

Surrey examines a plea for a 20mph road

4 June 2025



A campaigner says a Surrey council is “missing the point” about safety as hopes for a 20mph speed limit on a rural road have been scuppered.

Surrey County Council (SCC) claim the traffic measures on Ford Road in Bisley would be too costly.

Dr Ayres started a petition for a 20mph speed limit, arguing residents should be able to get to the shops without “such fear and intimidation that they experienced when confronted by coaches and HGVs at 30mph”.

He presented his campaign at a SCC Highways, Transport and Economic Growth meeting on June 3.

Over 120 people signed the petition calling for the current 30mph speed limit to be lowered to protect pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and other road users from the increase in traffic, particularly HGVs.

Several large commercial premises are located on Lucas Green Road. Often HGVs will come off the A322 Guildford Road, drive through Ford Road to get to their destination.

Matt Furniss, cabinet member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth Decisions, said he recognises the concerns raised but said that drivers generally comply with the 30mph speed limit on the narrow rural road and that it has a relatively good safety record.

But Dr Ayres slammed the council’s response for “missing the fundamental point of this petition” by focusing on the HGVs and drivers on the road. He said it was about “the safety and wellbeing of the vulnerable road users who frequent Ford Road”.

He said: “I do not accept commercial interests in Lucas Green Road should dictate what happens in Ford Road.”

The road has a “relatively good safety record”, according to a report, with only one personal injury collision in 2021 in the 10 year period between November 2014- October 2024.

As the current speed limit is 30mph, and the existing average speed is over 28mph, council documents state the road would need more than just a sign to reduce the speed successfully.

These measures could consist of road humps, raised road tables, road narrowing, chicanes and priority give way pinch points.

The report read: “The cost of introducing traffic calming measures over such a length of road (approximately 2km) would be substantial, especially since significant improvements to the existing street lighting are likely to be required to comply with the appropriate design standards for the installation of traffic calming measures.”

Council officers also warned the additional features could have negative effects; for instance, traffic tables could cause noise and vibration from the HGVs or that speed cushions could even lead to road damage.

Concerns were also raised that if the speed limit changed to 20mph on Ford Road, residents on Lucas Green Road would also want a reduced speed limit.

The report said, given the roads are interlinking and are similar in character and measures introduced in one road are likely to have impacts on the other road, introducing traffic measurements would likely create “significant concern” for those residents on the other road.

A traffic engineer said: “We’re aware of the issues and hopefully we can in the future change the speed limit.” She added the council will include the road on a list for schemes that need funding in the future.

Redesigning the Surrey skyways?

4 June 2025



Quicker, Quieter Flights on the Horizon for Heathrow and Gatwick Passengers and Neighbours

Passengers at Heathrow and Gatwick are set to enjoy quicker flights and fewer delays under new government plans to redesign flight paths, aimed at modernising one of the world’s busiest airspaces.

Announced on Monday (2 June), the largest overhaul of UK airspace since the 1950s will prioritise London’s crowded skies, promising more efficient, direct routes for aircraft. The changes are expected to support expansion at Heathrow and growth at Gatwick, while also cutting delays and noise pollution for communities under the flight paths.

Transport officials say the new UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS) will be fully operational by the end of 2025, run by NATS (En Route) plc (NERL). With 2.7 million flights expected this year alone, the new system will help manage soaring demand more sustainably, with fewer planes circling while waiting to land.

Local residents living near Heathrow and Gatwick could benefit from quieter skies, as modernised ‘skyways’ will allow aircraft to climb more quickly after take-off and descend more smoothly, reducing noise and emissions.

Heathrow’s expansion, including its long-discussed third runway, is expected to generate over 100,000 new jobs, while Gatwick is also poised to gain from increased passenger capacity and investment. Aviation Minister Mike Kane said the changes would “turbocharge growth in the aviation industry”, with faster and more reliable journeys for holidaymakers and business travellers alike.

Local airports, airlines and residents’ groups are watching closely, with officials promising that community consultation will remain central to the process. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) will oversee the implementation, ensuring transparency and evidence-based decisions.

Rob Bishton, Chief Executive of the CAA, said: “Modernising our airspace is key to enabling growth and helping mitigate impacts like noise.”

