point that padding can occasionally aid operational robustness, but we believe that much of the padding in the existing timetable lengthens journey times for no discernible benefit. Padding is ultimately a waste of capacity, and



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therefore a waste of time and money for the railway. It increased under the old Passenger Charter scheme, which encouraged train operators to make trains “on time” by making them slower. Under the new “Delay Repay” scheme this negative incentive no longer exists in the same way. All instances of padding should be looked at critically to see what tangible reliability benefits, if any, they bring.

A further point about padding is the misleading information currently included in the public timetable concerning arrival times at terminal stations. To pick a glaring example of this, all journeys between Waterloo East and Charing Cross take 3 minutes in the working timetable (the schedule the trains actually operate to). However, in the public timetable trains between Waterloo East and Charing Cross are shown as taking at least 4 minutes and in some cases 6 minutes. Such misleading information dates from the days of the Passenger Charter scheme, when it was beneficial for the operator to make trains artificially “on time” by padding arrival times in the public timetable. This should surely no longer be necessary under the Delay Repay scheme, as compensation is only due if a particular train is 30 minutes or more late. The franchise agreement should put an end to this somewhat disreputable practice by stating that, for example, all trains between Waterloo East and Charing Cross should be shown as taking 3 minutes, the time it actually takes. “Terminal padding” should itself be terminated!

(v) Connection Protection and Skip Stops

Under current arrangements the franchisee is encouraged to keep trains on time in all circumstances, regardless of whether the passenger will be inconvenienced. There are two main circumstances in which this happens:

- Services which are running late “skip stop” certain stations in order to get them back on time. For example, an Ashford to Charing Cross service might skip Paddock Wood if it is running late. The train arrives “on time” at Charing Cross despite it having been cancelled as far as Paddock Wood passengers are concerned!
- If a mainline train is running late then connecting trains are often not held, in order to keep them “on time”. For example, a train from Paddock Wood to Maidstone West might depart on time, but without most of its potential passengers because the connecting mainline train has been delayed and missed the connection.

In both these circumstances the franchise agreement and the associated performance measurement regime must be specified to make the operator behave in a way which is in the interests of its passengers rather than its statistics.

(vi) Types of rolling stock

Passengers on our line place a high priority on the quality of the seats provided on services. In fact, our Members Survey showed that “replacing carriages with 5 seats per row to carriages with 4 seats per row” was rated 6 out of a total of 22 ideas for improving the rail travelling experience. Consequently, we believe the franchise agreement should specify that



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all Dover and Hastings trains consist of carriages with 2 by 2 seating, as opposed to the 3 by 2 per row seating on some services at present.

This requirement may seem to contradict our demands for greater train capacity. However, to quote two comments from our Members Survey, “the middle seat of 3 is very uncomfortable” and so “people often prefer to stand than to sit in the middle seat anyway”. Even at times of low demand, there is a marked difference in comfort between Class 375 trains with 2 by 2 seating, and the Class 375/9 trains with high density 3 by 2 seating. We propose that the class 375/9 trains are converted to 2 by 2 seating, leading to a step change in comfort levels with little loss of useful capacity.

(vii) Standing times

Current franchises include a guideline that no passenger should have to stand for more than twenty minutes. This should be strengthened to ensure that mainline passengers should not need to stand at the start of their journeys back from London. For example, at present a passenger from London Bridge to Tonbridge might have to stand until Chelsfield at which point a seat will become available. This is regarded as acceptable because the standing time to Chelsfield is only 19 minutes. However, the point is that no passenger paying the high price of a season ticket from Sevenoaks or Tonbridge should have to stand when boarding a train from London.

(viii) Fares (including season ticket prices)

Most commuters have no choice about how to travel and must not be exploited by either the operator or the Department for Transport.

Fare increases should be restricted to $RPI+x\%$ **over the previous year's actual fares** and not based on the repeated application of the $RPI+x\%$ formula to a **notional figure based on farebox revenue** and fixed at the start of the franchise. This allows a Train Operating Company with weak farebox revenue to apply $RPI+x\%$ to almost every station on the network, leading to average regulated ticket price increases far higher than the formula would suggest. This happened on Southeastern in January 2010.

Of course, it is imperative that fare increases over and above RPI are scrapped altogether as soon as possible. Season ticket prices should be benchmarked against those of similar distance destinations in the UK and Western Europe (for example, commuter routes in Paris and Amsterdam).

(ix) Duty of consultation

Finally, we propose that the franchise agreement places a formal duty on the operator to consult appropriately with its passengers and organisations representing passengers. This would include:



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- A requirement for direct consultation with passengers before any substantial change to the timetable (alongside the lines of the December 2012 Timetable Consultation recently undertaken by Southeastern).
- An obligation to recognise and consult with local Rail User Groups (such as Tonbridge Line Commuters) by:
 - Sending a representative to the Rail User Group's Annual General Meeting.
 - Offering to meet the committee of each Rail User Group on at least a quarterly basis.

