

Report to	Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment
Date	25 July 2005
Report By	Director of Transport and Environment
Title of Report	Brighton to Ashford Train Service
Purpose of Report	To consider the County Council's response to the proposals by Southern Train Operating Company to introduce a new train service in December 2005.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. To inform the Train Operating Company that East Sussex County Council:**
 - **Strongly supports the introduction of the proposed Brighton-Ashford train service;**
 - **welcomes the proposal for enhanced peak services between Rye and Ashford;**
 - **regrets and opposes the virtual cessation of service to Three Oaks, Doleham and Winchelsea;**
 - **expects the Train Operating Company to review the proposal not to serve Ore in the Ashford direction in the light of the Ore Valley development proposals;**
 - **requests the Train Operating Company to provide an earlier arrival at Ashford International.**
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1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 The County Council has received requests from a number of people in the Brede Valley to replace train services proposed for withdrawal with buses. There is no money within the County Council's passenger transport budget to enable the introduction of such services and such a commitment on behalf of the County Council would create a financially-unsustainable precedent. The actual demand for train travel at Three Oaks, Doleham and Winchelsea is so low that a replacement bus service based on that demand would not be viable and could not be justified for County Council financial support. Commercially-provided bus alternatives are available at Winchelsea and within a mile of Three Oaks.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 The South Central passenger train franchise, operated by the Southern Train Operating Company (TOC) includes a commitment to introduce a through train service between Brighton and Ashford with an overall journey time of 1h 36m. The TOC proposes to introduce the new service in December 2005 and has asked the County Council to comment on the likely timetable. Officer comments have already been made to the TOC and the purpose of this report is to request your endorsement of the approach taken.

2.2 The TOC's proposal is for an hourly service, seven days a week, with the following stops: Brighton, Lewes, Polegate, Eastbourne, Bexhill, St Leonards, Hastings, Rye, Ham Street and Ashford, with journey times of 1h 39m from Brighton to Ashford (currently 2h 16m) and 1h 46m from Ashford to Brighton (currently 2h 21m).

2.3 Because of low passenger usage at Three Oaks, Doleham and Winchelsea, and owing to the need to obtain the fastest possible overall journey time to attract passengers, train calls at these stations would be reduced to no more than three trains a day in each direction. Ore would have three trains to and from Ashford per day, but would be served every hour in the Hastings direction by extending Brighton-Hastings stopping services to Ore.

2.4 Rye would see a train every half hour during peak times to give better connections at Ashford with trains to and from London.

3. Comments/Appraisal

3.1 While the County Council has no statutory responsibilities in relation to train services, changes which result in stations losing a substantial number of trains have potential knock-on effects on the need for supported bus services, with implications for the County Council's budget. In addition the Council has strategic concerns about transport links along the coast to improve strategic accessibility, stimulate the economy and support likely future housing development. The proposed service meets, to an extent, the proposal in the South Coast Multi-Modal Study for a Southampton-Ashford train service.

3.2 The County Council can in general strongly welcome the proposed service. It should give an improved level of service between Brighton, Lewes and Eastbourne, including faster trains. If there is retention of Hastings-London Victoria trains it enables the continuation of a three-trains-per-hour service between Eastbourne and Hastings. Continental train services can be accessed at Ashford, but an earlier morning arrival would permit better connections, and also Channel Tunnel Rail Link domestic services due to commence in 2009, enhancing access to jobs. It provides improved levels of peak services to and from Rye.

3.3 I consider that the most appropriate way of meeting the transport requirements of current users of the train at Three Oaks, Doleham and Winchelsea is through the extension of existing community transport provision in the Hastings and Rye area. The TOC have indicated that they would be unwilling to fund replacement bus services and have declined my request to provide additional stopping train services midday, because of the constraints of the single track between Ore and Rye. Housing proposals will require more trains to Ore.

4. Environmental Issues

4.1 If successful, the new service should provide an attractive alternative to car trips along the coast, with consequential benefits in terms of reduced congestion and pollution from vehicle exhausts. A small increase in car trips may result from the withdrawal of trains from the lesser-used stations.

5. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

5.1 The proposed Brighton-Ashford train service meets a long-standing County Council aspiration for better connectivity between towns along the Sussex Coast and into Kent, supporting planned housing and employment growth. However, virtual cessation of train services to Three Oaks, Doleham and Winchelsea runs contrary to the East Sussex Provisional second Local Transport Plan objective to maintain or improve accessibility to rural areas. Specifically this will make development of the County Council's emerging Accessibility Strategy more problematic. Whilst I consider that the introduction of the service should be welcomed, the TOC should be made aware of the detriment to the rural community in the Brede Valley resulting from their proposals.

BOB WILKINS

Director of Transport and Environment

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Local Member(s): Councillors Glazier, Kramer and Maynard

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Letter from Southern Train Operating Company dated 11 May 2005.

Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy 2004.

Brighton-Ashford Train Service

Summary of demand data for Ashford-Hastings segment ('Marshlink')

Southern Train Operating Company included summary data in the general information they provided to the County Council on the new service proposals. Table 1 below gives an overall indication of passenger journeys to and from stations on Marshlink and is assumed to be based on actual ticket sales.

Table 1 Journeys to and from Marshlink stations (year to 31 March 2004)

167,000 journeys per year from M/L stations	156,000 journeys per year to M/L stations
58% Rye	74% Rye
27% Ham Street (Kent)	7% Appledore (Kent)
8% Ore	7% Ham Street (Kent)
4% Appledore (Kent)	7% Ore
2% Three Oaks	3% Three Oaks
1% Winchelsea	2% Winchelsea
0% Doleham	1% Doleham

It can be seen that demand to and from Three Oaks, Doleham and Winchelsea is very low relative to, for example, Rye.

Table 2 below gives an indication of the types of journeys made on Marshlink.

Table 2 Destinations and origins of Marshlink journeys

Destination of journeys from Marshlink	Origin of journeys to Marshlink
34% via Ashford (mostly to London)	33% via Ashford (mostly from London)
20% to Ashford	23% from Hastings
19% to Hastings	15% from other M/L stations
14% to other M/L stations	13% from Ashford
7% via Battle (mostly to London)	11% via Bexhill
6% via Bexhill	6% via Battle (mostly from London)

The importance of Ashford and Hastings for onward connections is clearly demonstrated.

Table 3 below gives the results of passenger counts taken over the whole day at Ore, Three Oaks, Doleham and Winchelsea stations in October 2003.

Table 3 Passenger counts: Ore, Three Oaks, Doleham and Winchelsea

Station	Total passengers inbound and outbound Tuesday 14/10/03	Total passengers inbound and outbound Thursday 16/10/03
Ore	67	104
Three Oaks	33	43
Doleham	15	16
Winchelsea	14	12

The numbers of passengers using Three Oaks, Doleham and Winchelsea, and the fact that usage tended to be scattered over the day, would suggest that the provision of a conventional public transport service to these locations could not be justified.

Under the December 2005 proposals, Ore retains an hourly service to and from Hastings and Brighton. An ad hoc count was taken of passengers joining and alighting the 0827 departure from Ore to Ashford in June 2005 to check for schoolchildren travelling to Rye. Overall numbers were very low and no schoolchildren were identified.