Martin Rolfe, CEO at NATS, added: “We have one of the busiest and most complex airspaces in the world. To maintain our performance as traffic grows towards 3 million flights per year, we have to modernise. UKADS is a crucial step.”

Karen Dee, Chief Executive of AirportsUK, called the move “a vital step in making our airspace fit for the 21st century,” while Tim Alderslade of Airlines UK said the changes were “long overdue” and would reduce delays, improve resilience, and lower carbon emissions.

The government’s plans also pave the way for future air travel technologies such as drones and flying taxis, with London’s airspace set to lead the way.

Local residents can expect more information as the CAA and NATS engage with communities to design the new routes, with a full consultation expected by September 2025.

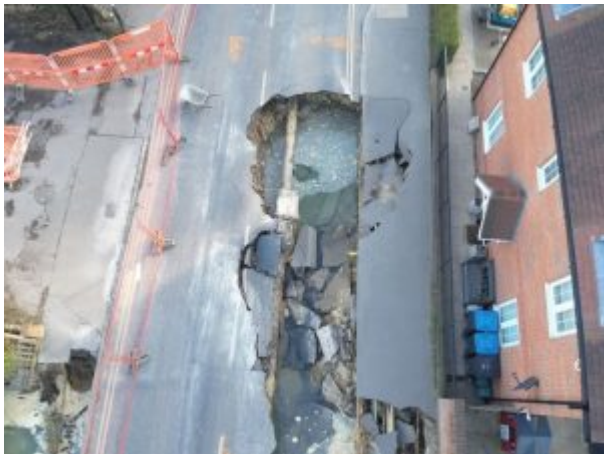
The Department for Transport says it is determined to strike the right balance between economic growth and protecting communities from excessive noise and pollution.

Notes to Readers:

- UKADS will be led by NATS (En Route) plc (NERL).
- Heathrow’s expansion plans, including a potential third runway, will benefit from the new airspace design.
- The initial focus is on modernising London’s airspace, but future phases could benefit airports nationwide.
- A consultation on the regulatory changes will begin later this year.

Surrey sink-hole major incident

4 June 2025



A significant sinkhole has emerged on Godstone High Street in Surrey, leading to evacuations and widespread disruptions. The incident began on Monday night when a section of the road collapsed, revealing a hole filled with water. By Tuesday morning, the sinkhole had expanded to approximately 20 metres in length and 6 metres in width.

Surrey County Council has declared the situation a major incident, with the Surrey Local Resilience Forum overseeing the response. Assistant Director for Safer Communities, Carl Bussey, stated that efforts are underway in collaboration with emergency services, utility companies, and Tandridge District Council to ensure public safety and restore essential services.

The sinkhole’s rapid expansion has led to the evacuation of around 30 properties within a 100-metre cordon. Residents have been advised to avoid the area while investigations and repairs are conducted. The incident has also resulted in the closure of Godstone High Street between Oxted Road and Bletchingley Road, with diversions in place for the foreseeable future.

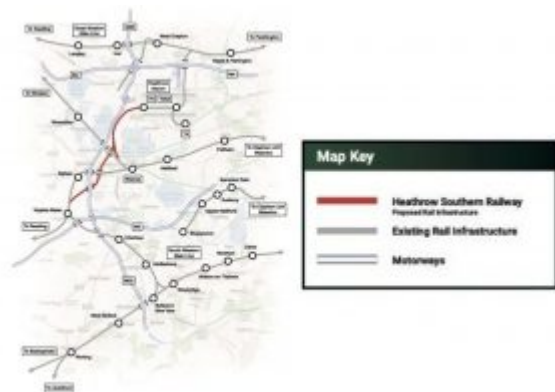
The cause of the sinkhole is believed to be a burst water main. SES Water has confirmed that engineers are on-site working to repair the damaged pipe and restore water supplies to affected homes. In the interim, bottled water is being distributed to residents.

Local residents have expressed concerns over the incident. Some evacuees have reported hearing cracking sounds and witnessing the sinkhole’s growth overnight. One resident described the scene as resembling the aftermath of an earthquake, with buckled roads and pavements.

