



## Mayor's rail takeover 'would harm services'



Control bid: Boris Johnson campaigning for improvements to the rail network. Picture: Alex Lentati

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Pippa Crerar, City Hall Editor



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Boris Johnson's plans to take over suburban rail routes into London received a blow today as the Conservative leader of Kent council ruled them "totally unacceptable".

The Mayor has been fighting for the power to improve crowded and unreliable commuter trains into the capital by bringing the services under Transport for London's control.

He argues that if he were awarded the franchises, he could simplify ticketing, improve timetables and extend train lengths. The first two being targeted are Southeastern, which serves Kent, and West Anglia. TfL insiders said the bids were "still very much alive" and they would continue to make the case. But Department for Transport sources suggested ministers were "cooling" on the idea, which has run into opposition from councils in the Home Counties.

In a letter to transport minister Simon Burns, Kent council leader Paul Carter said main commuter routes were already at full capacity and the Mayor's proposal to increase the frequency of "metro" services — routes within London's boundaries — would harm services coming to the capital from Kent.

He wrote: "We are in serious danger, if current TfL proposals go ahead, of benefiting London commuters, while disadvantaging Kent commuters. This must not be allowed to happen."

Gareth Powell, TfL director of strategy and service development, said: "Kent residents will get more capacity and more frequent off-peak services under our plans to take responsibility for services. The success of London Overground shows what can be done."

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