

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET PARKING AND PLANNING PANEL – 13 JULY 2017
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (PUBLIC PROTECTION, PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE)

GOVIA THAMESLINK 2018 TIMETABLE CONSULTATION – PHASE 2

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Govia Thameslink Rail (GTR) is currently carrying out second phase of public consultation on the proposed timetable for train services serving the borough from May 2018. A report on the first phase of consultation was presented to Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel in December 2016 – whilst some aspects of the proposals were welcomed, it was agreed that the Council would object to other aspects which would effectively result in a worsened rail service for the borough.
- 1.2 The Phase 2 consultation provides a greater level of detail than at Phase 1, including actual proposed timetables rather than a more simplistic indication of the number of trains per hour proposed to serve each station. However, it is apparent that very little has changed since the Phase 1 consultation, and the proposals for Welwyn Hatfield's services do not appear to have changed at all. Because of the extremely short 4-week consultation on the Phase 2 consultation including a consultation event being held on 12 July, a verbal update will be provided on the proposals at the 13 July CPPP meeting. Following debate, it may be necessary for the Council to continue to maintain its objections.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 (i) That the Panel consider the report below and the verbal update of the consultation event on 12 July, and indicate whether they wish to maintain the objections made during the Phase 1 consultation.
- 2.2 (ii) That the Head of Planning be given delegated authority to agree the final response to the consultation with the Executive Member for Planning prior to the end of the consultation period on 27 July 2017.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 Govia Thameslink Rail (GTR) holds the franchise for Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern train services, and operates all of the train services at the six railway stations in Welwyn Hatfield under its Great Northern brand. From May 2018, GTR will be introducing significant changes to train timetables across its network. GTR has now evaluated the responses on the intended service patterns set out in Phase 1 of the public consultation, and has published the proposed full Monday to Friday timetables for Phase 2 consultation.

Previous Phase 1 consultation

- 3.2 The headline change to services from May 2018 will be the new destination for Great Northern services originating from Cambridge and Peterborough which currently stop at Welwyn North, Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield; before running to London Kings Cross. These will become Thameslink services, and run to London St Pancras instead of Kings Cross before continuing south through Central London to Maidstone East in Kent. To the north, all of these services will run to Cambridge – this will necessitate a change of train at Hitchin or Stevenage to travel to Peterborough. During peak hours, existing additional Great Northern services from Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield to London Kings Cross would become through Thameslink services from Welwyn Garden City to Sevenoaks in Kent, again running via Central London.
- 3.3 The Council's response to the Phase 1 consultation welcomed the connectivity benefits of through trains to destinations in Central London and beyond, although it expressed concerns at the usefulness of Maidstone East and Sevenoaks as destinations (for example, many Thameslink services will serve Gatwick Airport). The Council also objected to the general lack of improvement to the frequency of these services, particularly given the levels of development proposed in the Local Plan and the fact that other stations (such as Stevenage and Hitchin) will see significant increases in train services.
- 3.4 The other main service change is to Great Northern's 'stopping' trains from Welwyn Garden City and Stevenage/Hertford North to Moorgate, which call at Hatfield, Welham Green and Brookmans Park (on Welwyn Garden City services) and Cuffley (on Stevenage/Hertford North services). These routes will see more frequent trains, particularly at off-peak times where the number of trains will increase from 3 to 4 per hour (to Welwyn Garden City) and 3 to 6 per hour (to Hertford North).
- 3.5 However, alternate 'stopping' trains to Welwyn Garden City will now skip some stations. This effectively results in a cut in services from 3 to 2 per hour at Welham Green and Brookmans Park at off-peak times on weekdays. On the Hertford North route, services will also no longer continue to Stevenage and will be replaced on a semi-permanent basis by a bus service from Hertford North. These changes are likely to significantly reduce the attractiveness of the train as a transport option, particularly leisure where people's choice of transport mode is much more discretionary. As a result the Council's response to the Phase 1 consultation welcomed the general improvement in the frequency of service on the Great Northern 'stopping' trains, but objected to the loss of service at Welham Green and Brookmans Park.
- 3.6 Whilst not a part of the proposals in GTR's consultation, the Council's Phase 1 response also referred to the new trains that will be operating almost all of the borough's rail services by May 2018. Whilst these have a higher overall capacity and incorporate features such as 'walk through' carriages, this is at the expense of their seating capacity. The response therefore highlighted that the lack of major improvements to services will inevitably result in more passengers having to stand on peak services, and objected on that basis.

Current Phase 2 consultation

- 3.7 The current phase of consultation evolves from Phase 1, and provides a full indicative weekday timetable. GTR have also now published their responses to

the Phase 1 consultation, which indicate how the Phase 2 proposals have evolved from the responses made. In general, the Phase 1 proposals have seen little change in establishing the proposed Phase 2 timetable. It appears that GTR has not been willing to consider changes at all where the response to the broad questions posed at Phase 1 was positive, regardless of whatever nuances there might have been. However, it is also apparent that some cohesive local campaigns have been persuasive in securing positive changes.

