



# Sussex Community Rail Partnership

Eridge Station, Groombridge Lane, Eridge, East Sussex TN3 9LE

Kent RUS Consultation Response  
RUS Programme Manager  
Network Rail  
Floor 4 Kings Place  
90 York Way  
London N1 9AG

Dear Sir,

## **Network Rail Kent Route Utilisation Strategy Comments from Sussex Community Rail Partnership**

1. The Sussex Kent Community Rail Partnership is appreciative of the opportunity to comment on the Kent RUS draft. The CRP has been particularly impressed at the extent to which Network Rail staff have gone to ensure a full understanding of the draft by local communities by holding additional consultation meetings in excess of the normal number and responding very fully to comments and questions raised during the consultation period.
2. The Sussex CRP is principally concerned with the Marshlink Line (Ashford to Hastings) though the communities it works with are also very interested in onward services from Ashford and the Tonbridge line from Hastings. Routes on into Sussex are considered in our response to the Sussex Route Utilisation Strategy.
3. **General.** The Sussex CRP is very disappointed with the Draft on three major counts. First it fails to stretch the thinking in the longer term so as to develop more imaginative ways of transferring more traffic from road to rail across a region where road improvements are even more costly and difficult than rail improvements.

4. Second, on the other hand, it equally fails to identify, even in list reference terms the many small but important little improvements which, collectively, could add up to potential service improvements being available for TOCs to capitalize on.

5. Thirdly all the economic analysis is seriously flawed by the strictures imposed by the DfT in terms of returns for investment, not offering the possibility of more favourable demand forecasts, not exploring the use of external funding and not identifying the necessary further changes in, say, demand or funding that are needed to make a case for investment in infrastructure and / or rolling stock.

**6. Marshlink Line (Ashford to Hastings).** We are very disappointed that you reject ideas of improving the capacity of this line. In the shorter term we understand that there is potential for improvements in line speed at a number of locations simply by removing outdated speed restrictions and carrying out simple maintenance operations. Second a minimal redoubling of the line at certain points (e.g. extending the Rye double section towards Winchelsea) opens up more train movement possibilities as would further improvements in signaling. Such small inexpensive improvements would allow the train operator to develop a more flexible service which had the opportunity of improved connections at Ashford, the occasional school time and late train additional stops at stations almost totally deprived of a service after the introduction of the through Ashford to Brighton service and a more demand responsive “shuttle” service between Ashford, Rye and Hastings

7. In the longer term we are very convinced that there is a good case for electrification and significant redoubling of this line. The main benefits of electrification would be felt further west along the Coastway route as it would be possible to run longer electric units with gangway connections and SDO on the Hastings to Ashford portion. Currently 2 car 171 diesel units provide insufficient capacity on many services between Eastbourne and Brighton but are very popular as they offer a faster service between main stations. There are also significant costs to the TOC in operating a small, orphan fleet based in Selhurst. Should the Uckfield Line be electrified this would become even more of a problem. In terms of the bigger picture electrifying and redoubling this route opens up new “London avoiding” freight and passenger routes which along with an additional temporary alternative route should be given a much higher value when considering the beneficial long term advantages.

**8. Hastings to Tonbridge.** Hastings itself and the communities along this line will be seriously affected by the Thameslink outturn. The stopping of through trains to the city (Cannon Street) will have significant effect as this is a popular service for the many city commuters who have chosen to live near this line. The commuters could quite easily decide either to rail head to Ashford to the East to take advantage of the high speed service, or the Uckfield line to the West (already at capacity in peak times), or in fact move which could have a detrimental effect on the economy of this part of East Sussex. Surely, in view of the need to transfer passenger movements from road to rail, it does not make sense to displace passengers from a line which has the potential of carrying more, not less people.

**9. Gatwick.** Past demand is used as an excuse for not proposing any direct Gatwick services for Kent. The old services were never marketed and where new services have been introduced in this region and elsewhere in the UK take up has always been in excess of anticipated demand. Difficulties between Redhill and Gatwick are well

understood but again there has to be more creative thinking to develop more paths there. Gatwick (BAA) itself has a strong desire to increase the proportion of travelers AND STAFF arriving by public transport. The road systems (M25 in particular) are already saturated (with potential solutions costing far more than rail solutions) Finally BAA has inaugurated a coach service from the Medway towns to Gatwick. How sad that the rail system could not have offered to try an innovative pilot itself.

10. **Ashford Station.** Is there no opportunity of increasing the capacity of Ashford station? The Marshlink could provide an increased service to bring commuters (both London bound and Ashford bound) to Ashford station from stations towards Rye, including from a new station in the Ashford suburbs, if more train movements were possible at Ashford.

With kind regards,

Tim Sparrow  
Chairman, Sussex CRP