

Rail Strategy

Consultation summary report

December 2025

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Engagement approach

Early and preliminary engagement was undertaken with key strategic rail partners and key local stakeholder groups during the development of the draft strategy. This helped ensure that proposals reflected both operational realities and local priorities before being shared more widely.

The Draft East Sussex Rail Strategy was consulted on as a modal strategy of Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4). The consultation aimed to gather feedback on proposed roles, schemes, and investment priorities across the rail network. The strategy focuses on passenger rail only. Freight on rail is considered in the East Sussex Freight Strategy which has been developed in parallel to the East Sussex Rail Strategy.

The feedback from the formal public consultation ran from 6 May to 30 June 2025 and comprised both structured survey tools and open feedback mechanisms.

A bespoke workshop was held with young people to discuss lived experiences of young people and rail travel and to provide input into the strategy.

Key outcomes

Responses were collected via an online questionnaire (paper copies were available on request), which included a mix of closed and open-ended questions, and email submissions. In total, 78 responses were received — 70 through the online portal and 8 via email. Responses were received from key strategic rail partners.

For those who provided responses to the 'about you' questions on the online survey, there is a good representation of responses across all ages (in 10-year bands), from 20-29 through to 70-79, with 7 to 12 responses per 10 year age band. In terms of gender, more males than females responded.

Closed question feedback

Respondents showed strong agreement with the Rail Strategy's defined roles and policy linkages, with particularly high support for schemes related to decarbonisation, accessibility, and modal integration. Most respondents endorsed all six priority investment areas, which are:

- Accessibility
- Modal integration
- Reliability and resilience
- Decarbonisation
- Journey time competitiveness
- Customer experience

Most respondents did not provide any feedback on the Rail Strategy Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA), while a smaller number of shared comments highlighting areas needing further clarification and improvement.

Open question feedback

- **Positive Feedback:** Strong support was noted for the strategy's direction, particularly around accessibility, governance, and better integration with buses, cycling, and walking. Electrification and reopening of lines (e.g. Lewes–Uckfield) were frequently supported.
- **Concerns:** Key concerns included:
 - Unclear delivery roles
 - Lack of clarity on funding and timelines
 - Accessibility and service reliability
 - Ticket affordability, service frequency, and rural connectivity

- **Negative Feedback:**
A minority disagreed with the strategy's overall scope or raised concerns about feasibility, especially in rural or non-commuter areas.
- **Environmental Concerns:**
Respondents called for stronger links between climate priorities and rail infrastructure design, including decarbonisation and climate resilience.
- **Suggestions:**
Respondents recommended improvements in station access, intermodal links, governance, and data transparency. Multiple comments were made for re-opening disused lines, new rail infrastructure (e.g. Willingdon Chord), real-time information systems, and more affordable fares.
- **General Comments:**
Some responses were broad or generic, while others emphasised the need for clearer communication and local engagement.

Reflections

- There is **strong public support** for the strategy's ambitions, especially around accessibility and decarbonisation.
- The breadth of the strategy is a strength but risks **overstretching resources**.
- Many of the suggested schemes are **complex and high-value**, requiring coordination with external delivery bodies.
- **"Quick wins"** should be prioritised alongside longer-term flagship projects.
- Future progress depends heavily on **East Sussex County Council's available capacity** and its role within any potential new governance structures.
- There is an expectation that the strategy will **translate ambition into locally grounded outcomes**.

Actions following feedback

The strategy was updated following feedback received during the consultation period. This section provides a summary of the feedback and actions undertaken, reported by coding category and sub-category.

Category: Positive feedback

You Said (sub categories)	We did
Strategy and governance, accessibility and inclusion, integration and mobility and infrastructure and reliability	Positive feedback on the clear roles, collaborative approaches, and the content of the strategy are welcomed and noted.

Category: Concerns

You Said (sub category)	We did
Governance and delivery	We have updated the roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to the emerging Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) for Sussex and Brighton and in relation to local government reorganisation.

