

Trains 4 Deal is the recognised rail users' group for Deal and Sandwich. This response to the DfT consultation has been written after discussion among the membership.

By Tom Rowland
Chairman Trains4Deal

Our initial response to the consultation document was one of dismay. Deal and Sandwich are not specifically referred to in the text of the document although we fought a five year battle to be included in the high speed network and the service from the towns has proved one of the stars of the HS1 service, a much used, outstanding success. Then the collapse of the Dover sea wall was a disaster for rail users for most of 2016 from the towns.

Since its reinstatement the HS1 service has returned to hugely successful usage levels, with many more commuters and regular off-peak users boarding at Deal and Sandwich than do in Dover. The HS1 service has been a key driver of economic growth.

However, the Franchise network map on page 9 of the consultation document marks the section of line passing through Deal and Sandwich a "SouthEastern limited service route," although it is also included in the High Speed Network.

Bat and Ball, a small halt outside Sevenoaks, is the only other station reduced to a limited service status on the SouthEastern network and the implication is that Deal and Sandwich are small, out of the way irrelevancies to the overall success of the rail service.

That is not the case. Deal has a population of around 35,000 with large numbers of people working in the creative industries and dependent on fast transport links to London.

If the HS service is increased to a half-hourly frequency under the new franchise, then we urge that Deal and Sandwich be included in the upgrade as detailed in the specification for the franchise.

Our fear is that Deal and Sandwich will not be included in the full HS service when the franchise specification is published and the towns will again find

themselves marginalised with an inferior and easily sidelined rail service that will not meet the needs of the next five to 10 years.

To take your consultation questions in turn.

1. Priorities. These should include increasing the frequency of the HS1 service to half hourly and including Deal and Sandwich in all of the upgrades.
2. We believe more space may be required on HS1 as the service popularity increases but this should not be at the expense of the space provisions for wheel chairs and bicycles. Provision of space for bicycles should be increased, not reduced. Given the constraints on taking bicycles on the service nearer to London this is particularly relevant at the coastal end of the service.
3. Changes to carriage layout should not reduce the existing comfort levels of seating for passengers.
4. There is no First Class seating on HS1 trains and we support this.
5. We agree with your improvement priorities.
6. We agree with your priorities
7. The fare structure should be improved by reintroducing the Easement on the time restrictions on the use of the Network Rail Cards before 10am so passengers can use it on the 9.34 train from Deal, or its equivalent. SouthEastern already offers similar easements from Broadstairs, Margate and Hastings and until the introduction of the HS1 service at Deal there was an easement for the 9.40 train from Deal. Many users who work in the creative industries have moved into the towns and they need to travel to London to work two or three times per week but at present are offered no reduction on the standard fare. At the moment the earliest service available for Network Rail Card holders leaves Deal at 10.34, meaning it is impossible to get to London before the afternoon.
8. Offer more discounts
9. Improve road access on the 'down' line side of Deal station. At the moment there is no road access and it is impossible for cars to stop on the dangerous corner although an unused piece of Network Rail owned land is available. The same applies at Sandwich.
10. Improve road access to 'down' side of Deal station.
11. We are in favour of the extension of HS1 services to Hastings and other south coast towns so long as it is not at the expense of services to Deal and Sandwich which are in need of upgrading. We urge the retention of

the existing HS1 Rounder service and would like to see the DfT insist the franchise winner actively markets and promotes the service as a round the coast service, something SouthEastern has conspicuously failed to do.

12. We do not believe that a service that is exactly one hour in duration is necessary for the economic redevelopment of any destination. A reliable service that takes 63 or 64 minutes is sufficient.
13. We do not support the proposal. In this area the HS1 stops at Walmer and Martin Mill should be preserved.
14. Getting from Deal to Dover by road is an increasingly unpleasant experience, as is travel between Deal and Canterbury. A reliable rail service is much preferable in both cases and under no circumstances should rail users be encouraged to drive to Dover Priory or the new station at Thanet Parkway to pick up trains, in either case adding to local road congestion problems.
15. We oppose any simplification that would deny Deal and Sandwich the full benefit of improved HS1 services.
16. St Pancras should remain the principal London destination accessible directly by rail from Deal with some services serving London Bridge and Charing Cross.