

East Croydon Station

This is Southern's busiest station and, cumulatively, over the past few years a number of significant improvements have been made to the station. It should be Southern's flagship managed station but it is not.

There are a number of improvements, big and small, that could be put into place to improve the passenger experience but the overarching need is for a strong, highly visible, empowered and supported station director to be appointed. Someone needs to take ownership of the whole station and its environs on behalf of passengers.

A well run and ordered East Croydon station would have an impact on the operational performance of the whole of the Southern network. Dwell times here could be improved significantly by some relatively simple interventions.

There is a varying amount of detail set out below but we think urgent action is needed to:

- Improve local management
- Have additional staff along platforms to assist passengers /reduce dwell time
- Review how information is given to passengers during disruption
- Improve departure screens
- Improve signage around the station
- Complete the ongoing building works
- Thoroughly clean and 'refresh' the station

Station management

Individually the staff working here, many of whom seem to have been here for years, are helpful and knowledgeable when approached, and appear to give a good service to passengers who have requested assistance.

Southern's management team were previously based close by and travelled through the station at least daily - the MD could be seen speaking to staff as he went through the station – but senior staff were deliberately relocated as part of a programme to shift the culture. Perhaps the management chain is now too long and remote? At a time when they need to be supported, local staff appear isolated and vulnerable as they are blamed by the public for poor performance. Staff are often seen standing in twos or threes talking to each other which has the effect of making them less accessible to passengers who might feel they cannot interrupt.

A station director should be appointed with a remit not just to manage station operations but also to 'take ownership' of everything that happens in and around the station. They should be incentivised to trouble shoot as needed to secure improvements for passengers and then, having brought the station up to scratch, focus on continuous improvement. They should be pro-active, knowledgeable and willing to take responsibility when things go wrong.

Staff on platforms

There need to be sufficient well trained staff deployed along platforms so that they can proactively assist passengers rather than 'just' despatch the trains.

More staff along platforms would mean that, as well as helping people with special assistance needs, other passengers travelling with luggage or young children could be assisted to get on or off the trains (particularly at the points where there is a particularly large stepping gap).

Staff would also be able to 'personalise' messages encouraging passengers to move along inside the train as well as to keep clear of the doors.

Information during disruption

Despite the investment in information systems the CIS does not always give reliable information and it is not always easy to hear the station announcements directly relevant to a particular train because they are interrupted by announcements from other platforms or the standard security announcements.

When services are disrupted it is often clearer (for the majority of passengers) to turn off the recorded announcements and have someone at platform level giving clear information about the services due to depart from that platform – as happens on the Underground.

Departure boards in main entrance

These were previously on the left of the main concourse but were relocated to their present position on the left, above the ticket office, when the station was refurbished a year or so ago. However, the positioning of and information displayed on these has a big impact on how the station operates for passengers and therefore on dwell times that affect performance.

At the time we asked whether signs showing the next fastest train to key destinations such as London Bridge, Victoria, Clapham Junction, Brighton and Gatwick Airport could be fixed above the gatelines so they could be read easily by passengers coming into the station, who could then go straight through to their platform without the need to stand and check the departure boards on the right.

We were told that this was not possible because the station is effectively a bridge and could not support the weight. If there is no effective engineering solution to this surely it must be possible to develop something in a lighter weight material? If Network Rail cannot do this, maybe they could set a challenge to universities?

The number of trains departing from the station means it is regularly the case that the next departure to key destinations does not show on one of the five next train departure boards – so passengers have to look-up their station on the individual station information to the right. This is more difficult to read whilst walking so, once again, passengers need to stop – getting in the way of others. For example, there are three trains to London Bridge scheduled within a few minutes of each other

around 9 am each weekday morning – someone arriving a few minutes before the first of these is scheduled to depart at 8.56 would probably not see their train on the main board

Surely it would be easier for passengers if the individual station finder departure board was moved back to the left hand side of the station, which would allow more detailed information about the next ten departures to be displayed on the right hand side of the station?

Other departure boards

There is an urgent need for extra information on the overbridge. A significant number of passengers change trains at East Croydon, especially those going to and from Gatwick Airport, but it is not easy to find the platform needed for onward travel.

A full set of departure boards should be provided on the overbridge as well as clear signage to indicate the next trains to London Bridge, Victoria, Clapham Junction, Gatwick and Brighton.

Summary departure information is shown on a small screen above the two side entrances at the front of the station. These are better than nothing but not easy to read and can be even more difficult to read in full sun. They are angled so that they can only be read from inside the station rather than on entry – I am not sure if there are additional screens outside the entrance. Departure information at the new entrance onto Dingwall Road has not been checked recently.

Ramps

Last year (?) vinyl sheets were fixed to the clear glass side walls of all three ramps to obscure the view of the trains. We were not consulted about this but were subsequently told that this was a pilot to see if it would reduce the number of accidents caused by passengers running for their trains. We have not been told whether the pilot was successful but from the aesthetic point of view this has eliminated one of East Croydon's positive features, namely light and bright access to the platforms from the main entrance.