- 3.8 Q76 of the Phase 1 consultation concerned the proposed increases to services at stations such as Hitchin and Stevenage, and by association the relative lack of service improvement at stations within Welwyn Hatfield. Because 62% of respondents supported the general package of changes (badged as an improvement), it does not appear from the published documents that GTR has given any consideration to the concerns of those who will not benefit. This is also true of Q77, which concerned the northern destination of current Great Northern (future Thameslink) trains which serve the borough. Because 53% of respondents favoured both of these running to Cambridge (rather than one to Cambridge and one to Peterborough as at present), the proposal appears to have simply been accepted without any indication of how GTR has balanced the issues raised.
- 3.9 To the south of Welwyn Hatfield (between Potters Bar and New Barnet stations), Hadley Wood provides an example of station where strong local campaigning has influenced GTR's proposals. During off-peak hours the station would also have received a service reduction from 4 to 2 trains per hour, similar to Welham Green and Brookmans Park. In this case GTR will now provide 4 trains per hour, on the basis of a *'huge level of response from local users'*, whilst for Welham Green and Brookmans Park GTR has commented that *'these stations have low passenger footfall and an increase in service would not be justified'*.
- 3.10 In accepting the change, GTR has noted that the additional stops at Hadley Wood on trains which are proposed to skip Welham Green and Brookmans Park *'can be accommodated without compromising the plan'*. By virtue of skipping those stations, the Phase 2 timetable indicates that trains will have 11 minutes between the time they arrive at Welwyn Garden City from London and the time they depart again on their return journey. In the case of the trains which will continue to stop at Welham Green and Brookmans Park this turnaround time at Welwyn Garden City will only be 6 minutes, yet this has clearly been considered by GTR to be acceptable. It is therefore difficult to see how stopping all services at Welham Green and Brookmans Park would in fact compromise the timetable.
- 3.11 Another example of local campaigning influencing GTR is at Baldock. Despite having a population of just over 10,000 compared to almost 40,000 and 50,000 for Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City respectively, it will now be served by 4 fast trains into London compared to Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City's 2 per hour. GTR has cited *'significant housing growth in the area'* as the reason to increase the number of trains from the 2 per hour proposed at Phase 1, yet the 3,100 new homes proposed for Baldock in North Herts' Local Plan is comparable to the 2,900 and 4,900 envisaged for Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City respectively in this Council's Local Plan.
- 3.12 On the whole, there appears to have been comparatively little consistency in how GTR has evolved the proposals from Phase 1 to Phase 2. Whilst the challenge for GTR in preparing a new timetable for one of the most constrained railway

networks in the world cannot be underestimated, it appears to have given greater weight to the number of comments received than the strategic issues actually identified in the comments. This results in outcomes which could be considered somewhat inconsistent, and ultimately an inefficient use of GTR's scarce resources.

- 3.13 The Council could therefore consider restating its previous concerns relating to frequency of services, but tailoring them with a more focused response at Phase 2 to indicate the extent to which settlements within Welwyn Hatfield will also be experiencing growth. Now that an actual train timetable has been published, the Council could also attempt to set out exactly how GTR might be able to accommodate more services to stations within the borough (such as the example in paragraph 3.10).
- 3.14 A verbal update will be given at the 13 July CPPP meeting of a stakeholder event attended by GTR on 12 July, which may provide more information on the proposals and further context on how the Council could respond.

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 There are no legal implications arising as a direct result of the timetable consultation.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising as a direct result of the timetable consultation.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 There are no risk management implications arising as a direct result of the timetable consultation.

7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no security and terrorism implications arising as a direct result of the timetable consultation.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 There are no procurement implications arising as a direct result of the timetable consultation.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 To the extent that improved train services might encourage people to travel by train rather than by car, the proposals set out in this consultation might make a contribution towards reducing the rate of climate change. However, it is conceivable that proposals which worsen the convenience and comfort of train travel will result in increased car use, with adverse climate change implications.

10 Policy Implication(s)

10.1 There are no policy implications arising directly as a result of this consultation. However, improvements to access by train are likely to benefit the local economy by making the borough more attractive to external investors.

11 Link to Corporate Priorities

11.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority *meet the borough's housing needs*, and specifically to the achievement of *plan for the needs of our communities* and *allow for sustainable growth that protects our environment and heritage* because people rely on a good quality train service.

11.2 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority *help build a strong local economy* and specifically to the achievement of *promote the borough as an attractive place in which to invest* because a good quality train service helps to increase the attractiveness of the borough to external investors.

12 Equality and Diversity

12.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been carried out in connection with the proposals that are set out in this report because the proposals are not being made in connection with a council service.

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Background papers

GTR 2018 Phase 2 Timetable Consultation: <https://www.transformingrail.com/>

CHPP Report on Phase 1 consultation – 1 December 2016