Such consultation is in the best interests of the operator, but should be enshrined in the franchise agreement.

Q.6 What changes to services would stakeholders propose, why and would these provide economic benefit?

Our ideas for new (or, in some cases, reinstated) services are given in our answer to Question 4 above. Our response to the present question outlines some relatively minor adjustments to current service patterns which would be of great benefit to passengers in the area of West Kent we represent. The suggestions below are largely cost neutral and suitable for inclusion in the franchise specification without unduly affecting the operator's commercial freedom.

(i) Sunday service from Hildenborough

Hildenborough currently has a poor Sunday service, consisting of one train in each direction each hour (xx:48 down and xx:42 up). These calls are made by Ashford line services, whereas calls Monday to Saturday are made by Tunbridge Wells services.

We propose that the service specification should stipulate a half hourly Sunday service at Hildenborough in both directions. Our preference, though it may be left to the operator to decide, is that the calls should be made by Hastings line services rather than Ashford line services. This aspiration would have several economic benefits:

- A more frequent service at Hildenborough would encourage leisure traffic that might otherwise go by car.
- The opportunity for Hildenborough passengers to travel to Tunbridge Wells on Sundays without changing trains would promote Tunbridge Wells as local destination, including for shopping and tourism. We believe there is far more demand for travel from Hildenborough to Tunbridge Wells than to Ashford, and that it is logical that the same "down" destination should be provided seven days a week.
- Promotion of the Ashford line by providing a more regular "clockface" timetable, by removing the anomalous hourly call at Hildenborough.

We also suggest that the late evening Saturday timetable should provide two trains per hour at Hildenborough in both directions, rather than a single train each hour as at present. It is



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anomalous to have two trains per hour on weekday evenings and only one on Saturday evenings, when demand on Saturday evenings is higher than on most weekdays (the possible exception being Fridays).

(ii) Early morning connections to Eurostar services at Ashford International

Early morning departures to Ashford currently offer very poor connections to Eurostar services. After much lobbying, Eurostar now runs a direct service from Ashford to Brussels, departing at 07:24 each morning (Monday to Friday). Unfortunately, the only down train which connects with this service is the 04:50 Tonbridge to Ramsgate service, which arrives at Ashford at 05:27, slightly less than an hour and a half before the required Eurostar check-in – an unpalatably long wait. The following service from Tonbridge to Ashford leaves Tonbridge at 06:20, a full 90 minutes after the earlier train, and arrives at Ashford at 06:58, just too late for the Eurostar check in.

We require a train which arrives at Ashford approximately 40-45 minutes before the Brussels train departs, say arriving at Ashford at around 06:45. There are various ways in which this could be specified in the franchise, though all that is required in practice is to run the 06:20 from Tonbridge (05:30 ex-Charing Cross) slightly earlier, in the process providing a new Eurostar connection for passengers at Orpington, Sevenoaks and Hildenborough. A straightforward approach might be to state in the service specification that the first train from Charing Cross to Ashford must arrive at Ashford by 06:45.

This proposal would promote business and leisure travel to Brussels from a wide range Kent stations. Specifically, it would make day trips to Brussels possible from stations right along the line from Orpington to Pluckley. Day trips are a key part of business travel, and this small and cost neutral change would therefore bring significant economic benefit.

(iii) Journey times on the Hastings line

Since the start of domestic High Speed services from St Pancras to Ashford International, the classic mainline effectively runs from Charing Cross to Hastings rather Charing Cross to Ashford. However, in the off peak timetable faster trains between London and Tonbridge are still run on the Ashford line, rather than on the Hastings line. This does not make sense, since passengers on the Hastings line do not have option of using High Speed services.

We suggest that the Orpington stops on the two Hastings services each hour are transferred to Ashford line services. This would have several economic advantages:

- A faster off-peak service from Tunbridge Wells to London, encouraging leisure travel from Tunbridge Wells to the capital and vice-versa. This benefit also applies to stations further down the Hastings line, which currently suffer from very slow journey times.
- New journey opportunities from Orpington to stations on the Ashford line, including on to Canterbury, Dover and Ramsgate.



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One argument which might be made against this proposal is that direct journeys from Orpington to Hastings line stations will no longer be possible. However, trains starting from or terminating at Tunbridge Wells would still call at Orpington. As well as maintaining a direct service between Orpington and Tunbridge Wells, this would ensure that Orpington passengers could easily change at Tunbridge Wells for destinations further down the Hastings line.

(iv) Shoulder evening peak service from London to Tonbridge

The evening peak on the London to Tonbridge mainline caters well for passengers leaving work between about 5pm and 6pm, but quite poorly for those travelling later. This is probably a hangover from a more 9 to 5 age, but does not reflect the needs of today's commuters. In particular, services from Charing Cross following the 18:21 are slow and poorly spaced. Whereas the 18:21 takes 39 minutes between Charing Cross and Tonbridge, the next four departures all take 44 minutes or longer.