Authorities are urging the public to follow updates from Surrey County Council, Surrey Highways, and Tandridge District Council on social media for the latest information regarding the situation.

Surrey’s new rail link to Heathrow?

4 June 2025



Plans for a new railway connecting Surrey to Heathrow and beyond have resurfaced as the track’s backers welcomed government support for a third runway at the airport. The line, called the Heathrow Southern Railway (HSR), is a privately financed proposal to link towns in Surrey to one of the world’s busiest airports.

If built, it would operate between Heathrow and London Waterloo via Staines. There would also be direct trains from the airport to Woking and Guildford, before carrying on to the south coast. Heathrow Southern Railway said it also would provide for an extension of the Elizabeth Line to Staines.

Baroness Jo Valentine, the group’s chairperson, said: “The UK Government has set a bold agenda for growth with its support for a third runway at Heathrow Airport. Our railway enhances that growth by increasing connectivity and reducing surface emissions. These benefits accrue with a two runway airport but will be enhanced with an additional runway. We look forward to working with all partners to make this a reality.”

Mark Livock, chief executive, added: “The new Government has expressed interest in finding ways to harness private sector finance in making the delivery of major infrastructure schemes more affordable. Heathrow Southern Railway has a depth of experience in creating opportunities for private investment that could deliver tangible benefits to the UK, and southern rail access to Heathrow would positively transform public transport connectivity to Europe’s busiest airport.”

The group estimates that the new route would cut about millions of road journeys – with many of those from the M25. They added: “Our construction plans minimise the impact on neighbouring communities by providing a route mainly in tunnel and using only electric trains. Unlike the previous “Airtrack” proposals,

HSR avoids level crossings in the Egham area.”

An HSR spokesperson said: “Our proposed route starts at Heathrow’s Terminal 5 station and is intended to run mainly in tunnel and be electrified to minimise environmental impact. It rises to the surface to connect to the existing railway near Staines and Virginia Water.”

Related reports:

Heathrow expansion reaction

“Blocks away” from airport expansions

Hsr Proposed Route (Image Heathrow Southern Rail)

Heathrow expansion reaction

4 June 2025



Heathrow has been given the go ahead to press forward with plans for third runway that will bring in hundreds of thousands of extra flights to the West London airport every year, the Chancellor has announced – but questions remain about how deliverable the project will be.

The airport has long pressed for a third runway. The plans in the past have involved demolishing the mediaeval village of Harmondsworth and its neighbours Sipson and Harlington.

Feasibility studies have also been carried out about re-routing the M25 through a tunnel under the new northern runway and the enormous infrastructure project is supposed to be built while the country meets its environmental targets.

Heathrow has welcomed the Chancellor’s announcement today that the Government is backing a third runway – and would be inviting proposals to be brought forward by the summer.

The government has already tightened legal pathways against any plans, cutting the number of appeals allowed from three down to just one.

Opponents, including the London Mayor’s office, MPs and campaign groups however, argue a third runway won’t bring in hoped-for economic benefits but will raise “serious environmental and health concerns”.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said: “I remain opposed to a new runway at Heathrow Airport because of the severe impact it will have on noise, air pollution and meeting our climate change targets.

“I will scrutinise carefully any new proposals that now come forward from Heathrow, including the impact it will have on people living in the area and the huge knock-on effects for our transport infrastructure.

“Despite the progress that’s been made in the aviation sector to make it more sustainable, I’m simply not convinced that you can have hundreds of thousands of additional flights at Heathrow every year without a hugely damaging impact on our environment.”

Stanwell Moor is the Surrey village at the end of Heathrow’s southern runway.

Residents there have grown used to jet engines flying overhead. So much so, that some regard the noise made from incoming planes a respite compared with the roar when taking off.

The Stanwell Moor Residents’ Association, in a statement published on its website, said: “What is different this time is that easterly alternation planning application will go ahead regardless of the airport expansion and would lead to more flights over our village; and secondly, the Government are likely to reform planning to speed up the approval for expansion.

“We will be ready to represent the village with a list of demands that put residents first.”

The Government said it would issue a full assessment of any expansion plans through the Airports National Policy Statement.

