

Report to	Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment
Date	5 December 2005
Report By	Director of Transport and Environment
Title of Report	Passenger Service Requirement (PSR) Consultation
Purpose of Report	To consider the County Council's response to the Department for Transport's proposals to change the Passenger Service Requirement (PSR)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. To inform the Department for Transport (DfT) that East Sussex County Council:**
 - **objects to the late consultation on the PSR;**
 - **urges the DfT to reconsider the PSR to include additional stops at Winchelsea, Three Oaks and Doleham railway stations which provide for local school, shopping and social needs;**
 - **welcomes the provision of additional services to Ore.**
 - 2. To authorise the Director of Transport and Environment to add further representations relating to matters of detail contained in the draft PSR.**
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1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 In strategic terms the PSR has no financial implications for the County Council. However, the train timetable, which cannot be implemented without formal approval of the PSR, has raised a number of concerns. The County Council supports the introduction of the faster Brighton – Ashford train service, but concerns have consistently been raised over the impact this proposed service would have on the smaller rural stations. Travel demand at these smaller stations (Winchelsea, Three Oaks, Doleham) is too low for buses to be financially viable, and there is no money available within the passenger transport budget to provide buses. Such a commitment on behalf of the County Council would create a financially unsustainable precedent.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 Details regarding the purpose and nature of the PSR, including the background to the new rail timetable, proposed to commence in December 2005, are included in the Appendix to this report.

2.2 During this Summer the train operator, Southern, consulted on a new timetable (commencing on 11 December 2005) that will run for a 12 month period to December 2006. As a consequence the DfT is obliged to consult on the proposed changes to the PSR because the new timetable cannot be implemented within the terms of the existing PSR established in the Southern Franchise Agreement. The new timetable has principally been driven by the introduction of the new Brighton-Ashford International service, which is a separate requirement of the Franchise Agreement.

2.3 The consultation focuses solely on whether the proposed drafting changes are the most appropriate way to change the PSR to accommodate the new service. It does not seek views on whether the new service should be implemented as that decision was made by the DfT at the time the new franchise was let.

3. Comments/Appraisal

3.1 The County Council is not being asked to comment on the new timetable as part of this consultation. Although no objections are raised to the way the proposed PSR amendments accommodate the new service, there are grave concerns over the late consultation of the PSR and the delivery of the timetable in such a short period following it. The County Council has no statutory responsibilities in relation to train services, and there are concerns that the reduction in rail services could have implications on the need for additional/new support from other services, which in turn could affect the County Council's budget.

3.2 In addition, the Council has strategic concerns about transport links along the coast to support likely future housing development. Although the smaller stations may not necessarily need to retain their hourly service, there should at least be a level of service provision which enables basic school, shopping and social needs to be met.

3.3 Although there are no objections to the PSR in strategic terms, this consultation gives a further opportunity for the County Council to reiterate its concerns relating to the new rail timetable. Specifically, the virtual cessation of services to Three Oaks, Doleham and Winchelsea, and the impact this will have on users of the service which have not been addressed by the proposed changes to the PSR.

3.4 The proposed PSR should have been amended and consulted upon before the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) set the specification for the service, and not at a time when Southern has already consulted on a service. It appears as if the PSR has been designed around the timetable, and not vice-versa. It would be more appropriate for the PSR consultation to precede and inform a draft timetable consultation.

4. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

4.1 The County Council regrets the late consultation on the PSR and feels that it is a matter which should have been undertaken earlier to allow it to inform the development of the new timetable. It is unfortunate that we have to deal with a consultation on the PSR so near to implementation of the new rail timetable. The County Council supports the introduction of the new express service from Ashford to Hastings, but not at the expense of service to the smaller stations between these main line stops. For these reasons I recommend that the DfT reconsider the PSR to include additional stops at Winchelsea, Three Oaks and Doleham railway stations which provide for local school, shopping and social needs. The County Council has commissioned consultants Owen Williams to undertake this schedule of more detailed comments. I therefore recommend that the Director of Transport and Environment be authorised to add further representations relating to matters of detail contained in the draft PSR.

BOB WILKINS

Director of Transport and Environment

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Local Member(s): All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

DfT's consultation letter and documents of 4 October 2005.

Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment 25 July 2005 'Brighton – Ashford Train Service'.

Background

A franchise commitment on the new Southern Franchise, let in May 2003, was made to introduce a new fast Brighton – Ashford service. During the Summer, the rail operator, Southern, consulted on a new timetable (proposed to commence on 11 December 2005), that will run for a 12 month period to December 2006. The new timetable cannot be implemented without relevant changes being made to the existing Passenger Service Requirement (PSR). In order for the Train Operating Company (TOC) (Southern) to be able to implement their new timetable in December 2005, the existing PSR will need to be amended to allow for the service level provision achieved in the proposed new timetable. As a consequence the Department for Transport (DfT Rail) is obliged to consult on the effect of the timetable changes on the Passenger Service Requirement (PSR).

What is a PSR?

The level of service that a Train Operating Company (TOC) must provide is set out in the Passenger Service Requirement (PSR) for franchises let before 2004. This is a fundamental obligation contained in each Train Operating Company's Franchise Agreement with the SRA. PSR's seek to ensure the provision of a minimum level of service, whilst allowing the TOC some freedom to adjust its timetable to respond to passenger needs and to improve efficiency.

The PSR for each TOC outlines the parameters within which it must design a timetable and is set out route by route, specifying service characteristics that are important for passengers. These include frequency of trains, stations to be served, maximum journey times, times of first and last trains, weekend services and through services.

Under most circumstances, though not where a franchise is in its last 12 months or where it is on a management contract with the SRA, a TOC may operate additional services it wishes to run over and above the PSR. It therefore develops a timetable that meets both the SRA's requirements and its own commercial objectives.

The new timetable changes were driven principally by the introduction of the new fast Brighton – Ashford service. Stakeholders were consulted on the new Southern Franchise and the commitments it contained prior to the letting of the franchise. The Southern Franchise Agreement recognised that the existing Ashford – Hastings PSR and trains service would need to be radically amended to deliver this new service.

The County Council received a number of complaints from East Sussex rail users about the new timetable to reduce train services, some of which reflected the views of the County Council. These views were highlighted in a report to Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment on 25 July 2005 titled 'Brighton – Ashford Train Service'. In summary these comments were that although 'the proposed Brighton-Ashford train service meets a long-standing aspiration for better connectivity between towns along the Sussex Coast and into Kent, supporting planned housing and employment growth', the 'virtual cessation of train services to Three Oaks, Doleham and Winchelsea runs contrary to the need to support and enhance accessibility to rural areas and will make development of the County Council's Accessibility Strategy more problematic'. While the County Council 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'.

The DfT Rail Group are of the view that the faster Brighton – Ashford service will provide enhanced journey opportunities for passengers across the south coast to access Eurostar and South Eastern Train services at Ashford International and is intended to deliver improved operational performance across services serving the South Coast. It would also provide better links from Kent to the East Sussex coastal towns. Improved south coast linkages are a key aspiration of the South East England Regional Transport Strategy.

Implementing the Ashford – Brighton new service has had an effect on Southern services operating out of Brighton along the South Coast on the “East Coastway” towards Lewes – Eastbourne – Hastings and on the “West Coastway” towards Worthing- Littlehampton – Portsmouth. The revised East Coastway timetable to accommodate the new Brighton – Ashford trains included moving the timing of the Hastings to Victoria trains to the opposite half hour compared to today’s service. As this did not fit with the evening West Coastway – London service, the West Coastway services have also been revised.