

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 28 February 2019

Time: 6.30pm

Place: Autun Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Michael Downing (Chair), Lloyd Briscoe, Jim Brown, Lizzy Kelly, Andy McGuinness and Adam Mitchell CC.

Also Present: Councillor Ralph Raynor (Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise & Transport)
Mr Phil Hutchinson (Head of Strategic Planning, Govia Thameslink Railway)
Mr Paul Codd (Stakeholder Manager, Govia Thameslink Railway)
Mr Neil Henry (Head of Operations South, Network Rail)
Mr Ken Mason (Infrastructure Projects Manager, Network Rail)

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.30pm
End Time: 7.55pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jamie Fraser, Sarah-Jane Potter and Simon Speller (due to a Mayoral commitment).

It was also noted that apologies for absence had been submitted by the Stevenage Rail user Group.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 31 JANUARY 2019

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Environment & Economy Select Committee meeting held on 31 January 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 STEVENAGE RAIL STATION SERVICE UPDATE

The Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) and Network Rail representatives gave a presentation on performance statistics, enhanced services (including the summer timetable), proposals for the future, and the plans for the Stevenage Turnback Facility.

The Select Committee was informed that GTR operated the Southern, Thameslink, Great Northern and Gatwick Express services. There were over 1 million journeys per day, on 3,600 trains. GTR employed over 7,000 staff. In delivering the

enhanced Thameslink Programme, GTR had implemented a management contract for the Department of Transport, in order to transform north-south travel, which included 20 trains per hour in both directions through the London core.

The GTR representatives drew attention to a number of performance statistics, including 87% of all services running at the Public Performance Measure target of service arriving at final destination within a 5 minute window; and 59% of all services arriving exactly on time at every station. The May 2019 timetable was being tuned for punctuality, in line with a new right time railway initiative with an ambition of 70%+ trains arriving on time at every station.

In terms of the Summer (May) 2019 timetable, the GTR representatives advised that there would be an additional 31 new weekday train services, including 28 extra Brighton to Cambridge services (an additional 1 or 2 trains per hour in both directions). There would be approximately 180 new train services on Saturdays and approximately 100 new train services on Sundays (precise details were summarised in two powerpoint slides).

Building on the delivery of the improved Winter 2018 timetable, the GTR representatives stated that 2,000 smartphones would be issued to station team members; timetables would be available online and in print; passenger awareness campaigns, including posters, web updates, e-mails and wider marketing; and introduction of station support volunteers.

In respect of the Stevenage Turnback Facility (5th Platform), the Network Rail representatives advised that this would result in more trains per hour and improved reliability on the Hertford Loop, building on the benefits of the new 717 fleet of trains, and increasing connectivity at Stevenage for destinations on the East Coast Main Line.

The Select Committee noted that replacement bus services would be essential during the Turnback works, although it was hoped to escalate the programme of works to meet a completion date of late 2020 or possibly earlier (currently scheduled for a September 2021 completion).

The Network Rail representatives explained that journeys from Watton-at-Stone to Hertford North and further south would not be affected, but there would be 2 replacement buses per hour each way between Stevenage and Hertford North and 1 replacement bus per hour each way between Stevenage and Watton-at-Stone. Details of the replacement buses to be used on both routes were provided, together with the bus stops to be used at all 3 stations.

In terms of passenger communications regarding the Turnback Facility works, the Select Committee was informed that details were currently on the website and posters had been displayed. Leaflets and advertising was pending, as were drop-in sessions at Hertford North station and public engagement through social media and wider marketing channels.

During the course of the presentation, the following issues were considered:

- The Cambridge Rail User Group had engaged effectively with Network Rail and GTR over network/timetabling issues; Network Rail / GTR had arranged two meetings with the Stevenage Rail User Group, but unfortunately the Group had been unable to attend on both occasions.
- Pocket size fold out timetables would be produced, but there were no plans to produce timetable booklets.
- The regrettable problems experienced following the introduction of the May 2018 timetable had largely been addressed, including the issue of driver training and operatives being in the right place at the right times.
- The GTR representatives would respond to Members of the Committee regarding a query raised in respect of the 82% Public Performance Measure relating to the percentage of trains which had run to schedule.
- With particular reference to Finsbury Park station, the Network Rail/GTR representatives acknowledged the difficulties caused by last minute platform changes. They explained the reasons for such changes, and would be working to improve communications so that the process in future was much slicker.
- The Select Committee was advised of ticketing promotions, such as Key Go / Key Card / Oyster Card, together with the possibilities for extending the use of these forms of ticketing.
- It was noted that the King's Cross Signalling facility was over 40 years old, and that plans were in progress for the remodelling of this facility, which would entail disruptive weekend works from late June 2019, with peak disruption from December 2020 to March 2021.
- In terms of the works relating to the Stevenage Turnback facility, the GTR representatives undertook to respond to Select Committee Members on the possibility for the replacement buses to be adapted to take full size bicycles, and possible discounted fares for those using replacement buses during the construction works, and to clarify the situation with regard to the use of replacement buses during weekends throughout that period.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That, notwithstanding the absence of representatives from the Stevenage Rail User Group, the developments in the timetabling of trains be noted, and it be hoped that Network Rail and Govia Thameslink Railway's continue consultation with users and SBC Members over future timetabling development.
2. That Network Rail's plans for the Stevenage Turnback Facility (5th Platform), including the temporary replacement bus services whilst works take place and the escalated plans for completion of the project, be noted.
3. That the Select Committee continue to take note of events and outcomes relating to GTR timetabling issues and the Stevenage Turnback Facility.
4. That the GTR representatives provide responses for circulation to Select Committee Members in respect of the following outstanding issues:
 - Public Performance Measure (PPM) Targets and actual performance;

- Buses – possible adaptation to take full size bicycles;
- Fares – possible discounted fares for those using replacement buses during the construction works on the Stevenage Turnback Facility; and
- Clarity with regard to the situation with the use of replacements buses during weekends throughout the construction works on the Turnback Facility.

4 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

5 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

6 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR