

Unblocking the Croydon Bottleneck Phase 2, Network Rail consultation

West Sussex County Council response, September 2020

The following is WSCC's response to the [unblocking the Croydon bottleneck phase 2 Network Rail consultation](#).

1. What is your name?

West Sussex County Council

2. What is your email address?

ltip@westsussex.gov.uk

3. Postcode (to identify concerns/opportunities by location)?

PO19 1RH

4. How do you feel about our proposals to unblock the Croydon bottleneck?

Strongly support - Yes

Support

Undecided

Do not support

Strongly do not support

Please give a reason for your choice

West Sussex County Council welcomes this phase 2 consultation on Unblocking the Croydon Bottleneck and the further development work that has taken place since the previous scheme consultation in 2018. We support the principles of this scheme and the benefits to the reliability and capacity of the Brighton Main Line and the wider Sussex route network. We welcome Network Rail continuing to plan to ensure we are able to provide reliable services and meet future passenger growth in these uncertain times of the Covid-19 pandemic. We believe it is important that Network Rail considers carefully different scenarios of impacts on long-term passenger forecasts on the scheme as a result of Covid-19. We believe that this investment has the potential to play an important role in supporting the national economic recovery post Covid-19.

5. How do you feel about our proposals for the redevelopment of East Croydon station?

Strongly support

Support - Yes

Undecided
Do not support
Strongly do not support

Please give a reason for your choice

We welcome the benefits that will derive from additional track and platform capacity and improvements to facilities and access to East Croydon station. However, we have refrained from commenting on the detailed proposals as we believe it is for the local community/stakeholders to comment on the specific plans as they will have a better understanding of the likelihood and severity of localised negative impacts.

6. How do you feel about our proposals for the reconstruction of Lower Addiscombe Road/Windmill Bridge?

Strongly support
Support - Yes
Undecided
Do not support
Strongly do not support

Please give a reason for your choice

We welcome the benefits that will derive from additional track capacity that will result from the reconstruction of Lower Addiscombe Road/Windmill Bridge. However, we have refrained from commenting on the detailed proposals as we believe it is for the local community/stakeholders to comment on the specific plans as they will have a better understanding of the likelihood and severity of localised negative impacts.

7. How do you feel about our proposals to provide grade separation of the Selhurst triangle?

Strongly support
Support - Yes
Undecided
Do not support
Strongly do not support

Please give a reason for your choice

We welcome the benefits that will derive from grade separation at the Selhurst triangle. However, we have refrained from commenting on the detailed proposals as we believe it is for the local community/stakeholders to comment on the specific plans as they will have a better understanding of the likelihood and severity of localised negative impacts.

8. Do you have any further comments or other ideas for our proposals to unblock the bottleneck?

The need for investment

Our comments below reiterate many of the comments made in response to the previous consultation in 2018. We understand that this investment is critical to address reliability problems on the route resulting from the Croydon bottleneck by providing additional platform capacity at East Croydon and removing problems resulting from 'flat junctions' through the Selhurst triangle, and also to meet the forecast increase in demand on the Brighton Main Line. Investment on this key corridor linking London, Gatwick Airport and the Sussex Coast has the potential to provide a significant boost to the regional and national economy, and aid with the economic recovery post Covid-19.

For West Sussex this could boost the Gatwick Diamond, the West Sussex coast and parts of rural West Sussex, where there is potential to run more reliable and some additional rail services. We support the work being undertaken by Network Rail to develop detailed plans and the business case for this scheme.

The M23/A23/Brighton Main Line corridor is identified within the Transport for South East Transport Strategy as a key corridor that is heavily utilised, has a significant 'capacity gap' and suffers from poor resilience. The strategy highlights that this is undermining the potential for this corridor to support the economy and unlock development near key economic hubs, and that disruption at the northern end of the corridor can cause significant delays across the whole of Sussex.

TfSE identified in its Economic Connectivity Review that the BML corridor is the most attractive opportunity for investment in the South East scoring highly due to the potential to support delivery of economic outcomes and the feasibility of improving the corridor. TfSE also identified that improving the M23/A23/BML corridor will support an additional 18,000 homes, the fifth highest in the region, although we consider this to be an underestimate as it does not take account of additional housing that will be facilitated on the Sussex Coast. Network Rail should consider including these benefits within the business case for the scheme.

Covid-19 Response Scenarios Planning

TfSE have been assessing different response scenarios considering how society emerges from Covid-19, including considering whether a successful vaccine treatment is found and the timescales for this. The Covid-19 global pandemic has significantly changed the landscape for transport planning, and the long-term impacts on travel behaviour and economic growth are unclear. We agree that Network Rail should continue planning to ensure we are able to provide reliable services and meet future passenger growth. However, Network Rail should work with TfSE to consider the impacts of different post Covid-19 scenarios on the scheme in terms of long-term passenger demand, for example as a result of the increase in employees working from home and changes in demand for rail travel to London.

Scheme progression timeline

We note that the timescales for progression of the scheme set out in the consultation material anticipating benefits realisation in stages from 2028 to 2033. Whilst we understand that this is a major level of investment requiring extensive planning and development, and the need for projects to be realistic in terms of project programming, we believe that a challenge should be set to see whether scheme benefits can be realised earlier than 2028. We note scheme completion in 2033 is 13 years from now. If the scheme is to play an important role in helping longer-term economic growth from the extended impacts of Covid-19, then planning for the scheme will need to progress as soon as possible.

Link to wider package of measures for the Brighton Main Line

We understand that this scheme forms part of a wider package of measures for the Brighton Main Line that were identified in the Sussex Area Route Study published in September 2015. We understand that as a package the Brighton Main Line improvements have the potential to provide up to six new journey paths from the Sussex Coast during the high peak hour.

We understand that the development of the Croydon proposals is at an early stage, and some potential benefits will rely on future changes to service patterns through the re-franchising processes. However, in order to assess their relative merits and priority it is important that Network Rail articulates clearly the benefits of each of the different proposed infrastructure investments on the Brighton Main Line corridor in terms of reliability, journey times and additional services that could be operated. The Route Study identified interventions at London Victoria, Clapham Junction, Stoats Nest Junction, Reigate, Redhill, Gatwick Airport, Haywards Heath, Keymer Junction/Wivelsfield, Hassocks/Preston Park and Hove. There will be different options for use of these new journey paths and these opportunities should be discussed with key stakeholders at the earliest possible stage to ensure that local transport and land-use plans can be aligned and will ultimately help to deliver shared objectives for the regional economy.

Managing the impacts of the work

We welcome recognition within the consultation material of the need to carefully plan how the scheme can be constructed while minimising the impact on passengers. It is essential that consideration of the disruption impacts of implementing the scheme on passengers is put at the forefront of planning for this scheme and that lessons are learnt from other projects that have successfully managed major construction works whilst maintaining a full service timetable for the majority of the time.