We have made specific representations to the current operator about the spacing of services, including about the 18:45 service from Charing Cross to Hastings, which is timetabled only 4 minutes after the 18:41 to Ramsgate and is frequently delayed. While responsibility for resolving such poor pieces of timetable planning rests primarily with the operator and Network Rail, we believe that the service specification could encourage the operator to do better by:

- Specifying a minimum number of "fast" departures for each of the three hours of the evening peak (16:00 to 19:00)
- Specifying that such services should take no longer than 38 minutes

A fast and evenly spaced service on the Southeastern mainline makes would make commuting to London a more attractive option from passengers from West Kent, delivering economic benefits to both London and Kent. We recognise that there are currently some timetable constraints, but these should ultimately be alleviated by the redesign of London Bridge and the surrounding tracks. We strongly urge that this increase in capacity should result in faster specified journey times, rather than more "padding" for the train operator (see our answer to Question 5 above). Our aspiration would be for regular Charing Cross to Tonbridge journey times of 35 minutes or less from January 2018, including throughout the evening peak.

(v) Late evening services from Charing Cross to Tonbridge

As with the later evening peak, a problem exists in the spacing of mainline departures from Charing Cross from 21:00 onwards. At this point the service moves from six trains an hour to only five.

As uncovered by research by TLC, five trains an hour would suggest a headway (gap in departures and arrivals) of only 12 minutes. Unfortunately, the timetable is constructed in such a way that there are gaps in arrival at Tonbridge of up to 25 minutes. This is caused by timetabling the slowest departure in the hour (xx:30) a long time after one of the fastest trains



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each hour (xx:10) and the absence of a departure in between (in the day it would be at xx:15). We have suggested a potential solution to the current operator, involving retiming the Tunbridge Wells trains.

In terms of the franchise specification, the operator could be encouraged to resolve this problem by either:

- Specifying that there should be six services in the late evening period (21:00 to 23:45), to match the daytime service.
- Specifying that headways (eg arrivals at Tonbridge) should be reasonably even. The current Saturday evening service consists of only four trains an hour, but is in many ways preferable to the poorly spaced weekday service of five trains an hour.

A better designed late evening timetable would be a significant driver of leisure travel to and from London, such as theatre trips. These trips are currently discouraged by the timetable lottery encountered by passengers arriving at Charing Cross – arriving at Charing Cross from the theatre a minute later can lead to a passenger getting back home 25 minutes later (despite the relatively high number of trains per hour).

(vi) Through running between Redhill and Strood via Tonbridge and Maidstone West

Currently there two services which regularly terminate at Tonbridge:

- An hourly service from London Bridge to Tonbridge via Redhill (run by Southern)
- An hourly service from Strood to Tonbridge via Maidstone West (run by Southeastern; in the rush hours, these services currently turn back at Paddock Wood)

In line with our view that the Tonbridge to Redhill line should become part of the South Eastern franchise, as described in our response to Question 4 above, we propose that these services should be combined into a single hourly service which runs as follows: Victoria-Redhill-Tonbridge-Maidstone West-Strood. This service would operate under the South Eastern franchise and would call at all stations between Redhill and Strood. We envisage that it would run throughout the day, including in rush hours (though we appreciate that the flat junctions at Tonbridge and Paddock Wood are an operational challenge).

This service pattern would have several economic advantages:

- The creation of many new direct journey opportunities, such as Redhill to Maidstone West and Paddock Wood to East Croydon.
- More effective utilisation of rolling stock, by reducing the time trains spend sitting at Tonbridge station.

A further operational benefit would be reduced occupation of platform space at Tonbridge. Currently Platform 1 is occupied much of the time by trains terminating from the Redhill and Maidstone West lines. This leads to a lack of flexibility in times of disruption. For example,



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when a Charing Cross bound train fails or is deliberately held in Platform 2, then Platform 1 cannot be used as an alternative platform for other London departures.

We propose switching the London terminus for this service from London Bridge to Victoria. This would have several benefits:

- Eliminating confusion at Tonbridge for passengers travelling to London Bridge (at present passengers for London Bridge might mistakenly board a service to London Bridge via Redhill, not realising that taking a Charing Cross or Cannon Street service will get them to their destination quicker).
- Providing an alternative London destination for passengers from Edenbridge and Tonbridge, who have other more direct services to London Bridge (from Edenbridge Town or via the Sevenoaks mainline).
- Providing direct services to Clapham Junction, an extremely useful interchange for services on the South West Trains network.

All in all, combining the two services and swapping the terminus from London Bridge to Victoria is more efficient for the railway and better for passengers. We would emphasise that the proposed Victoria-Strood service via Redhill and Tonbridge would operate in addition to the new Ashford to Gatwick via Redhill service that we propose in our response to Question 4 above. This would restore two trains per hour to the Tonbridge to Redhill line.

Q.7 Do respondents feel that there are other destinations that domestic high speed services could serve that would support regional and national economic growth?