It said the project must represent value for money and that it, plus any associated service transport costs, will be financed through private funding to “ensure that a third runway is delivered in line with our legal, environmental and climate objectives.”

Paul Beckford, policy director at the HACAN clearskies group said: “The announcement today will disappoint the thousands of residents whose communities will be destroyed by a third runway and the millions who will be exposed to increases in noise and air pollution.

“Labour have set four tests that any airport expansion must pass in order to be approved and we believe that Heathrow’s current plans are simply not compatible with those tests.

“The Government believes that it can achieve both growth and meet its climate targets but this decision puts both of those ambitions at risk.

“Expanding the UK’s largest emitter of carbon in a forlorn hope of increasing GDP at some point in the future without a credible plan to deliver zero emission aviation is a folly of the highest order.”

The Liberal Democrats issued a statement from its MPs saying the third runway would jeopardise the UK’s climate commitments and will have a significant negative impact on local communities and human health.

The hundreds of thousands of extra flights to-and-from Heathrow, they said, will increase the risk of health conditions including heart disease, strokes and mental health issues.

MP for Esher and Walton Monica Harding said: “A third runway at Heathrow would have a profound impact on our climate, health, and communities. With a lack of clarity on the economic benefits and costs to the taxpayer, along with serious environmental and health concerns, the Government must urgently address these questions.”

Others, such as the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport UK were quick to praise the announcement but cautioned the importance of prioritising environmental concerns.

Its chairperson, Paul Le Blond, said “Any expansion strategy must prioritise public transport integration, leveraging existing transport hubs and accommodating new rail links.

“The development should include modernised terminals and new gateway facilities for both the northern and southern perimeters. Crucially, all environmental impacts—including noise, local air quality, and greenhouse gas emissions—must remain within statutory limits.

“Whilst the expansion would be privately funded through passenger and shipping revenues, government support through policy frameworks and strategic rail investment will be essential to unlock private sector investment.”

Related reports:

“Blocks away” from airport expansions

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Chance for Epsom and Ewell’s say on Heathrow flights

Surrey Uni making self-driving cars safer

4 June 2025



With self-driving cars expected to hit British roads next year (2026), a new motion forecasting framework developed by the University of Surrey and Fudan University, China, promises to make autonomous cars both safer and smarter.

Researchers have combined their expertise to create RealMotion – a novel training system that seamlessly integrates historical and real-time scene data with contextual and time-based information, paving the way for more efficient and reliable autonomous vehicle technology.

Dr Xiatian Zhu, senior lecturer at the Centre for Vision, Speech and Signal Processing and the Insitute for People-Centred AI at the University of Surrey and co-author of the study, said:

“Driverless cars are no longer a futuristic dream. Robotaxis are already operating in parts of the USA and China, and self-driving vehicles are expected to be on UK roads as early as next year. However, the real question on everyone’s mind is: how safe are they?

“While AI operates differently from human drivers, there are still challenges to overcome. That’s why we developed RealMotion – to equip the algorithm with not only real-time data but also the ability to integrate historical context in space and time, enabling more accurate and reliable decision-making for safer autonomous navigation.”

Existing motion forecasting methods typically process each driving scene independently, overlooking the interconnected nature of past and present contexts in continuous driving scenarios. This limitation hinders the ability to accurately predict the behaviours of surrounding vehicles, pedestrians and other agents in ever-changing environments.

In contrast, RealMotion creates a clearer understanding of different driving scenes. Integrating past and present data enhances the prediction of future movements, addressing the inherent complexity of forecasting multiple agents’ movements.

Extensive experiments conducted using the Argoverse dataset, a leading benchmark in autonomous driving research, highlight RealMotion’s accuracy and performance. Compared to other AI models, the framework achieved an 8.60% improvement in Final Displacement Error (FDE) – which is the distance between the predicted final destination and the true final destination. It also demonstrated significant reductions in computational latency, making it highly suitable for real-time applications.

Professor Adrian Hilton, Director of the Surrey Institute for People-Centred AI, said:

“With self-driving cars reaching British roads imminently, ensuring people’s safety is paramount. The development of RealMotion by Dr Zhu and his team offers a significant advance on existing methods. By equipping autonomous vehicles to perceive their surroundings in real-time, and also leverage historical context to make informed decisions, RealMotion paves the way for safer and more intelligent navigation of our roads.”

