

Mrs Ashley Taylor
Principal Policy Planner
Ashford Borough Council

Wednesday 7 December 2016

Dear Ashley,

Re: "Ashford Local Plan and Railway Infrastructure"

Many thanks for your email regarding the above. As we have discussed, Southeastern consider the retention of Chart Leacon Depot as railway infrastructure to be an important component of securing the capability to cater for growing rail demand for Kent. By helping to enable this growth, then rail's ability to contribute to the continued health and growth of the Kent economy is itself assured.

Before specifically addressing the Chart Leacon site, I thought it may be helpful to outline what the characteristics of good railway depots or sidings are in general, and therefore why good sites are often difficult to find. The points shown below are all important, so there is no particular significance to the order in which they are presented. An ideal new depot or sidings location would therefore:

- have infrastructure already in place (i.e. signals, rails, power supply, sheds etc.), even if not in current use. This makes commissioning or recommissioning considerably cheaper, easier and faster to achieve;
- contain a large number of separate "roads" (actual berthing lines), ideally longer than 12 car length. This gives both high unit storage capability, and maximum operating flexibility as units can be berthed in different train formations up to the maximum of three four-car units;
- have more than one access and egress point. This makes the depot operationally more efficient in terms of bringing trains into service
- be in an isolated location or situated amongst commercial land use, away from residential properties to minimise concerns over possible noise from operations;

- be easy to reach by road to enable engineers and train crew simple access;
- have space to provide accommodation for train crew and engineers, or be close to existing train crew depot locations;
- be at a location which was close to the “natural” start and end point of large numbers of services;
- be secure to minimise trespass and vandalism.

If Chart Leacon is reviewed against the above list it fulfils all of the above criteria. This is rare in any individual site.

Demand for rail continues to grow. There is a well-developed market and supply chain for the provision of additional new units. Consequently, often the largest constraint on increasing train numbers is actually where they are maintained, and even more where they are berthed.

For the last 18 months or so, Southeastern has been working extremely closely with the DfT to review options to increase mainline and metro service capacity through cascading existing units from GTR as they come available as a consequence of the introduction of new units to that operator. In addition to this, from May 2018, a total of 136 GTR class 700 vehicles are expected to berth in Kent, 48 of those vehicles will be in the Ashford area. The class 700 units, and any additional units cascaded to Southeastern will create a need for additional berthing in the East Kent area.

With the increasing usage of the Class 395 High speed services, it seems all but certain that additional units will be required to accommodate that demand in the medium term. If these are berthed alongside the existing units at the High speed depot at Ashford, then inevitably, existing mainline units will need to be displaced, again adding to the berthing challenges in the East Kent area.

In the short term, Southeastern has been holding detailed discussions with DB Cargo, who own and operate the site at Dollands Moor near Folkestone to enable provision of some additional berthing capacity. Whilst this can accommodate some of the extra berthing requirement (albeit with capital expenditure required), and thereby solves part of the short term need, it cannot provide all the requirement, and is unlikely to be the answer in the medium and long term, given the need for continued DB Cargo operation from the site. Furthermore, whilst an excellent facility, it is 11 miles from Ashford, which would add to ongoing operational expense as empty stock movements would increase as trains are brought to Ashford to commence passenger operations.

In your email you asked for details about berthing capacity in the Ashford area, what utilisation rate this was currently at, and when this rate was forecast to be exceeded.

The table below gives this information for the current operation and for the anticipated position in May 2018 when a number of GTR class 700 services commence operation into Kent. It assumes the ability to berth in Dollands Moor.

	Current Operation				Predicted 2018 Operation with GTR Services		
	Capacity for Passenger Service Vehicles	Vehicles Berthed	Utilisation	Entries into AM Peak Service	Vehicles Berthed	Utilisation	Entries into AM Peak Service
Ashford Hitachi Depot	170	129	76%	17	137	81%	19
Ashford East Berthing Sidings	24	20	83%	2	24	100%	3
Ashford Up Berthing Sidings	16	14	88%	2	14	88%	2
Folkestone East Berthing Sidings	36	24	67%	2	36	100%	3

The table needs very careful interpretation, however. Whilst there would still appear to be available capacity within the Hitachi Depot, full utilisation is restricted by the maximum formation at which services can operate (8 vehicles on the Maidstone East line) and by the layout of the depot which dictates the number of services which can be brought into passenger service for the Morning Peak. Consequently, the actual capacity is the lesser of either the available physical space in the depot, or the maximum number of units that can enter into service during the peak. At Ashford Hitachi depot, the latter is the limit, where the maximum number of departures from the depot to form Morning Peak services is 19, and so the capacity is actually effectively 100% utilised. It is also worth noting that in addition to vehicles berthed in the depot for passenger services there may be up to another 34 vehicles on the depot for maintenance or to use the wheel lathe. Although these vehicles have dedicated identified berthing the expected increase in vehicles required will also require an increase in the maintenance fleet to be berthed at the depot.

At present, whilst no final decision has been made about additional units that may cascade to Southeastern from the work currently underway with DfT, it would not be appropriate to speculate about additional numbers of units which may require berthing (hence why they do not feature in the table). What the above table does show, however, is that even without any of these additional units, depot and sidings capacity in the Ashford area is forecast to effectively be fully utilised by May 2018. At present, any additional capacity required by further cascaded units would be accommodated by Dollands Moor. As explained above, however, Dollands Moor can provide a partial short term solution, but does not constitute a full long term answer.

As an accompaniment to this letter, we have attached an adapted picture showing how many four car units Chart Leacon could house, even leaving the former maintenance sheds in place. With each yellow bar representing a train, this indicates that at least 20 additional units could be accommodated at the site. It also clearly shows that all surrounding land is not residential.

Southeastern has commissioned work to assess other possible stabling locations in East Kent, and none of the available locations can individually fulfil all the needs faced. In fact, it would take at least 3 of the locations to be developed to collectively offer the same (or less) capacity as offered by Chart Leacon alone. Development of each of these sites has also been estimated as considerably more expensive per unit berthed than Chart Leacon would be. Whilst the figures are indicative, the approximate cost of commissioning Chart Leacon per unit is estimated at approximately £700k, where the other locations vary from £1.4m to £3.1m per unit to provide collectively significantly less ideal solutions.

At the start of this letter we outlined the characteristics that define an ideal depot and/or berthing site. In order to cater for the forecast significant growth of rail demand in Kent, a substantial influx of additional units will be required over the next years. Chart Leacon is ideally located for integration into existing operations, situated as it is so close to Ashford which is a critical hub for so much of the rail activity in the area. It has a large amount of rail infrastructure already in place which would only need to be recommissioned, thereby reducing both time to bring on stream, and cost to do so. It is also a large site, with very flexible operational capabilities which could easily accommodate a large number of additional units, thereby making a profound contribution to future berthing needs. For all these reasons, we believe that the retention for Chart Leacon for future operational railway use is both highly sensible and highly desirable.

If you have any further questions or clarifications required, then please do not hesitate to call me.

Yours Sincerely,



Richard Dean
Train Services Director

CC: *Matt Lodge, DfT*
Tim Rees, DfT
Chris Gibb, Network Rail
John Halsall, Network Rail
David Statham, Southeastern

Ashford Chart Leacon - Open Berthing Capacity