We do not feel there is any compelling case for expansion at the current time. However, we do support Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council's suggestion that HS1 services between Maidstone West and St Pancras should call at Snodland station. Demand from Snodland is set to increase because of developments planned in the Medway Valley area. Moreover, from our point of view, an improved service from Snodland would discourage commuters from driving across the Borough to catch rail services from Paddock Wood and Tonbridge. Such "railheading" is a frequent practice on our line, due to the poor services on other local lines.

Q.8 How might better use be made of the capacity currently available?

Overcrowding is a significant issue on Southeastern, including for passengers on our line. While passengers at Paddock Wood, Tonbridge and Hildenborough usually obtain a seat on their morning journeys into London this is not always true when they make the reverse journey at the end of the day. While passengers boarding at Charing Cross and Cannon Street will normally get a seat, those boarding at Waterloo East and London Bridge quite often have to stand. For example, the 18:21 service from Charing Cross to Tonbridge often has passengers standing from Waterloo East to Sevenoaks, a journey time of 28 minutes.



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The real capacity issue is the number of train pathways, which are limited by the Network Rail infrastructure. We recognise that track is expensive to increase. However, lengthening trains is a relatively cheap way of increasing the passenger capacity of existing lines and alleviating overcrowding. Most stations on the Tonbridge mainline have sufficient platform capacity for 12 carriage trains, and selective door opening can be used for the few stations with shorter platforms. We therefore recommend that:

- The majority of rush hour services from Paddock Wood, Tonbridge and Hildenborough should be formed of 12 carriage trains, rather than a mixture of 8, 10, 11 and 12 carriages as at present.
- There should be a critical evaluation of which trains are busy and which have spare capacity. For example, loadings on trains between 18:00 and 19:00 are often considerably greater than between 17:00 and 18:00.

In the lifetime of the new franchise additional Class 375 units should be obtained so that a greater number of rush hour services can consist of 12 carriages. We feel that there is no justifiable reason for the Department for Transport not to fully support this investment, given the extremely high level of fares on our line compared to similar routes and the affordability of new rolling stock compared to new track.

Q.9 What steps might bidders be expected to take to meet passenger demand and what might be the most appropriate mechanisms for managing demand?

As outlined in our answer to Question 8 above, we believe that the key way of meeting demand should be to run more 12 carriage trains in the rush hour. The operator should also be encouraged to make regular checks on loadings and allow for seasonal variations (such as school holidays).

In terms of managing demand, the operator should be encouraged to provide appropriate (but not overly restrictive) fare reductions to encourage use of lightly loaded services. Our position on demand based pricing is outlined in our response to Question 20 below.

Q.10 What destinations on the current South Eastern network do respondents think should be served by Thameslink core services and what is the rationale for those services?

We broadly support the conclusions reached by the timetable planning exercise that has been completed. Direct rush hour services to and from Cannon Street are extremely valuable to passengers at Paddock Wood, Tonbridge and Hildenborough and we would not wish to lose these services, nor any Charing Cross services, in order to have Thameslink trains. We understand that on the completion of the Thameslink Programme London Bridge will be served by Thameslink services all day, including in the rush hours (such trains running to and from Southern destinations such as Brighton). Our view is that these services will provide



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sufficiently easy connections for Southeastern passengers travelling to and from Thameslink destinations, including Blackfriars, Farringdon and St Pancras.

A particular problem facing our line is the practice of passengers from the Maidstone East line driving to stations such as Tonbridge and Paddock Wood in order to catch direct services to the City. This “railheading” occurs because very few services are provided from Maidstone East line stations to and from Blackfriars. For this reason, we would greatly welcome the expansion of Thameslink core services to Maidstone East. However, this should be in addition to, and not at the expense of, the current service which operates on the Maidstone East line to Victoria. Removing the Victoria services will merely result in Maidstone East line passengers railheading to our line to obtain alternative West End services. This would only exacerbate crowding on services through Tonbridge.

Q.11 What improvements would respondents like to see made to other South Eastern services, what is the rationale for them and would these provide economic benefit?

We have already outlined a series of possible improvements to South Eastern services in our responses to Question 4 (proposed increments to the service specification) and Question 6 (proposed changes to existing services). Below we have summarised our proposals, to provide a line by line overview.

(A) South Eastern mainline (London to Ashford/Hastings via Sevenoaks & Tonbridge)

We propose that:

- There should be a **Boxing Day service** of one train per hour in each direction between Charing Cross and Ashford serving Paddock Wood and Tonbridge. Such a service ran on a commercial basis up until December 2009, after which the operator was forced not to run it as a result of the perverse influence of the Revenue Support mechanism within the franchise agreement. The service should now be specified in the new franchise agreement.
- **Hildenborough** should have two trains per hour in each direction on Sundays, and these calls should be made by Hastings line trains instead of Ashford line trains. The late evening Saturday timetable should also provide two trains per an hour for Hildenborough.
- It should be specified that a train from Charing Cross to Ashford must arrive at Ashford by 06:45 in order to provide a connection to the early morning **Eurostar** departure to Brussels.
- Off-peak Hastings line **stops at Orpington** should be transferred to Ashford line services.
- **Spacing of services** should be improved and **faster journey times** provided by removing unnecessary padding. Specific concerns addressed in our answers above include:
 - Poor spacing and slowness of services from Charing Cross to Tonbridge in the later evening peak (18:00 to 19:00)
 - Poor spacing of late evening services from Charing Cross to Tonbridge (21:00 onwards)



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- Consideration should be given to an **all night service** between Charing Cross and Ashford International via Sevenoaks and Tonbridge.

