

# 1. Executive Summary

One of the original reasons for establishing the Green Belt around London was to prevent the capital's commuter infrastructure from being overwhelmed by population growth at and around the city's periphery.

SE Essex is a commuter economy within London's Green Belt, 12% of workers commute by train to London with a further 10% travelling by road. These London jobs are of disproportionate economic importance, being more highly paid than those held by counterparts working locally.

However, the SHMA (Strategic Housing Market Analysis) for the area set large Objectively Assessed Needs (OAN) of 75-80,000 over 20 years, which, if met, would see a substantial growth in population and the number of people commuting to London (see below).

This begs the question about whether meeting OAN is economically sustainable. Will the commuter infrastructure - already at capacity, on which the area's economy depends, be able to respond to the increase in demand?

The SE Essex Action Group Alliance (SEEAGA) made the decision to produce this study to examine that question and we are indebted to the local rail franchises for their assistance in producing it.

## 1.1. Rationale for the OAN

The OAN for most SE Essex authorities were developed on a rationale of accelerating migration to the area to promote anticipated growth in local SE Essex business through the availability of a much enlarged pool of labour, even though there is a demonstrably adequate pool of labour already.

The OAN is also based on the assumption that every new worker brought in to boost potential new local industry would be joined by an additional out-commuter, thus placing additional pressures on the commuter transport infrastructure.

Furthermore, the proportion of incomers who commute is likely to be greater than the assumed current local proportions as the large majority of new homes will be at market prices, the price of which is determined by what the out-migrating Londoners, who still intend to work in London, can afford.

## 1.2. C2C

Demand on the line grew 45% in 2006-16, and Peak Demand can be expected to grow 36% in 2013-23 and 76% in 2013-43. The operators cannot run more frequent services but can make some improvements to capacity through lengthening services and have begun to do so.

- The busiest section of the railway is the direct section via Basildon and High Peak capacity on that section could grow up to 18% from the baseline, and much of this improvement has been delivered already.
- The limited, slow service via the Tilbury loop could see a 71% increase in High Peak capacity if issues around Level crossings are resolved.
- The capacity of the Grays to Fenchurch Street route, via Chafford Hundred, cannot be improved.

Most of these improvements will be delivered by 2025 and after that there is nothing meaningful that can be done to improve capacity.

### 1.3. Southend Victoria Branch

Peak Demand is projected to grow 32% in 2013-23 and 75% in 2013-43. The operator is planning several improvements to the service including replacing the train fleet and improving the frequency of off-peak service.

Crossrail, which opens in 2019, replaces the existing Shenfield Metro service and makes no difference to rail capacity in our Housing Market Area.

#### 1.3.1. Capacity Improvements in the current franchise – to 2025

There are grounds for guarded optimism that High Peak capacity could increase by up to 20% during the current franchise.

- It is possible that High Peak capacity in part of the branch could see a 4% increase from lengthening the last High Peak service that is not at full 12-car length. It is also possible that there could be a small reduction.
- The train fleet replacement will mean significantly more seats fitted into trains of the same length. These will mostly be tip-up seats in standing areas. Exchanging standing areas for seats usually reduces overall capacity, but several factors mean that the interior of the train is more spacious, so we are hopeful that overall capacity will be increased.

#### 1.3.2. Potential improvements in the next franchise – 2025 to 2035

There is also a chance that two additional services per hour may be available in the High Peak. If these services do not become available in 2025-35 they are still likely to do so in the long run, **however** when they do it is doubtful that the Southend branch will be the beneficiary.

There are no other meaningful improvements to High Peak capacity that could be applied in this period.

### 1.4. Railway Tipping Point

Both railways face enormous challenges, even if OAN is not met. The greatest threat to each railway is the problems of the other. When one line becomes intolerable passengers will increasingly transfer to the other line threatening to overwhelm that in turn.

### 1.5. Recommendation

In seeking to boost useful industries that *might* come to the area, meeting OAN would hazard the much more valuable *existing* London employment we already depend on by overloading the railways.

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush but meeting OAN would be akin to risking two birds in the hand to chase one in the bush.

Most Local Authorities are expected to meet OAN, however there are exceptions:

“The Framework is clear local planning authorities should, through their Local Plans, meet objectively assessed needs **unless** any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits...or specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted. Such policies include... **Green Belt.**”  
Para 044 NPPG

All the SE Essex LAs are fortunate enough to be surrounded by countryside which is designated as Green Belt, and which can therefore be cited as a reason not to meet OAN.

LAs should produce Local Plans which include lower-than-OAN Housing Targets, citing constraints such as Green Belt designation and stating the economic harm that would arise as a result of the limitations to commuter rail links. Other issues such as commuter road links, education, health provision and overwhelming public support for protecting the Green Belt might also be raised.