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Wimbledon loop to remain part of Thameslink network

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Plans to remove the Wimbledon loop in south London from an expanded Thameslink rail network have been dropped following a public consultation that found in favour of retaining the existing through London service.

The current Thameslink route, operated by First Capital Connect, divides south of Blackfriars. Fast trains head for Brighton via East Croydon while a local service operates on the Wimbledon loop via Elephant & Castle. Four trains run every hour from loop stations serving Merton, Morden, Sutton, Carshalton, Mitcham, Streatham and Tulse Hill before continuing through to St Pancras International and beyond.

As part of Thameslink Programme plans the number of through London services between Blackfriars and St Pancras will increase to 24 an hour in the peaks from late 2018. But the recent £600m rebuild of Blackfriars station has included swapping the two through lines from one side of the station to the other. While this avoids Thameslink trains to/from London Bridge having to cross over the lines used by Southeastern stopping services starting/finishing at Blackfriars, the new layout means Wimbledon loop trains now come into the wrong side of Blackfriars to run through without switching tracks. Therefore Network Rail had proposed that loop services should start and finish at Blackfriars, avoiding crossovers which could affect the performance of the planned high frequency timetable but requiring passengers to change if travelling to/from the north (TB 7852).

On Monday (21 January) rail minister Simon Burns said, following discussions with Network Rail, loop services would continue to operate through London. He revealed that a Department for Transport consultation on the forthcoming Thameslink/Southern/Great Northern franchise received a total of 3,500 responses of which 2,200 (63%) were in favour of retaining the current route.

"The Thameslink Programme is having a huge impact on improving rail services across London and beyond, but the Department was always concerned that the initial proposals for this route were not quite right," said Burns. "I am therefore extremely pleased that Network Rail have relooked at the plans and am confident this decision will provide benefits to rail users for years to come."

Under the new proposals, eight Thameslink trains will run per hour via Elephant and Castle, including the four Wimbledon loop trains, two from Sevenoaks via Bromley South and Catford, plus two peak only services from Maidstone East via Bromley South. The remaining 16tph will travel to/from London Bridge across the new Borough Market viaduct.

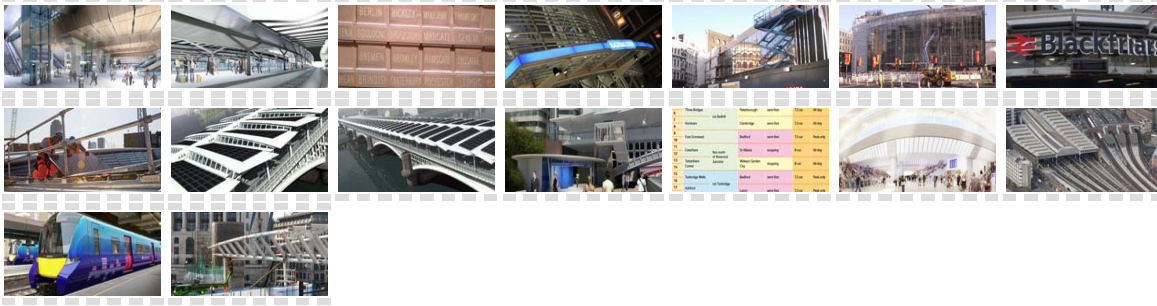
*First Capital Connect: operates
Thameslink services on
Wimbledon loop*



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