Written evidence submitted by West Sussex County Council (RTC0093)

Key points

- The recent significant problems on the West Sussex rail network have caused significant disruption to commuters and businesses.

- The current system for timetable changes lacks transparency and there appears to be no requirement for the rail industry to listen to the views of local authorities when they consult on new timetables. Changes to local rail timetables can impact on local economies and the lack of engagement may undermine the effectiveness of future Local Industrial Strategies and local authority economic growth plans.

- Changes to local rail timetables may impact other parts of local transport networks as they impact on how people choose to travel, resulting in increased congestion and carbon emissions.

1. Impact on West Sussex

1. There are three major rail lines in West Sussex: the Brighton Main Line, Arun Valley Line and the West Coastway Line. Govia Thameslink Railway operate almost all of the services on these routes. There were 50.5m entries and exits at stations in West Sussex in 2016/17 (ORR statistics) which highlights the importance of rail services to the West Sussex community.

2. In the West Sussex Plan the delivery of economic growth and sustainability are two of the County Council’s five strategic priorities. The local rail network, being prone to serious disruptions, deters business investment and encourages the use of less sustainable modes of transport. To deliver economic growth it is important that the county has the infrastructure required to support the economy and that West Sussex remains a great place to work, live or visit.

3. Government has rightly recognised the importance of working in partnership with local leaders to drive economic growth in its Industrial Strategy. The work of local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to deliver growth is undermined through not being meaningfully engaged when changes to rail timetables are developed. Local Industrial Strategies will not be successful if LEPs and their Local Authority partners are unable to play a meaningful role in timetabling discussions impacting on local people and businesses. Transport for the South East will be well placed to engage with both the rail industry and local highways and transport authorities in the future.

4. The impact of the change to the timetable has been keenly felt in West Sussex. It has been particularly problematic on the Brighton Main Line where commuter stations such as Hassocks no longer enjoy direct services to Clapham Junction in the peak periods.
5. West Sussex County Council highlighted concerns over the reliability of the new timetable and the absence of information about contingency plans in 2016 in response to consultation on the timetable changes. The poor implementation of the new timetable has seen trains delayed and cancelled, with commuters having their daily journeys significantly disrupted.

6. A recent draft study for Transport for the South East has calculated that the impact annual value of a 1 minute of congestion per year journey time saving on the Brighton Main Line corridor to business users is £4.5m.

7. Further, a recent study, led by Dave Cooper, Professor of Management and Economic Development at the University of Chichester, estimated that the disruption caused by RMT and ASLEF strikes on Southern Rail in 2016 cost the economy of the south around £11m per day through people being unable to reach their places of work. This figure does not account for other short term impacts such as loss of sales, impact of travel delays, staff morale and motivational issues, or individual loss of income.

8. Disruption to the rail network also impacts on how people choose to travel. The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has recently published rail usage statistics for 2016/17, as referenced above, which report a downturn in patronage on Govia Thameslink Railway during 2016/17 when the RMT and ASLEF industrial relations disputes severely affected performance. This suggests that disruption to rail services encourages many frustrated commuters to either work from home or use alternative modes of transport, such as driving, resulting in increased congestion and carbon emissions.

2. How could this disruption be avoided in the future?

9. The current process for timetable changes is not transparent and there is a lack of clear accountability. There is also little scope for the unique needs of local areas to be reflected in the process through meaningful engagement and there appears to be no requirement for the rail industry to take account of the views of local stakeholders.

10. Rail infrastructure must be recognised as playing a significant role in local transport networks and that rail disruption or significant changes to timetables can have a significant, adverse effect on other parts of local transport networks. Therefore, there is a need for local highways and transport authorities to be kept informed and meaningfully engaged regarding changes to rail timetables and the rail industry must be required to take account of the views of local stakeholders.

11. As part of the Committee’s inquiry, we would ask that consideration be given to the adequacy of GTR’s 2016 consultation on the timetable changes. We consider that for future timetable changes, train operators should be required to consider potential reliability issues and publish their contingency plans. This would allow consultees to understand potential reliability issues and comment on the adequacy of the contingency plans and their effect on any proposed timetable
changes. The recently established Transport for the South East will be well placed to engage with both the rail industry and local highways and transport authorities in the future.

_Councillor Louise Goldsmith, Leader, West Sussex County Council_
_Councillor Roger Elkins, Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure_

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