(B) Redhill and Maidstone West lines

We would like see the Tonbridge to Redhill line reintegrated into the South Eastern franchise. The main benefit of such a change would be easy through running of services from this line on to the rest of the South Eastern network. Our vision is for two services to run as follows:

- A semi-fast service running Gatwick Airport-Redhill-Tonbridge-Ashford International. This service would call only at a limited number of stations between Redhill and Ashford (Tonbridge, and perhaps also Edenbridge, Paddock Wood and Staplehurst).
- A service running Victoria-Redhill-Tonbridge-Maidstone West-Strood, and operating throughout the day (including in rush hours). This service would call at all stations between Redhill and Strood.

Both these services would operate hourly in both directions, combining to restore a half hourly service between Tonbridge and Redhill. This overall proposal would rejuvenate the Redhill and Maidstone West lines by:

- Creating a strong and economically viable service between Kent and Gatwick Airport, exploiting the substantial latent demand for rail travel between Kent and our nearest major airport.
- Providing many new through journey opportunities between stations on the Maidstone West line and those on the Redhill line.
- Allowing the network to operate more efficiently by removing the need for services to terminate at Tonbridge.

In short, we believe that our proposals would provide a major boost to the local economy as well as making efficient use of existing rail capacity. The combined Victoria-Strood service would be cheaper to run than two separate services, and we believe that the proposed new semi-fast Ashford-Gatwick service has the potential to be profitable rather than requiring further subsidy.

Q.12 Do respondents feel that Folkestone Harbour branch line and station should be kept open and maintained or would the rail industry be better investing the monies in other rail schemes?

We are not in a position to comment on this matter, and would suggest that the views of those in the Folkestone area should be sought.

Q.13 How would you like to see performance information published?

Data should be made available in two sources:



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(i) It should be available on web. Any raw data must be downloadable in CSV or XLS format. Raw data would be made available in daily files. Data must be available for at least 2 years. Aggregated data must also be presented on web.

(ii) It should be available in printed format at stations. Aggregated data must be available for viewing at each station, for example in poster format. This is important because some people do not have access to the internet, and all passengers should be able to see key performance data.

Q.14 How frequent should its publication be?

Information on the web should be updated automatically dependent on the time resolution of the data. For example, weekly reports should be published weekly. There should be a maximum latency time of 72 hours. For instance, a weekly report covering the period 1st to 8th June should be published on the internet by 11th June.

Printed data at stations should be published on a monthly basis with a maximum of 7 days latency.

Q.15 What level of disaggregation of performance do you believe is reasonable?

There should be **full** transparency on the performance of the rail network. This would result in data being made available at various levels of disaggregation:

(i) Raw data for every **scheduled** station stop. The following data should be provided: station code, unique trip identifier, scheduled departure date and time, observed arrival and departure date and time, train ID.

(ii) Performance metrics for each line on a weekly and monthly basis.

(iii) Annual performance metrics for the franchise.

(iv) Information about the causes of all incidents that resulted in a delay to the journey. It should be possible to relate this automatically to the raw data described in item (i).

Q.16 What are the priorities that respondents consider should be taken into account with providing passenger experience of using these services?

TLC has undertaken detailed research into our members' top priorities for improving passenger experience. Our Members Survey established the following factors as the top priorities for our members:

- Better management of services following severe disruption (eg fire on the line or snow)
- Cheaper fares



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- Improved services to particular named destinations (especially Gatwick Airport)
- Train information provision (real time and printed)
- Reduce likelihood of having to stand for parts of the journey (ie providing more capacity)
- Replace carriages which have 5 seats per row to carriages with 4 seats per row
- Cheaper car parks
- Cleaner carriages and toilets
- Shorter journey times

These factors all scored more than 200 points in our survey. The methodology of the survey is explained in the Appendix to this document, together with a more detailed summary of the results.

Several themes emerge from these findings:

- There is serious concern at the **increasing cost** of using the railway, whether through ever more expensive fares or the extortionate cost of car parking.
- **Provision of information**, particularly in times of disruption, is a key concern. As noted in our response to Question 1, the potential disruption caused by the rebuilding of London Bridge makes this a key factor for the new franchise.
- The **comfort and speed of journeys** is important to our members (see our response to Question 5 for more detailed comments on these factors).

Finally, we would make the case for a greater level of consultation with passengers about their needs. It is best to ask passengers what their concerns are, as exemplified by our Members Survey. This should be a greater priority for the operator and the Department.

