

SEVENOAKS RAIL TRAVELLERS' ASSOCIATION

Comments on Proposals for the Mayor of London's Rail Powers outside the GLA

Sevenoaks Rail Travellers' Association represents the 3000+ daily commuters from the Sevenoaks area, as well as the many other less regular train users from this area. These rail users travel to and from Sevenoaks, Dunton Green, Bat & Ball, Otford, Kemsing, Shoreham and Eynsford stations. Our response is in the form of answers to the seven consultation questions in the paper.

Questions 1 & 2: Should the Mayor be able to (1) add to, or (2) reduce, rail services which run outside the GLA boundary?

The Government devolved most responsibilities for transport in London to the Mayor. Railway realities mean that there are not always stations on the GLA boundary at which services may be turned round. It is therefore inevitable that changes to train services requested by the Mayor will affect stations outside the GLA. However, the main proposals of the consultation paper extend his powers only minimally into the surrounding counties. This will diminish, but not completely eliminate, concern over the democratic deficit that would arise if the Mayor of London is given a say over rail services outside the GLA. The Association believes it essential to balance the interests between Metro and longer-distance commuters.

Question 3: If the Mayor can determine fares within the GLA, should this power extend to boundary stations outside the GLA?

In general terms, the Mayor should not have powers to determine fares outside the GLA. However, there should be consistency in the fares across the GLA boundary (or the boundary of the Mayor's rail jurisdiction). Such consistency exists with respect to fares on National Rail services. Travelcards purchased within the GLA are currently cheaper than the Travelcard element of such tickets bought outside the GLA, but this anomaly is recognised by the new franchise holder for rail services within Kent.

Question 4: Should the Mayor be able to pay for enhancements to stations outside the GLA?

Yes, if the enhancements arise solely because the Mayor wishes to run more services to a boundary station outside the GLA. If we lived within the GLA we would not generally wish to see 'our' money used outside the GLA.

Question 5: Over what rail network should the Mayor be able to exercise power – should it extend only to the 'preferred' boundary station or to the (further out) alternative option?

The Sevenoaks RTA can only speak for the effect on the South Eastern main line, on which, in respect of Metro services from Charing Cross/Cannon Street, the preferred boundary station is Orpington, with Sevenoaks as the alternative option. The two-track section between Orpington and Sevenoaks is fully loaded at peak times and an attempt to run more Metro services then would lead to the many longer-distance commuters having to stand for long journeys. On this line, it would be preferable for the boundary station to be Orpington. Such a choice would, however, leave two 'GLA' stations (Chelsfield and Knockholt) beyond the boundary station. We could understand if the Mayor wished to comment on the frequency of services calling at those stations.

For services from Blackfriars via Swanley, Sevenoaks RTA has no objection to Sevenoaks being the 'preferred' boundary station, since this route is effectively a long branch line which happens to terminate at a station on the South Eastern main line.

The first paragraph, above, is written with a view to avoiding conflict. There is, however, one area where conflict is inevitable if the Mayor should wish to increase Metro services during peak hours. Then the lines between St. John's and Charing Cross/Cannon Street are already fully loaded and suburban services could not be increased without a negative effect on longer distance services. The final document will need to indicate which authority will have a final say who (e.g. Dept. for Transport, the TOC, Network Rail, etc.) will have a final say in the allocation of the available train paths.

Question 6: Should the Mayor be able to propose extra stops on 'outer suburban' services at key interchange stations on the way to London?

There is as yet no 'official' list of such key interchange stations. Between Sevenoaks and London, there is only one such station within the GLA at which we believe the Mayor would wish specifically to see interchange facilities maintained. – Orpington. Most off-peak main line services already call at that station, and this is thought likely to continue.

Question 7: Which of the 'Governance' options is preferable, when TfL is seeking agreement for proposed rail changes?

Under Governance Option A, TfL seeks the agreement of the local transport authority (i.e. KCC); under option B it sees the S.E. Regional Assembly in that role. Option A – the local transport authority - is preferable. The S.E. Regional assembly is too remote to be able to consider the detail of any specific proposal, whereas Kent CC does have an understanding of local issues and is subject to direct election of easily identified County Councillors. Passenger Focus should be added to the list of stakeholders to cover the interests of rail passengers from outside the GLA.

Dr. R. G. Johnson (Chairman) & P. T. Benford (Secretary)

21.05.06