While researchers encountered some limitations, the team plans to continue its research to further improve RealMotion’s capabilities and overcome any challenges. The framework has the potential to play a critical role in shaping the next generation of autonomous vehicles, ensuring safer and more intelligent navigation systems for the future.

About the Surrey Institute for People-Centred AI (PAI)

Taking a different approach to much AI activity in the UK, the Surrey Institute for People-Centred AI puts the needs of individuals and society at the very heart of everything it does: we believe that the starting point for AI should be people rather than technology.

This people-centred approach drives our research and enables us to design AI technologies and systems that are ethical, responsible, and inclusive. The pan-University Institute brings together Surrey’s core AI-related expertise in vision, speech and signal processing, computer science, and mathematics, with its domain expertise across engineering and physical sciences, human and animal health, law and regulation, business, finance and the arts and social sciences. With this distinctive approach, PAI builds on Surrey’s track record of collaboration with industry, the public sector, government and other relevant institutions to develop solutions to shared challenges.

Image: Waymo self-driving vehicle. Credit Grendelkhan CC by SA 4

Check your Epsom and Ewell train journeys January weekends.

4 June 2025



Residents of Epsom and Ewell are advised to prepare for disruptions to South Western Railway (SWR) services due to essential engineering works in the Wimbledon area. Bus replacement services will operate on key routes over two consecutive weekends: January 18-19 and January 25-26.

While services on the London Waterloo line from Epsom will be affected, passengers can still reach Waterloo by using Southern Railway services via the Victoria line and changing at Clapham Junction. However, there will be no SWR services between Epsom and Guildford, and SWR trains to Dorking will also be unavailable.

The works will involve renewing 800 meters of track, ballast, and sleepers between Wimbledon and Earlsfield, alongside replacing points and installing 100 meters of conductor rail. These upgrades aim to improve track reliability and reduce faults, providing smoother journeys for passengers.

Key Impacts for Epsom and Ewell Residents

- **No SWR trains from Epsom to Guildford.**
- **Southern Railway services to Dorking via the Victoria line remain available.**
- **Rail replacement buses will operate between Clapham Junction and Worcester Park, affecting onward connections.**

Additional Service Changes

- SWR services between London Waterloo and Chessington South, Hampton Court, Dorking, and Woking (stopping services) will not run.
- Longer-distance services to Portsmouth Harbour, Exeter St Davids, and Weymouth will be revised, taking up to 30 minutes longer.
- Berrylands station will be closed during the works.

Plan Ahead

SWR advises passengers to check travel options in advance via the SWR website (southwesternrailway.com/plan-my-journey) or National Rail (nationalrail.co.uk) and to allow extra time for their journeys.

Apologies from Network Rail and SWR

Peter Williams, SWR’s Customer and Commercial Director, acknowledged the inconvenience: “Customers should plan ahead if they intend to travel on these weekends, as engineers carry out vital maintenance at one of the busiest parts of our network. We’re grateful for our customers’ patience.”

Mark Goodall, Network Rail’s Wessex Route Director, added: “We’re sorry for the disruption but completing these upgrades back-to-back is the most efficient option. We encourage passengers to check their journeys and plan ahead.”

Further closures in the Wimbledon area are also planned for Sunday, February 2, and Sunday, February 9. Updates will be available on the SWR website.

For Epsom and Ewell residents, alternative travel routes and extra planning will help navigate the disruptions while these essential upgrades take place.

Going South from Epsom for Xmas? Check your trains

4 June 2025



Epsom residents are being urged to check before travelling as South Western Railway (SWR) services to Guildford face significant disruption due to emergency engineering works. The works will take place from **Saturday 21 December to Tuesday 24 December**, affecting trains running via Cobham & Stoke D’Abernon and Epsom.

The disruption comes as Network Rail works to stabilise an embankment near Clandon following the detection of ground movement. Trains in the area have been operating at reduced speeds, and urgent repairs are required to ensure passenger safety.