Q.17 What do stakeholders see as the most important factors in improving security (actual or perceived) and addressing any gap between the two?

The key factors are as follows:

- Staff presence in stations – ideally the staff should be able to both provide ticket information **and** monitor platforms
- Ticket office opening times – these should not be reduced, because the full range of tickets is not available from ticket vending machines and passengers rely on the knowledge of ticket clerks.
- CCTV – real time CCTV is required at stations and normal CCTV should be installed on all trains.

Q.18 What is important to stakeholders in the future use and improvements in stations?

Stations are the key selling points for train operators. As such they need to be attractive, well-signposted and welcoming to all passengers. Once in the station passengers need to



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feel that they are in a safe environment. Train departure information must be clear, or easy to access in the event of disruption. Tonbridge in particular is a major junction where many travellers change trains. Hitherto there has been a marked lack of seating available for such passengers, which is only now being addressed. Information at the station needs to be wide-ranging and clear, with a permanent staff presence.

Finally, toilet facilities should be provided at stations and toilets should not be locked up on the grounds of preventing vandalism. Instead, a proper inspection regime will ensure that they remain clean, safe and usable at all times of the day.

Q.19 What priorities would respondents give to car parking and cycling facilities at locations where these are fully used?

Stations are essentially interchanges with other modes and this needs to be made as convenient as possible. While car parking is the most important in terms of numbers, and facilities need to be adequate for peak demand, we should be encouraging the use of other modes such as bus and cycling, and make interchange with these modes attractive. Cycle stands (not boxes) in secure areas such as station platforms are preferred, and spaces for motorcycles should not be forgotten. It should also be borne in mind that walking is an important mode in itself, and so easy pedestrian access should be a high priority.

It should be noted that the high cost of station car parks was highlighted as a top concern in our Members Survey. Given that many respondents to our questionnaire would not drive to the station, we can infer that this issue is of great importance to those who do. It is important that car parking at local stations remains affordable, or else drivers will be encouraged to make their entire journey by car.

Q.20 What sort of ticketing products and services would you expect to see delivered through 'smart' technology on this franchise?

We have already covered this topic in our response to the Department for Transport's consultation on fares and ticketing. For this consultation, we would simply reiterate our position that the benefits of smartcards may not be fully realised if ITSO is preferred to Oyster. Most travellers will already have an Oyster card and would benefit from being able to use it on Southeastern services outside the London zonal region. They would not benefit from having to have a separate ITSO smartcard.

We need to be assured that under ITSO:

- A passenger can buy an advance ticket for a particular journey at a particular time.
- A carnet is available.
- The passenger can check easily the validity of their ticket at home, in the office or on the train.



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There are fraud risks with ITSO through potential non-payment of fares. Experience in London shows that station gates are left open for long periods and that there are few, if any, Oyster ticket checks on national rail services in London (one problem being a lack of handheld readers).

One possible benefit from smart ticketing might be the ability to automatically compensate a passenger in the case of a delay, instead of requiring the passenger to fill in a Delay Repay form. It should be possible to tell when a smartcard journey has taken longer than usual, and check this against train running information to confirm the delay in touching out was due to train disruption. This procedure might also protect against fraudulent Delay Repay claims.

Our response to the Department's earlier consultation also outlined our views on possible changes to fare structures as a result of smart ticketing. In general, we would support offering a better deal to those who travel less than five days a week and are open to some varying of prices according to time of travel within the peak. However, we would emphasise that many passengers have little leeway when they travel, and may have to travel at the busiest times for personal or business reasons. We would not wish to see a fares structure which treats such passengers unfairly, or worse still prices them off the railway.

Q.21 What local accessibility and mobility issues do stakeholders see and how they might be addressed?

Both Tonbridge and Paddock Wood stations good offer good access to all platforms. However, there is currently no wheelchair access to the down platform at Hildenborough, and as a result disabled passengers for Tonbridge and beyond are forced to travel in the wrong direction to Sevenoaks and change platforms there. A ramp should be provided on the down platform at Hildenborough.

Q.22 What environmental targets would stakeholders like to see within the franchise specification?

While the operator will have its own carbon footprint, it should be recognised that encouraging people to travel by train has significant environmental benefits. We therefore believe that the franchise should be judged on its success in drawing people away from less environmentally friendly modes of travel, especially private cars. For example, the operator should promote group tickets (such as 4 people for the price of 2) to specifically attract those who would otherwise find the car a cheaper option.

