



Forest Hill Society response to the draft London and South East Route Utilisation Strategy (February 2011)

1. The Forest Hill Society represents residents in and around the Forest Hill and Honor Oak Park areas of South London. With a membership of over 400 one of the key concerns of our members has been train services between our area and central London, particularly on the Sydenham corridor.

Background:

2. The area between Sydenham and Brockley has, for a long time, suffered from serious overcrowding and suppressed demand. Figures provided in 2007 estimated the suppressed demand at 40% of capacity and this was one of the drivers for the extension of the East London Line. Population continue to grow in this area with new development along the line, and more passengers switching to this line from other routes, as can be seen from increasing parking pressures close to the stations.
3. Since May 2010 we have seen a major new transport opportunity for people in our area via the East London Line. With regular trains going to Canada Water, this line has quickly become very successful in attracting passengers and is already (within six months of opening) near capacity between Brockley and Canada Water in the morning peak. Passenger numbers on ELL are likely to increase further over the next 10 years as employment opportunities shift to the east of London as well as with the extension to Highbury & Islington by May 2011, and more importantly with the development of Crossrail interchange at Whitechapel allowing for fast connections to West London and beyond.
4. The other major train service, which continues to provide the majority of journeys for rail users in the Sydenham Corridor, is the South Central franchise service to London Bridge. Trains on this route have been reduced since May 2010, partially compensated for by the introduction of East London Line. The Thameslink programme is expected to deliver more stopping services for the Sydenham corridor, connecting the local area directly to Blackfriars, Kings Cross, and beyond. This is a welcome enhancement to the line.

Concerns pre-2019:

5. London Bridge Construction for Thameslink

With work planned for the improvements to London Bridge station we understood that there would be a reduced service from 2012-2015 on the Sydenham corridor, although the level of reduction has not been made clear. Although this work has now been delayed, concerns remain over the level of service during the construction period. The 2008 South London RUS recommended that 12 car trains are put in place on the route to make up for the reduction in number of trains, particularly during peak periods. So far we are only aware of plans to increase platform lengths to 10 cars, preventing an adequate replacement service from being available during this time. We hope that this RUS can provide some assurance on service levels during the construction phase in the lead up to the running of the new Thameslink service in 2019.

6. Evening Peak Services

In 2010, at the time of the introduction of the East London Line, services were cut on the Sydenham corridor during the daytime and during the evening peak. Since then two extra trains have been provided in the evening peak to partially improve the service. This means that during the evening peak we have 5 trains per hour rather than 6, despite no overall reduction in morning peak services. The additional two trains that have been added to the timetable are just three minutes after the previous service, meaning that they are advertised on the boards for as little as 2 minutes after the departure of the previous train.

As we move into 2011 we have seen passenger numbers once again increase to fill the trains available, due to the 40% suppressed demand that was previously identified in the RUS and other documents. We believe that capacity needs to be found to improve services to Sydenham, with a more reasonably spaced service. Waiting 16 minutes for a train and then two leaving within 3 minutes of each other is not good timetabling by the railway authorities (17:05, 17:21, 17:24, 17:35, 17:53, 18:05).

7. Semi-Fast Services via New Cross Gate

Some improvement has also been made to daytime off-peak services by stopping some trains at New Cross Gate, which then run fast to East Croydon. The central platforms at New Cross Gate are under-utilised and can provide extra journey options for passengers travelling to the Sydenham area (by switching at New Cross Gate to ELL), and allowing some Sussex and Surrey passengers coming from the Shoreditch area to avoid London Bridge station entirely, but this requires a regular interchange opportunity to be provided. Analysis should be undertaken to model the benefits of stopping more fast trains at New Cross Gate on the little used central platform.

Issues post-2019:

8. Peak Service Balancing

We have seen in 2010 that having different number of trains in the morning and evening peak is not a sensible way to provide a frequent service with sufficient capacity into the future. We ask that the RUS recommends that all services have as close to symmetrical provision as possible in the morning and evening peaks, and that the Sydenham corridor should not be an exception to this general rule of rail planning.

9. Bakerloo Line

Even after the introduction of Thameslink there is predicted to be serious overcrowding on services in South East London. Figures provided by Lewisham Council in the Colin Buchanan report, indicate that stations on the Sydenham will continue to experience high levels of overcrowding, with expected demand at Brockley reaching 125% of crush capacity. However we recognise that not all the additional capacity can be provided on the Sydenham line by longer trains and additional services, although these are the cheapest way to improve capacity in the short term.

In the longer term the extension of the Bakerloo line must be considered as a priority for London rail infrastructure. Whilst this does not fall under the control of Network Rail, it is important for Network Rail to consider the benefits of this service and methods of integrating the extension into the existing rail infrastructure. People in South London have been waiting for this extension for over 80 years and over this time the case for it has increased in strength every decade.