Impact on Services

During the works, limited train services will operate between London Waterloo and Effingham Junction via both Cobham & Stoke D’Abernon and Epsom. To help passengers, replacement buses will run on the following routes:

- **Surbiton to Guildford**, every 30 to 60 minutes depending on the day.
- **Effingham Junction to Guildford**, every 30 minutes, with some extending to Epsom.

Passengers travelling between Epsom and Guildford will be served by either a train or replacement bus. Normal services are expected to resume from **Friday 27 December**, but journey planners will be updated daily, and travellers are advised to check before setting out.

A Safety Priority

Explaining the need for the emergency works, Tom McNamee, Network Rail’s Wessex Route Infrastructure Director, said: “We detected ground movement at an embankment in the Clandon area, which has made it necessary to operate trains at slower speeds. Stabilising the embankment is critical to ensure the safety of passengers and staff. While we recognise this will be disruptive, it’s essential to carry out these repairs to prevent further movement and restore full services as quickly as possible.”

Passenger Advice

SWR is apologising to passengers for the inconvenience. Steve Tyler, Planning and Performance Director at SWR, added: “We are sorry for the disruption and are working hard to provide as many train services as possible during the works. Buses will operate to ensure passengers can still reach their destinations, and we encourage everyone to check journey planners before travelling. We appreciate your patience as these essential repairs are completed.”

Key Information

- Trains will not stop at **Horsley, Clandon, or London Road Guildford** stations during the works. These will instead be served by replacement buses.
- No SWR services will operate on **Christmas Day or Boxing Day**, and an amended timetable will be in place from Friday 27 December.

For the latest updates, visit **southwesternrailway.com** or use journey planners to confirm service availability. Passengers are encouraged to allow extra time for their journeys during this period.

Surrey: Free school buses withdrawn

4 June 2025



Free school buses are being axed after a cross-country route was judged safe by Surrey County Council. Parents say the letter outlining the new walkable route explicitly states that the “personal safety issues of children travelling alone” were not considered. About 81 children from Esher High School are said to be affected. Compounding the problem, the council has stated that further funding to increase capacity on regular bus services is not available.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service understands parents are appealing the decision and have been in touch with Surrey Police. This comes just weeks after parents in South Nutfield were told children could walk across open rail tracks and flood-prone cow fields as the county council looks to make further service cuts.

Children who live more than three miles from their nearest school are eligible for free buses. The new route across the heath reduces the distance to just under that mark, meaning the children no longer qualify for the service. The council says the move will save about £180,000 per year and create space on “stretched coach resources to provide travel assistance to those eligible.”

One of the affected parents, Plamena Naydenova, received a letter that included directions on how her children could get to school, with 30 separate steps to follow. Among the instructions were phrases like “take the alleyway,” “follow the footpaths through Molesey Heath Nature Reserve,” and “turn right through the squeeze stile.” Later, children are told to “cross the River Mole Viaduct Sluice.”

Mrs. Naydenova said: “How can you call an 83-minute walk through dark heaths and unlit river paths a safe route? It’s just honestly outrageous, the whole thing. It isn’t about one child, it’s a principle. It will affect many families, not just my two children. I walked it with my sister as I was afraid to walk it on my own. It goes through narrow alleyways, fields, mud along the embankment of the River Mole, with no fencing.”

She added: “The bit that annoys me the most is the word safe—or safe for an accompanied child. Parents must accompany them, but the council doesn’t see that other parents have other children to drop off or work commitments. I would need to leave the house at 7 a.m. to get to Esher. How would I get the other children to school, never mind my work commitments? It’s very, very shocking. We all know it’s about the money and cost-cutting. But be honest and transparent—say ‘we can’t afford to pay anymore,’ not that there’s a new safe route.”

Since the shock email, parents have banded together. They understand about 81 other students have been impacted. Very few are expected to take on the route and, if their appeal fails, will instead use the standard bus network—although these services, she said, are often full, leaving school children at stops.

Mrs. Naydenova said: “It will put a lot of pressure on the existing paid buses. We aren’t going to let them walk across the heath. We only have one car, so the only other option is cycling, but how safe is that?”

Travel assistance will run until the end of the school year, but from September 2025, children will need to find alternative routes unless there is a change.