Another environmental factor, though admittedly beyond the scope of the franchise specification, is the need for infill electrification of the remaining diesel routes in the South-East. This would cement the environmental advantage rail has over other transport modes. There are three schemes which are relevant to the wider local area. In all cases, the routes are quite short and electrification would permit existing diesel stock to be cascaded to replace older stock on other parts of the national network with minimal delay. The three schemes are outlined below:



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- Reigate to Guildford (18.5 miles) and Ash to Wokingham (13 miles). Two diesel trains an hour (on the Gatwick/Redhill-Guildford-Reading line) use this route, running over electrified tracks for up to 40% of the total mileage. Infill electrification would permit a Reading-Guildford-Redhill-Tonbridge-Maidstone West-Strood service, providing a valuable South London Orbital route and alleviating congestion on the southern half of the M25. Such a route would provide useful connections at Tonbridge for Kent and part of East Sussex and at Reading for the Midlands, North-West, Wales and the West Country. This would in turn relieve passenger pressure on London termini.
- Ashford to Ore (25.25 miles). This route is used by an hourly through Brighton-Eastbourne-Hastings-Ashford service operated by diesel trains running on electrified tracks for about 58% of the total route mileage. Electrification would allow the option of running through HS1 services between St. Pancras and Hastings (and possibly on to Bexhill and Eastbourne).
- Hurst Green to Uckfield (26.25 miles). The hourly diesel London Bridge-Oxted-Uckfield service runs on electrified tracks for about 45% of the total route mileage. There is currently interest in re-establishing a line from Uckfield to Lewes, closed in 1968, to provide an additional route between London and the East Sussex coast. The tracks beyond Lewes are already electrified and infill electrification would increase capacity. This would in turn relieve the congested routes to London via Gatwick Airport and via Tonbridge.

Although none of these schemes come within the South Eastern franchise itself, we believe that the Department for Transport needs to promote the environmental benefits of rail in the round. Eliminating diesel traffic in the wider local area would be an important step in this direction.

Concluding remarks

We would like to conclude by reiterating some of the main themes which emerge from the answers given above:

- An improved service on the **Tonbridge to Redhill line** is a high priority for us. We have set out of ideas for reintegrating this line into the South Eastern franchise and connecting the line to more destinations in Kent. In particular, we strongly advocate an hourly semi-fast service between Ashford International and Gatwick Airport.
- Better management of services and the provision of clearer **information at times of disruption** is a key factor for the new franchise, particularly given the likely impact of the rebuilding of London Bridge. Bidders for the franchise should be asked to outline their strategy for dealing with disruption and for improving passenger information.
- The provision of **faster and more comfortable services** is a key priority for our members. In particular, we call for the elimination of unnecessary timetable padding and for all Dover and Hastings trains to carry 2 by 2 seating as opposed to 3 by 2 seating.
- Another theme which emerges is the need to end the **perverse financial and performance incentives** which have blighted the operation of the railway in recent years.



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This has led to unnecessary padding of schedules, a policy of deliberately failing to hold connections and the withdrawal of Boxing Day services due to the vagaries of the Revenue Support mechanism. We look to the Department to draw up a franchise agreement and performance measurement regime which avoids these pitfalls.

- The current **formula for fare increases** is also highly perverse, since in times of recession the operator is permitted to raise fares over and above expected levels in order to make up its farebox revenue. This leads to fare increases far greater than the RPI+x% formula would suggest, at times when passengers can least afford them. We call for fare increases to be based on actual fares, not on farebox revenue.

Picking up on the final point above, a fundamental concern, highlighted in our Members Survey, is the affordability of the railway for passengers. In particular, many of our members are worried about ever rising season ticket prices, which threaten to make commuting unaffordable and put livelihoods at risk. This is a matter which largely goes beyond the franchise specification as fare rises are principally a result of Government policy. We note that the Government has put on record its desire to end above inflation fare rises, and we will be keeping a watchful eye on its commitment to this objective.

We hope that the Department will give full consideration to our informed opinions on the future of the South Eastern Franchise, and would welcome the opportunity for further dialogue with the Department on the important issues we have raised.

Lionel Shields

Secretary of Tonbridge Line Commuters

10 September 2012



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Appendix – Summary of TLC Members Survey

Methodology

Tonbridge Line Commuters (TLC) decided to hold a Members Survey at the end of 2010 to ascertain what suggestions and concerns our members have regarding rail travel from Tonbridge, Hildenborough, and Paddock Wood.

The survey comprised a questionnaire which gave respondents 100 points that they could allocate against 21 factors concerning the train service they receive. An “Other” category allowed users to state other issues they want dealt with. Respondents were encouraged to provide comments to their answers.

The survey was sent out to TLC members at the end of November 2010 along with the twice yearly Travel Topics magazine. In addition the questionnaire was put on the TLC website where respondents could download an Excel file and fill this in. Responses were received by e-mail and post.

In total 67 members responded to the survey. To ensure anonymity to those who completed the survey, each respondent was given a number. All comments are therefore attributable to a “number” rather than a person. The only additional information that TLC will provide about the number is the station that the respondent uses most (ie Tonbridge, Hildenborough, Paddock Wood). Respondents were allowed to answer without providing us their name or station. There is no evidence of anyone attempting to abuse this anonymity – ie by responding multiple times with the same high scores in certain categories.