- a) A number of routes have been proposed and we would favour one that intersects with the Sydenham line to reduce the number of passengers travelling through London Bridge and provide a new frequent service towards London. We understand that one of the favoured proposals at present is to bring the Bakerloo line to Lewisham and Catford via New Cross or New Cross Gate. An interchange at New Cross Gate would be beneficial for users on the Sydenham line and would reduce congestion at London Bridge. However, this proposal would not reduce the demand at Brockley or further south; if anything it may increase.
- b) Options have been put forward for the Bakerloo line to go via Peckham and Honor Oak Park to Catford and beyond; this would significantly reduce demand on the Sydenham line north of Honor Oak Park, where crowding is highest. This route would be particularly welcome by the Forest Hill Society as it would be of particular benefit to residents in Forest Hill, Honor Oak and East Dulwich.
- c) With a half-hourly service on the Nunhead / Crofton Park route, capacity may exist for bringing the Bakerloo line along this route from Peckham to Catford. Crofton Park would then attract many commuters currently using Honor Oak Park and Brockley stations. This would alleviate over-crowding on the Sydenham line, but no interchange with the Sydenham line is likely.
- d) An option that is worth considering is bringing the Bakerloo line from Peckham to Catford Bridge via Brockley and Lewisham, with an interchange at Brockley station. This would alleviate over-crowding north of Brockley, but would be a longer route through South London, increasing journey times from Catford and beyond.
- e) A final option that could provide benefits across South East London, but at greater expense, would be an underground line all the way to Bell Green, Sydenham and then above ground on the Hayes line. This would go via Camberwell, Denmark Hill, East

Dulwich, South Peckham, Forest Hill and Bell Green. The advantage of this route would be the connections to a large number of other rail routes, reducing congestion at London Bridge station. Significantly this route maximises additional capacity by using entirely new tunnels and would best compliment the enhancements to the Thameslink and East London Line services. However, we recognise that this would be one of the more expensive options for extending the Bakerloo Line.

For the reasons set out above we would favour the Bakerloo line route coming via Honor Oak Park or New Cross Gate (a and b above).

10. Lower Sydenham Station

With the potential of a Bakerloo line extension, taking any route to Catford Bridge, we would recommend moving Lower Sydenham station to the Bell Green area. This would provide a station closer to where people live. The area around Lower Sydenham station has low population density and is not far from Bell Green. Bell Green itself is undergoing significant changes, with new houses and business planned for development, and an entrance on the east of the railway would provide a fast and frequent service from Bellingham, an area that currently suffers from poor transport links and high social deprivation.

11. Additional Carriages on East London Line

The East London Line has been built with four carriage trains, which are already close to capacity six months after the opening of the line. The addition of services from Clapham on the new branch of the East London Line will provide additional capacity on the central section, but this capacity is likely to be used very quickly.

The solution to the capacity problems on ELL must be to reconsider the length of the trains. We understand that this is not a simple undertaking due to the Victorian infrastructure around the Thames, between Rotherhithe and Wapping. We believe that the simplest way to achieve train lengthen would be to close Rotherhithe station (the platforms of which can be seen from Canada Water station), and only use Wapping station for some of the trains if the platforms cannot be extended slightly. Crystal Palace and West Croydon trains could run through Wapping without stopping, while trains from New Cross and Clapham would continue to stop at this station. As a result Sydenham trains, where the worst over-crowding exists, could be extended to 5 or possibly even 6 carriages.

12. Additional Trains on the Crofton Park Route

With only two trains per hour the Crofton Park route is currently under utilised which leads to increased demand for services from Honor Oak Park and Brockley. Assuming that this line is not used for Bakerloo trains, additional peak services should be run on this line from Bellingham to Victoria or other routes which can increase capacity on this under utilised line.

13. Adjustment of Franchises in Metro Area

With the extension of the Overground Network we believe it would be beneficial to customers in Metro areas for more services to be transferred to TfL / LOROL or franchised separately to allow for clearer ownership of stations and routes in South East London. Most services that run on the slow lines through Sydenham (with the exception of future Thameslink services) could be better coordinated by a single franchise accounting for short distance services within London. This particularly applies to the services from London Bridge to Victoria via Crystal Palace and Clapham Junction, which would make an ideal addition to the Overground orbital network.

14. Off-peak

Although the RUS does not focus on off-peak services, we believe that some consideration would be appropriate. Prior to 2010 Sydenham was served by a half-hourly service from Charing Cross during the late evenings and at weekends. In the timetable changes of December 2009 these were scrapped due to some confusion in service agreements.

When there is spare capacity in routes through London Bridge high-level station, during late evenings and at weekends, we would ask that train operating companies run services from the more central termini, including Charing Cross, Canons Street, and utilising the Thameslink connections. This will provide more opportunities for passengers to get services directly from Central London, and will provide additional interchange options for passengers travelling through London Bridge.

We ask for consideration of the reinstatement of direct services from Charing Cross to Sydenham during the late evenings and at weekends, as was available prior to December 2009. To facilitate this it may be necessary for some SouthEastern evening services to start from Canon Street, as they do during peak periods. Alternatively London Bridge platforms 1 and 2 could be used as terminating platforms during these off peak times, rather than completely closing these platforms. This would enable additional services to run from London Bridge. The Thameslink reconfiguration of London Bridge station will enable greater numbers of services to use the High Level platforms at London Bridge, and we would like to see a clear plan for maximum utilisation of these platforms during off-peak as well as peak times.

15. Summary

- 12 carriage trains on the Sydenham line into London Bridge
- Improved numbers of evening peak services on the Sydenham Line
- Increased frequency of services on the Crofton Park route
- Increased utilisation of the central platforms at New Cross Gate
- Integration of Bakerloo line extension options into the London and South East RUS
- Additional carriages on the East London Line
- Late evening and weekend services from central London termini