

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, in particular the railways - 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 in order 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 actually be greater than the 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

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 a number of improvements to the service including replacing the train fleet and improving the frequency of off-peak service.

Further Investigation before formal draft produced

Just before release, SEEAGA learned more about the seating layout of the trains to be used on the Southend Victoria and Southminster lines.

The trains are of the same length and will have the same overall 3+2 seating arrangement so we had thought the Seated element of Capacity would remain about the same.

However, through a variety of means the trains will have a Seated Capacity which is 22% or more higher. A formal first draft of this Paper will be released once we know more, in particular what the Overall (Seated plus Standing) Capacity will be.

For instance, it's possible that increased Seating would reduce Standing room and reduce Overall capacity. Alternatively there could be an Overall Capacity increase but lower than the 22% noted.

We are reasonably optimistic that there will be an Overall improvement in both capacity and comfort, but have yet to find out to what extent.

However there is very little that can be done to improve High Peak capacity.

- In the current franchise – to 2025
It is possible, though there are no guarantees, 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.
- In the next franchise – 2025 to 2035
The next franchise from 2025-35 might see improvements to shoulder peak services. 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.

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

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.