

# What is Thameslink's potential?

By Keith Dyall

Thameslink 2000 is something which we should support with great vigour in that it will enhance the transport facilities within the Thames area.

Having said that, will the development be used to its best potential?

Certainly some of the proposed beneficiaries are in for a few surprises. At present the maximum number of trains through the core Farringdon-Blackfriars section is eight trains per hour, consisting of four metro and four outer suburban services.

In order to prevent delays on either side of the river affecting the other there is a recovery period built in to the timetable, which is the reason for the long dwell times at Blackfriars.

The proposed scheme will increase the number of trains from eight to 24 per hour through this section in the peak, in other words a train every 2.5 minutes, thus forcing the removal of the recovery period.

Bear in mind that trains often have dwell times at King's Cross of at least two minutes in order to disembark and reload passengers, thus the prospect for reliability is not good.

Certainly the platforms at the new St Pancras station will be improved. There will be considerably more people waiting to get on and off there.

Thameslink has been considering the possible options for new stock to improve loading and unloading at key stations and this can only be done with more or larger doors.

This in turn would mean either fewer seats or less leg-room, decidedly uncomfortable for those doing longer journeys.

Regarding the services themselves, here we consider the peak periods which are the key south of the river.

There are services from 10 origin/destination points travelling over 12 different routes from Guildford via Sutton and Croydon in the west to Dartford via both Sidcup and Bexleyheath in the East, plus many places in between.

North of the river there are six origin/destination points over three different routes, which is much more manageable.

Having said that, there are pinch points at Welwyn North and the single-track sections of the Fensline, which could cause problems with trains that are running out of course.

We have to realise that no route will be getting any more trains



than at present, although for individual stations there may be increases or decreases.

The main changes are that trains on some presently overcrowded routes will be longer and many will have different in-town destinations.

Some places with a half-hourly service will find that they will have an hourly service to their existing terminal (Victoria) and an hourly service from Holborn Viaduct-London Bridge.

We are concerned about the wisdom of this which would leave passengers with the choice of a mad dash to another station or waiting an hour for the next train.

Obviously the choice has been made to give as many places a direct interchange into Thameslink as possible which may not have been a wise thing. This could have been a better option for some places such as Eastbourne and Littlehampton. The resurrection of the Guildford route is surprising, as it was not considered a success before.

Too many destinations over a wide variety of routes will lead to unreliability.

North of the river the choice of destinations is more bizarre.

British Rail and subsequently Railtrack were desperate to get the remaining services that were Network SouthEast out of King's Cross so that the suburban side could be converted to take inter-city services.

Leaving ex-NSE services there would mean that the station would have to be enlarged so that there would be less land left for commercial redevelopment.

When the number of train paths allocated to serving the GN lines fell from 12 to 10 it was decided that the only way that development land could be maintained was the removal from the scheme of the inner suburban service terminating at Welwyn Garden City.

Thus none of the Thameslink services would serve any of the London suburban stations.

Considering that 20% of cars approaching the inner London ring go through or round to the other side this seems a very strange decision as few car users commuting through London would have come from North of Stevenage and most would have come from the GLA area.

Of a more serious concern is that with inter-city taking over King's Cross there is a finite number of non inter-city trains

that can be run. There will be no paths left for expansion of services and there are, as we know, government plans for population increases for North London and Hertfordshire such as the consideration of plans for doubling the size of Stevenage.

The only way to begin to meet this sort of expansion would be to put extra stops in services such as the fast Cambridge trains, which could for instance make extra stops at Stevenage and Hitchin.

When Thameslink trains stopped using St Pancras the Bedford commuters were in uproar, because they had to fight to get on a train at King's Cross, and could not be guaranteed a seat, instead of the walk along the platform and time to choose a seat in comfort before the train departs.

This might sound trivial but experience shows that it will be a major cause of inconvenience. By far the largest number of GN commuters will still change at King's Cross to work in the West End, and many at Finsbury Park or King's Cross for the city, or travel into Liverpool Street.

The attached table gives more details as to the services being planned.

The London branch is pressing for the extension of the Chelsea-Hackney line to be extended onto the West Anglia routes which could relieve pressure on the GN routes, but some of the difficulties for long distance commuting would remain.

Direct access to the West End would be possible, however from Chingford, Enfield Town, Hertford East, Stansted and beyond.

## Proposed Thameslink 2000 service patterns

FROM/TO	FROM/TO	PEAK TPH	LENGTH	OFF PEAK TPH
VIA LONDON BRIDGE				
Bedford (Fast)	Brighton(fast)	2	12	2
Bedford (fast)	Brighton(slow)	2	12	2
Bedford (semi-fast)	Dartford (via Sidcup)	2	12	—
Bedford (semi-fast)	Dartford (via Bexleyheath)	2	12	2
Cambridge (slow)	Eastbourne	1	12	1
Cambridge (slow)	Littlehampton	1	12	1
Cambridge (fast)	Ashford	1	12	1
Kings Lynn	Ashford	1	12**	1
Peterborough	East Grinstead	2	12*	—
Peterborough	Horsham	2	12	2
Letchworth	Guildford (via Croydon)	2	8	2
VIA ELEPHANT AND CASTLE				
Luton	W Sutton (via Wimbledon)	2	8	2
Luton	W Sutton (via Mitcham J)	2	8	2
St Albans	Sevenoaks	2	8	—

TPH: trains per hour

\* Oxted to East Grinstead 8 cars

\*\* Cambridge to Kings Lynn 4 cars

Off-peak lengths at discretion of TOCs