Surrey County Council’s cabinet member for children, families, and lifelong learning, Councillor Clare Curran, said the route to Esher High School was established following “individual safe walking route assessments” applied in line with national guidelines. She explained: “It is important to note that the guidelines consider the relationship between pedestrians and traffic, and assessments are undertaken on the assumption that the child will be accompanied by an appropriate adult if necessary. The Department for Education’s own school transport guidance also supports this position. It is suggested that suitable footwear and a torch are used where needed.”

She added: “The council provides contracted coaches to those eligible for travel assistance to Esher High School. By limiting the services only to those eligible in line with statutory guidance, the council expects a cost saving of approximately £180k per year, as well as the benefit of utilizing the stretched coach resources to provide travel assistance to those eligible. The national picture is of increased demand on transport services and therefore council budgets. We spent £64.9m in 2023/24 on home-to-school travel costs for around 10.7k children and young people.

“We take our responsibilities regarding home-to-school transport very seriously; however, we must balance this with our duty to ensure we are only using public funds for those who meet statutory guidelines for free transport or who are most in need of assistance. Amidst a set of challenging financial circumstances, the council is not in a position to continue to pay for transport for families where they are no longer eligible for assistance due to a safe route being established.”

Related report:

Surrey school kids’ country walk saving money

Image: Surrey County Council’s recommended safe route to Esher High School (Palamena Naydenova)

Epsom and Ewell to be served by publicly owned trains

4 June 2025



The government has announced that South Western Railway (SWR), which serves commuters from Epsom, Ewell West, Stoneleigh and Worcester Park to London Waterloo, will be the first train operator to transition back into public ownership. The move comes following the passage of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, signalling a historic shift for Britain’s railways.

Starting next year, SWR services, including the Epsom to London routes, will come under the direct management of DfT Operator Limited, a publicly owned body. This change aims to address long-standing issues of delays, cancellations, and high costs that have plagued privatized rail services for decades.

What This Means for Epsom Commuters

Epsom’s SWR services connect thousands of local residents daily to key destinations such as London Waterloo, Wimbledon, and Clapham Junction and south to Dorking and Guildford. These routes are lifelines for commuters and leisure travellers alike, and reliability issues have often sparked frustration among passengers. Under public ownership, improvements in punctuality, affordability, and customer satisfaction are hoped for.

Local resident and commuter Sarah James commented: “I’ve been using the Epsom to Waterloo service for over ten years, and while it’s convenient, the delays and rising ticket prices have been hard to justify. If public ownership can bring real improvements, it’ll be a welcome change.”

Government’s Vision for the Railways

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander said: *“We’re putting passengers back at the heart of our railways. For too long, privatization has failed to deliver for the British public. South Western Railway is the first step in our plan to rebuild a rail system that works for everyone.”*

The move forms part of a broader government commitment to overhaul the rail network, with c2c and Greater Anglia services also set to follow suit by 2025. The goal is to save up to £150 million annually by eliminating franchise fees, redirecting those funds into service improvements instead of shareholder profits.

How Will the Transition Work?

The Department for Transport (DfT) is prioritizing a seamless handover, ensuring minimal disruption for passengers. Ticketing systems and staffing will remain unchanged during the transition period, with SWR’s current workforce continuing to support commuters.

Publicly managed services will eventually integrate into Great British Railways (GBR), the government’s new overseeing body for track and train operations. GBR promises a more unified and efficient approach to rail management, focusing on reliability, accessibility, and value for money.

Local Impacts Beyond the Commute

Epsom is known for its vibrant community and attractions like Epsom Downs Racecourse and Epsom shopping centre, which rely on reliable rail links to draw visitors. Public ownership of SWR could boost local tourism by ensuring smoother travel to and from Epsom.

Additionally, the promise of greater transparency and accountability could restore faith in public transport, encouraging more residents to opt for trains over cars, which aligns with Surrey County Council’s environmental goals.

What’s Next?

The first publicly run trains will start operating in 2025, and residents can expect regular updates on planned improvements, including timetable adjustments and station enhancements. The Epsom and Ewell Times will continue to monitor the situation closely, bringing you the latest developments as they happen.

For now, commuters and local businesses will be watching closely to see if public ownership delivers the transformative results promised by the government.

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