



23 March 2010

Dear Mr Mole,

Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with us to hear our grievances.

While we welcome the improvement to our services by the introduction of the East London Line along the Sydenham branch, we are disappointed that this is at the expense of our existing services.

The Grievances

The East London Line extension was supposed to address the estimated 40% suppressed demand along the Sydenham corridor. However, when the East London Line starts full operation on 23 May 2010, a new timetable is being introduced which reduces the capacity and number of trains from London Bridge. By Southern's own figures, there will be a reduction in capacity of 11% once the May timetable is implemented.

The Sydenham branch is already one of the two busiest lines operated by Southern Railway.

Charing Cross Services were withdrawn without public consultation

None of the cuts which have been imposed so far are a result of the Thameslink programme; There is no scope for further cuts in capacity during the rebuilding of London Bridge station.

The Solutions

- Increase capacity from London Bridge to 5 tph (each of 8 coaches) in the short term.
- Implement platform lengthening to accommodate 12 coach trains as recommended by RUS as a matter of urgency
- Restore 2tph off peak service to Charing Cross to alleviate crowding at London Bridge.

Background

Capacity

At the moment our six trains from London Bridge generally serve three destinations; Victoria (via CYP), Sutton (via WCY) and Caterham (via ECR). This changes during the afternoon peak (1615-1915) to a combination of trains to Victoria, West Croydon and beyond.

46 Carriages currently leave London Bridge between 1730 and 1830 and serve our stations. Of these, 16 are shared with Sutton and Caterham, while 30 are short haul to West Croydon or Victoria. These provide a total of 3482 seats, with permitted space for 1389 standing (40% of seating). Average usage is 4203 passengers (86% of Capacity, 121% Seats). Of these passenger 910 continue to stations beyond West Croydon. 3293 passengers per hour (pph) therefore use the current service to ELLX stations. ^[Information provided by Southern] The proposed 4tph service offers seating capacity of 2422 seats plus 966 standing (3388 pph) - a reduction of 11% capacity. Given the suppressed demand, we will average 103 passengers per coach instead of 91.37 if nobody transfers to ELL which is an INCREASE in loading of one eighth. but more than a doubling of those standing to 37%.

The headway for a stopping service along the Sydenham branch is less than 3.5 minutes ^[South London RUS March 2008, Figure 3.21]. This equates to 17 tph, so there should be nine slots available to Southern. It should be possible to adjust the ELL timetable to synchronise optimally with Southern since the only interface ELLX has is with Southern's services.

The stations from New Cross Gate to West Croydon are used by over 13 million Peak passengers each year – more than London King's Cross. Five of the stations on this section of track are among the 80 busiest London Stations.. ^[ORR Station Usage 0708 updated on 20/04/2009]

70% of Lewisham residents work outside the borough, many of whom commute into central London. ^[OnePlace.direct.gov.uk] Their reliance on surface rail for their journey to work is greater than any other borough in London ^[Lewisham Local Implementation Plan]. The ELLX stations in Lewisham account for 35% of its rail commuters. ^[ORR Station Usage 0708 updated on 20/04/2009]

Only 35% of London Bridge passengers use the tube to access the station. 50% walk to/from the station. ^[SRA London Area Travel Survey 2005] It is unlikely that all of the tube users will switch to ELL, nor will pedestrians switch as an annual Travelcard is £448.00 more expensive than a Station-Station season ticket.

Most passengers on this route wish to travel to the City of London or the West End. Demand modelling suggests that the base timetabled trains (ELL and Southern) will be severely crowded at the height of the peak. A way needs to be found to achieve 8 trains to Central London from the Sydenham line at the height of the peak. [Southern Railway response to RUS Consultation]

There has been very high peak growth on the Sydenham route to London Bridge where comparing 2006 with 2005, a 14% increase in capacity was outstripped by a 20% increase in demand. [Southern Railway response to RUS Consultation]

On some routes – for example Southern’s busiest Sydenham and Norbury lines – morning peak growth has been in excess of 40% over the last 10 years. [South London RUS March 2008, Page 4]

Passenger growth is expected to continue with 30-40% suppressed demand being the main driver and Penge West and Anerley getting improved services. The available evidence points to a high level of suppressed demand, with additional capacity being filled up as soon as it can be provided. [South London RUS March 2008, Page 29]

Platform Lengthening

The RUS recommends a significant programme of train and platform lengthening to provide additional capacity. The Sydenham and East Grinstead routes are recommended for lengthening from 8-car to 12-car. [South London RUS March 2008, Page 5] We understand that platforms are only to be extended to 10-car along the Sydenham route. Southern have described this as “a missed opportunity where most needed”. [Southern Railway response to RUS Consultation]

Reconstruction of London Bridge will be a critical issue for the 2012 – 2015 period. In order to maintain sufficient passenger capacity a wide range of interventions will need to be considered. The RUS emphasises the need for the major part of the train lengthening programme to be complete prior to the commencement of London Bridge construction works, in order to maintain broadly equivalent levels of capacity when compared to today. [South London RUS March 2008, Page 7]

Charing Cross

2 tph direct services operated from Charing Cross to the Sydenham line between around 19:30 and shortly after midnight. These services were very well utilised. Restoring or running additional direct trains to Charing Cross would provide improved journey opportunities for all stations on the

Sydenham route and alleviate crowding at London Bridge. ^[South London RUS Draft for Consultation]

While the South London Draft Consultation considered cessation of all Southern services to Charing Cross, the South London RUS recommended further investigation regarding off peak services ^[South London RUS March 2008, Page 145]

There was an agreement between DfT and Southeastern to maintain broadly current levels of train services in peak hours to Charing Cross following the introduction of high-speed rail services to St Pancras. The combined effect of the above is that most passengers will experience significant changes in train timetables between now and 2010, generally maintaining at least current levels of service, with some areas seeing major improvements. ^[South London RUS March 2008, Page 3,5] No mention was made of Off-Peak services; South Eastern seem to have overstepped their brief.

Significant numbers of our residents work in the West End and used the Off-Peak service to Charing Cross for their commute to and from work in Theatreland. While we fully appreciate that the capacity is not available for through trains during peak hours, this service was not a luxury. Priority of scarce resources should be made available for people's commute. The lack of direct service is already having an adverse impact on residents with their commute taking 20 minutes extra because of the interchange at London Bridge. Rail users are also discouraged from visiting the West End because of the uncertainty of connections, especially late at night. This could have a negative economic impact on the West End theatres and businesses.

Once again, thank you for your time and I look forwards to your assistance in resolving these issues. All of the solutions require leadership from the Department for Transport.

Yours Sincerely,

Richard Hibbert
Chairman, Forest Hill Society

on behalf of Sydenham Society, Forest Hill Society, Honor Oak Park Residents Association,
Brockley Society, Brockley Cross Action Group and Telegraph Hill Society