

Kent Rail Strategy for next decade adopted as Kent County Council policy

March 16, 2021



A new Kent Rail Strategy for the next decade and beyond has been officially adopted as Kent County Council's rail policy, having been approved by Cabinet Members.

This ambitious plan is intended to influence the provision of train services in the county of Kent well into the next decade.

The new rail strategy has been through an extensive consultation process, which generated almost two hundred responses from members of the public, rail user and rail association groups, community rail partnerships, representatives from the rail industry, and every level of local government across the county.

It sets out the requirements that Kent County Council considers are needed to support improvements to rail services to meet the expected rise in passenger levels across the High Speed, Mainline and Metro networks by 2031. The key measures outlined in the strategy are:

- enhanced passenger services across Kent
- the delivery of rail infrastructure enhancements
- an expanded fleet of new High Speed trains
- a replacement fleet for the Metro services
- improved station facilities and passenger communications.

The new rail strategy states that the Metro fleet serving West Kent is in “urgent need of modern, higher capacity trains which offer real benefits for these frequent commuter services”.

It goes on to add that “The High Speed fleet serving North and East Kent is in immediate need of strengthening to meet the demand for these highly successful services.”

KCC Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Michael Payne, said: “We want to ensure that Kent’s rail network will help deliver economic growth and continue to provide what our travelling public want and need.

“We do not pretend to know all the answers, but we do want to ensure that the voice of our residents is heard.

“The goals of this strategy mean that we are representing the needs of rail passengers across Kent. With a new South Eastern concession award expected in due course, as well as national rail policy on the cusp of further major change, we wish to make sure the voice of Kent residents is heard.

“It is also important to show our ambition for improved rail links from Kent with the rest of the south-east region, such as a through service linking Kent via Tonbridge with Gatwick Airport, as well as continuing to apply pressure for a better service between Maidstone and the City of London, at least initially to Blackfriars and eventually through to St Pancras and Cambridge.”

KCC Rail Project Manager, Stephen Gasche, said: “While recognising the dramatic decrease in passenger demand due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the County Council is planning for the future.

“We expect that by about 2025 demand will have returned to its pre-pandemic levels, and the proposals in our new rail strategy aim to ensure Kent’s rail network meets this challenge.

“Even allowing for a likely change in the number of passengers working five days a week in London, we need to plan now for future passenger growth which will in any event arise from the proposed increases in housing and population across the county between now and 2031.”