The number of respondents from each station is as follows:

- Tonbridge: 35
- Hildenborough: 11
- Paddock Wood: 7
- Other stations or station not stated: 14

The first way to analyse the results was to look at how many points were allocated to each factor. Since 67 people responded, a total of 6700 points were assigned. A list of factors along with the number of points each were allocated is presented in Table 1. The factors are ordered by total score.

Results

Results by Total Score

The first way to analyse the results was to look at how many points were allocated to each factor. Since 67 people responded, a total of 6700 points were assigned. A list of factors along with the number of points each were allocated is presented in the table below. The factors are ordered by total score.



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Rank	Question No	Type	Factor	Total Score
1	14	disruptions	Better management of services following severe service disruption (e.g. fire on line, snow, etc)	1065
2	1	service	Cheaper fares	1060
3	6	service	Improved services to... < add town (e.g. Maidstone, London Victoria, Reading, Eurostar services at Ashford, etc)	775
4	7	disruptions	Train information provision (real time and printed)	610
5	2	service	Reduce likelihood of having to stand for parts of the journey (i.e. providing more capacity)	535
6	12	carriage	Replace carriages which have 5 seats per row to carriages with 4 seats per row	430
7	22	Other	Other *** please enter station name in comments ***	395
8	16	station	Cheaper car parks	385
9	9	carriage	Cleaner carriages and toilets	255
10	3	service	Shorter journey times	235
11	11	carriage	Quiet carriages	180
12	4	service	24 hour services	155
13	13	disruptions	Better management of Engineering works	115
14	17	station	Increased provision of sheltered and heated waiting area at station	110
15	21	station	Better bus / train interchange at station	105
16	19	station	More car parking facilities	80
17	20	station	Longer ticket office opening hours	60
18	15	station	Better station facilities. *** please enter station name in comments ***	50
19	5	service	Improved Christmas Period services	4
20	10	carriage	Internet and Electricity Point provision in carriages	40
21	18	station	More bicycle facilities at station	20
22	8	carriage	Carriage with Buffet car	0
Total				6700

Results by Total Score

Another approach at ranking the factors was undertaken by counting the number of respondents who actively marked a factor as an issue that they were prepared to vote some of their points on. This is presented in the table below, ordered by number of respondents that voted for each factor.

Rank	Question No	Type	Factor	Total People	% of People
1	14	disruptions	Better management of services following severe service disruption (e.g. fire on line, snow, etc)	40	59.7
2	1	service	Cheaper fares	37	55.2
3	7	disruptions	Train information provision (real time and printed)	24	41.8
4	2	service	Reduce likelihood of having to stand for parts of the journey (i.e. providing more capacity)	24	35.8
5	6	service	Improved services to... < add town (e.g. Maidstone, London Victoria, Reading, Eurostar services at Ashford, etc)	22	32.8
6	12	carriage	Replace carriages which have 5 seats per row to carriages with 4 seats per row	21	31.3
7	3	service	Shorter journey times	17	25.4
7	9	carriage	Cleaner carriages and toilets	17	25.4
9	16	station	Cheaper car parks	15	22.4
10	22	Other	Other *** please enter station name in comments ***	12	17.9
11	4	service	24 hour services	11	16.
12	11	carriage	Quiet carriages	11	16.4
13	13	disruptions	Better management of Engineering works	10	14.9



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14	17	station	Increased provision of sheltered and heated waiting area at station	7	10.4
15	21	station	Better bus / train interchange at station	6	9.0
16	19	station	More car parking facilities	5	7.5
17	20	station	Longer ticket office opening hours	4	6.0
18	5	service	Improved Christmas Period services	3	4.5
19	10	carriage	Internet and Electricity Point provision in carriages	3	4.5
20	15	station	Better station facilities. *** please enter station name in comments ***	3	4.5
21	18	station	More bicycle facilities at station	2	3.0
22	8	carriage	Carriage with Buffet car	0	0.0

Not surprisingly the rankings of this table correlate very closely with that of Table 1. Notable differences are “shorter journey times” which gets rank #7 in this table as opposed to rank #10 in the earlier table.

Conclusions

Highlights of the survey are summarised below:

- This survey clearly highlights the customers' anger and frustration at the extortionate cost of train tickets and car parks.
- There is equal frustration at the woeful information provision to passengers – in particular at times when there is severe service disruption. This was clearly highlighted by the snow chaos of December 2010.
- With regard to service provision, there is clear support for the reinstatement of the Gatwick Airport service. A sizeable minority are also supportive of more late night trains, particularly on a Friday and Saturday night. Our members have also highlighted a requirement to increase seating capacity during certain time periods. There is also significant support for shorter journey times, as journey times have increased significantly in recent years.
- There are significant improvements to be made concerning the travelling environment that passengers experience. Carriages and toilets should be cleaner. Carriages should be made more comfortable with the removal of 3 by 2 carriages on mainline routes – these should not be seen as a “fudge” to provide more “scheduled seats”. There is also significant support for quiet carriages.

Although other factors did not receive as much support, there were still respondents who felt very passionately about these, and so these areas also merit improvement.