	<p>We welcome the involvement of towns, parishes and local groups. They are important in expressing their views and partners welcome their feedback in improving rail services and shaping the strategy and they should continue to engage with local government and rail operators to ensure their views continue to be heard.</p> <p>Communities without railway stations can engage with local authorities, particularly around accessing stations via active travel or bus, to provide them with the opportunity to use the rail network.</p> <p>As local planning authorities finalise their local plans there is an opportunity to ensure that they integrate with the rail and other modal strategies for the county.</p>
Evidence and policy gaps	<p>GTR (Southern) is the main operator within the county. We also have Southeastern who operate from Hastings to London via Tunbridge Wells. Unless specified, all schemes and interventions apply across both operators.</p> <p>Data is provided where readily available and sources provided.</p>
Infrastructure and service limitations	<p>Staffing levels and the impact on giving passengers the confidence to travel is appreciated. We will continue to lobby for ticket offices to remain open and ensure that there is relevant support for passengers to travel (e.g. through passenger assist or other means).</p> <p>Service patterns and times remain a matter for train operating companies. We will lobby for services to meet the needs of residents and visitors to East Sussex. This is across all days of the week and all time periods.</p>
Equity, inclusion and experience	<p>We have ensured there is a balance between the needs of local travel and commuters and those that support the visitor economy. Any benefits to</p>

	<p>commuters should also benefit local travellers too.</p> <p>Station design is matter for the rail operator, and they lead on these. Network Rail and train operating companies are working together to make stations fully accessible, where they are not already so.</p>
Fare and capacity	<p>Rail fares are currently set by government and train operating companies. The County Council will continue to lobby for affordable fares and encourage travellers to apply for relevant rail cards (e.g. senior or young person) or alternative discount card they may be entitled to.</p>
Disagreement with strategic direction, criticism of scope and framing	<p>We have tried to strengthen the strategic direction, making it clear what the priorities are for the County Council.</p> <p>With regards to actions, the strategy is dependent on partners leading on the development and delivery of schemes, and the County Council will strongly advocate and support partners, as required, to ensure they are successfully delivered.</p> <p>We have reviewed the strategy to ensure there is a balance between (longer) commuter, visitor and local travel, as both are important to the county and its economy.</p> <p>We acknowledge that re-opening historic rail links will not be agreeable to everyone. The proposals for each reopening and any new line or infrastructure will need to go through a full development process to mitigate any impacts and ensure that the scheme's benefits are greater than any disbenefits. We encourage everyone to have their say in official engagement events for proposals as they are brought forward.</p>
Dissatisfaction with stakeholder engagement	<p>All feedback received has been reviewed and read, and where appropriate has resulted in amendments to the strategy.</p> <p>The strategy reflects / balances the needs</p>

	of communities, visitors and local priorities whilst looking at the wider picture for the county.
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Category: Environmental concerns

You Said (sub category)	We did
Decarbonisation and mode shift	<p>Mode-shift also relies on how people access railway stations, and the East Sussex Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and the East Sussex Local Cycling and Walking Improvement Plan (LCWIP) are important strategies to ensure that people can travel using low-carbon modes.</p> <p>Two of the priority schemes are to electrify the remaining parts of the rail network in the county to enable electric trains to run across full network in the county and reduce the need to have diesel trains.</p>
Environmental planning and resilience	The East Sussex Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) has an Environmental Impact Assessment which incorporates the rail strategy.
Sustainability integration	Station design is matter for station operators, particularly in relation to environmental priorities.

Category: Suggestions

You Said (sub category)	We did
Policy, evidence and monitoring	<p>There is now a stronger evidence base chapter within the strategy highlighting the key evidence from LTP4's evidence base, with all sources identified and links where publicly available. There is also now a section (which is not exhaustive) linking through to local, national and regional policies.</p> <p>Feedback on the EqIA will be incorporated into a significant update of LTP4's EqIA. Modal strategies will better connect the 'what does this mean' and 'what can you do' questions within the EqIA, which could</p>

	<p>include mention of specific schemes, if appropriate.</p> <p>Due to uncertainties of when schemes and priorities can be brought forward, there are no targets. This is consistent with the East Sussex LTP4.</p>
Infrastructure and accessibility improvements	There are schemes within the strategy that help support and improve accessibility, sharing of travel information and journey planning. Many of these areas are outside the control of the County Council and we will lobby for these measures and improvements.
Strategic integration and governance	<p>There are priorities and schemes included within the strategy that seek to improve the passenger experience and multi-modal ticketing and, where possible, timetable integration.</p> <p>The roles and responsibilities sections reflect the emerging MCCA for Sussex and Brighton and local government reorganisation.</p>

Category: General comments

You Said (sub category)	We did
Generic or non-specific feedback	These responses are noted, as there is no actionable content.
Strategic and engagement commentary	<p>As devolution, local government reorganisation and the emergence of Great British Railways becomes clearer, we will ensure that the roles and responsibilities sections are updated to provide complete clarity.</p> <p>We will continue to work with stakeholders over the life of the strategy and will encourage partners to continue to do so too.</p> <p>Feedback on the survey and consultation have been noted and will be reviewed and used to improve future consultations.</p>