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Southeastern successor faces Thameslink challenge

Posted 21/06/12

The Department for Transport has begun a consultation on the new South Eastern rail franchise which will operate train services from 1 April 2014 to September 2020 with a possible two year extension.

While the government is backing longer rail franchises in an attempt to attract investment from the private sector, a relatively short term is planned for South Eastern to align the finish date with that of the new Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern franchise. Subsequent franchises can then be co-ordinated to deliver service enhancements made possible by the completion of the Thameslink Programme and Crossrail schemes in 2020.



In the meantime, both the new TSGN and South Eastern franchises will have to run services during the major disruption caused by rebuilding London Bridge station as part of Thameslink work. According to the consultation document, London Bridge major works start in January 2015 and will run to January 2018. Until April 2016, routes to Charing Cross and Cannon Street will be separated in the Lewisham area (because of work to build the Bermondsey dive-under) and will run independently for the last three miles into London Bridge. During this time it will not be physically possible for trains

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from the Greenwich route to gain access to Charing Cross so all Greenwich services will transfer to Cannon Street. This means that Cannon Street will be more intensively used throughout the week to accommodate these and other trains.

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The franchise is currently operated by GoVia - the joint venture between Go-Ahead and Keolis - as Southeastern. From April 2016, trains that serve Cannon Street will be unable to call at London Bridge and all London Bridge passengers will need to travel on trains bound for Charing Cross. The DfT expects that rolling stock formations will need to be adjusted taken from Charing Cross trains to strengthen Cannon Street trains in the first period and vice versa after

Services that are currently jointly operated by First Capital Connect and Southeastern will transfer to the TSGN franchise instead of the current situation where Southeastern is responsible for the portion of the journey south of Elephant & Castle. From north, the entire service will be the responsibility of the TSGN franchise and will not figure in the new Southeastern franchise.

Further services are expected to transfer in 2018 when London Bridge works complete. According to the DfT, some Thameslink core trains serving Sevenoaks, Maidstone East trains could be transferred as well as some Kent services. Recent timetabling work has established that if trains between Kent and the Thameslink core run via London Cannon Street for the present level of service to continue to run into and out of London Cannon Street. In view of the high cost of the London Bridge works, the DfT believes it may be best for services between Kent and the Thameslink core to run only via Elephant & Castle.

Other issues raised in the consultation include Network Rail's proposal to close the Folkestone Harbour branch services, from 2018, on Abbey Wood station as well as Woolwich Dockyard and Woolwich Arsenal station. Network Rail also proposes that Woolwich station can be secured.

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