

Summary of the Responses to Consultation on Proposed Closure of Rochester Station and the Department for Transport's comments

Introduction

The Department for Transport ("the Department") has carried out a public consultation on Network Rail's proposal to close the existing Rochester station when the new replacement station opens 500 metres away.

The consultation on the proposed closure of the existing station at Rochester has been completed and the responses have been considered by the Department. Following this consultation exercise, the Department has decided that it is not necessary to modify the proposal from what was originally published.

Next Steps

The proposed closure of the existing station at Rochester is now subject to ratification by the Office for Rail and Road, which is not automatic.

Responses received

Thirteen responses to the consultation were received by the Department during the initial consultation period, including Kent County Council ("KCC") and Transport Focus, the statutory body representing the interests of rail passengers in Great Britain.

One representation objected to the closure.

Two representations expressed support for the closure but with qualifications.

Four representations expressed no opinion on the closure itself either way (neutral representation) but sought clarification of matters relating to both the current and the new stations.

Six simply sought copies of the consultation document.

A fourteenth response was received during the six week extension period.

Representation objecting to the closure

One representation objected to the closure of the existing station at Rochester on the basis that none of the bus services serving the existing station (i.e. routes 145, 155, 142 and 156) would call within easy walking distance of the new station, and that this would result in passengers having a long walk to the new station or, if carrying luggage, obliging them to drive or take a taxi.

Department for Transport's comment

The Department has no direct responsibility for the positioning of bus stops or the routes taken by buses. These are matters for the relevant local authority and individual bus operators.

The bus services referred to in the representation currently operate along High Street, using bus stops D and E near the existing Rochester station. The Department acknowledges that some passengers who use these services would be inconvenienced by the move to the new location – unless the bus services were altered to call at the new location in Corporation Street.

Network Rail has commented that the business case for moving the station was predicated on shortening overall journey times and reducing reliance on cars for a large section of the local community. In particular, the new station improves connections with the city centre and the new Riverside development, which has been an issue emphasised within Medway Council's Local Planning policies for some time. Therefore, Medway Council also has a direct interest in how the new station is served by buses.

Network Rail advised the Department that Medway Council was aware that some buses would not be able to serve the new station and had asked the current bus service provider, Arriva, to look at the timetable. It is therefore possible that by the time the new station is opened, changes will have been made to the timetable that would see buses serve the new station.

Of the bus services mentioned in the representation, two operate via Chatham station, which would provide an alternative for passengers who were unable or unwilling to walk from the bus stop to the new station location. The Department considers that, in the event that bus services remained as they are now after the closure of the current station, such passengers would continue to have a similar quality of access rail services by bus, albeit from a different station. In addition, screens would be provided at the new station showing information about bus services as part of integrated transport services for the Medway Towns.

The Department accepts that, if there were no change to the arrangements for buses to take account of the closure of the existing station, some passengers arriving by bus may be required to make alternative arrangements. However, the Department notes that the new position of the station in Rochester will fulfil a number of Medway Council's planning objectives, including improvements to connectivity with the city centre and the Riverside development. These benefits, together with the wider benefits to rail services through Rochester as noted in the consultation document (including greater capacity, longer trains and reduced operating costs) would be lost if the Department were to conclude on the basis of this representation that the existing station should not be allowed to close.

Representations supporting the closure

Both KCC and Transport Focus expressed support to the closure of the existing station at Rochester but with qualifications.

KCC supported the proposal on the basis that the new location would be better placed to serve the town centre, would enable 12-car trains of either Class 375 or Class 465 stock to operate without the need for "selective door opening", and would generally improve the capacity of the congested Medway area on the existing rail network.

However, KCC considered that the Department's consultation document included a 'serious error' in relation to the terminology used to describe the train operating company ("TOC") responsible for Rochester station and the passenger services calling there.

Department for Transport's comment

The Department did not feel it appropriate to consider reissuing the documents as the question of how the TOC was described had no bearing on the question whether to allow services to be switched to a new station 500 metres away from the existing one.

Transport Focus noted that replacement station was only 500 metres away, would have its own car park and should be able to provide 12 car capability due to longer platforms. It did not object to the closure provided that new station was provided with a comparable level of station amenities.

Department for Transport's comment

The Department is satisfied that the amenities at the new Rochester station as described by Network Rail appear to be at least comparable to those at the existing station.

Neutral representations

Four representations did not express any opinion on the closure but sought further clarification of various aspects of the proposal to move from the current station to a new one.

One neutral representation asked for details of the groups representing disabled people and accessible transport who had been directly consulted about the closure and also the location where the Equality Impact Assessment for it had been published.

Department for Transport's comment

The Department did not publish an Equality Impact Assessment as there is no requirement in the Equality Act 2010 to do this.

When Medway Council considered the planning application for the new station, it did so with reference to the policies set out in its Local Plan (2003). The letter of 12 September 2013 to Network Rail communicating the decision on the planning application noted that particular account had been taken of a number of policies including BNE7 (Access for All) and BNE8 (Security and Personal Safety). Network Rail has confirmed that the structure was designed in accordance with the "Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations" a DfT and Transport Scotland Code of

Practice ("the Code"). The Code takes into account the needs of disabled people but also ensures that the design of a station will benefit other passengers such as those with luggage, small children or simply unfamiliar with using the railway.

The Code was updated in March 2015 but the version taken into account with the design of Rochester station can be viewed here -

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/3191/accessible-train-station-design-cop.pdf

No consultation responses were received which specifically mentioned the groups of people referred to in the Equality Act 2010, i.e. people of different age groups; people with dependents and caring responsibilities; people with a disability; women and men; people belonging to all racial, cultural and ethnic groups; people who are pregnant or subject to maternity legislation; people who have a religion or belief, or who do not; people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual or in a Civil Partnership; people who intend to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone gender reassignment.

To ensure that we meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty the Department sought the view of two local equality groups, giving them an additional six weeks to respond: Medway Ethnic Minority Forum noted that its members seemed to approve the proposal and no response was received from Medway Disabled Residents Forum. As part of the earlier planning process Medway Council consulted the Medway Access Forum and it appears that no response was received.

The Department's consultation exercise required notices to be displayed at a large number of stations, in newspapers and on the DfT website. Prior to this the scheme to provide a new station at Rochester was well publicised by Network Rail and Medway Council. The design and location of the station was considered through the planning process which took account of accessibility, local amenity and benefit to the community as well as providing additional capacity for the railway.

On the basis of this evidence, the Department has concluded that the move from the current station to the new one would have no specific adverse impact on the above groups.

One neutral representation considered that the buildings of the current station were a fine example of London, Chatham & Dover Railway architecture and asked what would happen to them after closure.

Department for Transport's comment

Network Rail has advised that there was no intention to demolish the buildings in the short term and that consideration would be given to renting them out on a commercial basis in future.

Two of the neutral representations sought clarification of the services that would operate from the new station, including the frequency and journey times to London Victoria, London Cannon Street, London Bridge and Stratford International.

Department for Transport's comment

Network Rail has confirmed that services would simply transfer from the existing station to the new one. Therefore, the frequency and pattern of services would remain as they are.

Network Rail has also advised that there may be a slight decrease in journey times to certain destinations, purely because of the different location of the new station. However, precise details of journey times will not be known until the timetable for December 2017 is finalised.

End