Temporary signs were recently fixed down one of the ramps warning of an uneven surface. We don't know how long they were there (at least a few days) but, given the number of people using the station and existing concern about trips and falls the problem should have been dealt with immediately.

Despite the obscured glass, people still run for trains standing at the platform - and can sometimes find themselves getting on the wrong train because the previous train has not yet left. The result of all this is in our view that passengers are more likely to disrupt services than previously, thus extending dwell times at this key station.

Management of building works

These started more than two years ago, Chris Burchell was still in post when we first expressed concern about storing equipment on the platforms. There have been posters at the front of the station for ages telling passengers that the station is being improved but not explaining how or why or giving any indication of progress.

The station has resembled a building site, with scaffolding obscuring the CIS and not only reducing the amount of shelter available but actually funnelling water down onto areas where passengers wait. Again, poor management of these building works has had a big impact on passengers' ability to get on and off trains quickly and efficiently.

The works were almost complete when new works were started to raise the levels of platforms 1 and 2 – this is very welcome but delayed the completion of the platform works even longer as plans were not in place to commence the additional work as the previous work completed. We are sure Network Rail project managers would not allow this to happen in their own homes, why should passengers put up with it?

There is still equipment stored on one of the platforms.

The overbridge is still not open properly and continues to look like a building site.

Signage inside the station

'Locally made' signs regularly appear - confirming either that the permanent signage is inadequate or inappropriate. It also raises the question as to why the signage is not changed or the problem which merits the need for a warning sign addressed.

- New direction signs have been put up on the platform buildings at a lower level than those installed once the platform improvement works were finished, perhaps because they were not visible people standing to get off the train?
- It is not clear to arriving passengers unfamiliar with the station which direction they need to take to exit the station.
- Way out signs at platform level need to distinguish between the different exits
- The presence of lifts needs to be very clearly signed from the whole length of the platform to avoid passengers with heavy luggage having to negotiate stairs because they did not know lifts were available.

Local information

- It was a welcome step when gateline staff were given information about onward travel so they could help arriving passengers, originally this was tucked behind a pole but has now been neatly stuck down the corner of the wall behind Smiths.
- Continuing your journey information should be clearly be provided for passengers to see for themselves as they exit the station, particularly via the main front exit (the information provided by London Tramlink to the right of the main station is helpful but the station should also display such information clearly).

Ticket windows

- At busy times all the windows should be brought into use whilst the queue is cleared.
- Window no 1 is at wheelchair height but has not been used for at least a year – it has become a notice board instead. When we have raised this with Southern we have been told that all the windows are accessible but it is not clear how this is the case.
- In recent months Southern have restricted Oyster transactions to just two ticket windows.

Gatelines

- Signage above the gatelines clearly indicating which gates are open (and any that are Oyster only) would be much more convenient for passengers and would help to reduce the congestion at the gatelines.
- Similarly, clearer advice about not passing into the gate area until after an oyster or other smart card had been tapped would reduce the number of delays whilst passengers moved back and retapped their cards – or a member of staff had to provide assistance.

Waiting rooms

- The new waiting rooms beside the cafes do not seem to be as comfortable or to work as well as they used to for passengers, although it is nice that the toilets are no longer accessed from here.
- In particular there is nowhere to put down a drink other than on an adjacent seat or on the floor. Apart from this being inconvenient for passengers it must lead to a lot of spills, previously there were tables and a side counter top.

Cleanliness and day to day maintenance

- The platform toilets are free, well used and, on the occasions I have checked, they appear to be kept clean and well supplied with soap and toilet paper.
- However the soap containers and other equipment are very much the worse for wear and the benches around the basins 'flood' easily.
- Why does every set of toilets have a paper sign on the door proclaiming that the facility is open? I think most passengers would assume they would be open as a matter of routine.
- New lifts have been installed between the platforms and the overbridge but already the control panels are chipped and also seem the worse for wear.
- The glass walls of the lift are dirty as are the walls around the lift shaft which are visible through the glass.
- The new platform surfaces are already stained.
- The white and yellow lines along and near the platform edges need repainting in many places and do not exist in others.

- The yellow handrails at the side of the ramps are stained in many places and the paint on the bottom fixings is chipped in many places
- Many of the bulbs in the ceiling lights above the ramps regularly need replacing – I don't think I have ever seen them all operating properly
- Sheet vinyl has been fixed along the front glass wall of the station (perhaps to shade the station from the sun?) but this is starting to peel away in places.
- The pavement outside the main entrance to the station is dirty
- The glass roof above the main entrance is dirty and it seems that moss is starting to grow.
- The white metal structures above the glass roof are very dirty
- Smokers congregate immediately outside the main station entrance which is unpleasant for other passengers and probably awkward for them – a clearly marked area away from the main entrances should be marked and signed for the use of smokers with bins provided

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