

Govia Thameslink Railway: 2018 Timetable Consultation

Phase 3 – weekends & late evenings (2330 – 0500) West Sussex County Council response

December 2017

West Sussex County Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to Govia Thameslink Railway's 2018 Timetable Consultation Phase 3. This response has been prepared by officers on behalf of the County Council. It builds on the issues highlighted in our responses to the previous Phase 1 (Autumn 2016) and 2 (Summer 2017) consultations.

We welcome the significant investment in the Thameslink Programme, the additional capacity and new journey opportunities this will provide between many stations in West Sussex, particularly Gatwick Airport, and destinations north and south of London. We do not propose to repeat comments made in our previous consultation responses on wider issues, however we have highlighted key issues in relation to late evening and Sunday services.

Early/late morning services

As highlighted in our previous consultation responses we have concerns about the provision for early morning and late evening services. We note the recommendations of the Gibb report published in June 2017 regarding the ongoing performance issues on the Southern Rail network. In particular we note the recommendation to reduce the number of overnight train services and operate these services on the Thameslink route. Whilst we support improvements to track maintenance arrangements so that this can improve the resilience of the network operation, we are concerned about the impact that this will have on stakeholder aspirations for greater access to the network late at night and early in the morning to support the leisure economy and particularly access for staff and passengers accessing Gatwick Airport.

The proposed timetable suggests that there is a slight deterioration in early morning connectivity to Gatwick Airport from the Arun Valley Line and West Coastway and little change in late evening connectivity. We also note the proposals to make a permanent reduction in overnight London Victoria to Gatwick Airport services that were originally reduced in May 2017 on a temporary basis. This is a specific concern in terms of access to Gatwick Airport and journey connections to and from London Victoria. Gatwick Airport Limited have explained that up to one fifth of Gatwick's passengers depart the airport, and up to 30% of 24,000 on-site staff [travel to the airport, before the first London Victoria train of the day](#). Passengers and staff have also been affected by reduced rail connections late in the evening. A key concern relates to the limited range of journey connections currently available at central London stations on the Thameslink corridor, compared to the range of London Underground and Victoria coach station connections available at London Victoria.

We would like to see that all efforts are being made to use technological innovations that can improve the efficiency of rail maintenance such as bi-directional running and electrical power supply isolation enhancements, to enable increased rather than reduced overnight access to the network for services. When closing the rail network late in the evening, during the night or early in the morning is a necessity to enable maintenance on core routes, high quality rail replacement coach services should be provided as alternatives.

Thameslink Sunday services Brighton – Cambridge

We welcome the new journey opportunities that will be created by the Thameslink programme enabling direct journeys between Brighton and Cambridge. However, we note that no direct Sunday services are proposed between Brighton and Cambridge. We would like to see direct services also provided on Sundays for this route, to enable direct connections between these important economic centres and destinations on route, in particular to support weekend visitor journeys across the spine of the Thameslink network.

Arun Valley Line and West Coastway Sunday services changes

We note the planned alteration of Arun Valley Line and West Coastway services on Sundays. This will mean that on Sundays the current London Victoria to Portsmouth Harbour and Littlehampton via Hove (dividing at Worthing) service will run complete to Littlehampton. The current London Victoria to Bognor Regis via Horsham service will run to Portsmouth Harbour. We welcome the direct journey opportunities provided between Chichester, Horsham and Crawley such that this is consistent with services through the rest of the week, and note the new connections to Arun Valley Line stations on Sundays. However, we understood from the phase 1 timetable consultation that this would “improve the journey time between London, Chichester and Portsmouth”, however, it is disappointing that this does not appear to be the case from the ‘Check Your Journey’ tool, with journey times increasing for example by 2 minutes to 1 hr and 45 minutes for a journey between London Victoria and Chichester.

Horsham-Dorking Line

We welcome the additional evening services (in particular southbound) proposed for this line to address the gap in services during weekday evenings. It is disappointing however that services are not proposed on this route on Sundays and on Saturday evenings to grow patronage on this route. We would welcome future consideration being given to expanding services and growing patronage on this route given development growth plans along this A24 corridor between Horsham and Dorking.

West Sussex County Council

19 December 2017