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Passenger journeys double at £44m station branded 'white elephant'

By Gerry Warren

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The success of Thanet Parkway station near Ramsgate has defied doomsters who claimed it would be a £44million flop.

New figures reveal the number of passenger journeys has more than doubled, making it the fastest-growing station in the Southeastern network.

The statistics released by the Office for Road and Rail show a 116% increase from 57,238 between March 2023 and March 2024 to 123,724 in the following 12 months to March 2025.

The spiralling cost of the station - jointly funded with government and council cash - brought condemnation from some critics when it launched in July 2023.

Ending up at four times the first estimate of £11 million, Barry Lewis, who was a Kent County Council Labour councillor at the time, branded it an "expensive joke", with spending having been allowed to run out of control.

He also feared the unmanned station would be a "mugger's

paradise" and prove a white elephant, adding: "We already have more railway stations per population than anywhere else in the county and most people in Thanet will have to bypass an existing station to get to the new one."

Meanwhile, former Thanet councillor Ian Driver said the project was "financially and logistically out of control".

Six months after its launch, there were still some doubting its viability, pointing to falling rail use at the time following the Covid pandemic.

But Southeastern says the growing popularity of Thanet Parkway proves it was the right decision.

Even the introduction of parking charges in January 2024 has failed to blunt demand as feared.

The operator also points to other significant growth in use across the network, including at Folkestone West, which saw a 43% rise to 678,666 in passenger journeys in 2024/25.

There has also been a rise at smaller stations like Bekesbourne, up almost 30% to 37,720, and Dumpton Park, near Ramsgate, which is up

41% to 45,098.

But Ramsgate station, although boasting 1,375,656 passenger journeys in 2024/25, is only a more modest 11.9% up, suggesting some users have defected to Thanet Parkway.

Larger stations are also busier, like Maidstone East, which rose 34.6% in the last year to 1,727,430 passenger journeys.

Southeastern's commercial director, Alicia Andrews, says the strong growth is hugely encouraging.

"Thanet Parkway's extraordinary performance and the continued recovery at smaller stations illustrate the positive impact of our investment in new trains, updated stations and better services," she said.

That investment includes a new fleet and refreshed trains, said to improve customer experience.

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Thanet Parkway station, near Ramsgate, has the fastest-growing passenger number on the Southeastern network

Picture: on_my_drone

Rail passenger numbers from Kent stations			
Lower South Coast			
	2014/15 JOURNEYS	2015/16 JOURNEYS	PERCENTAGE CHANGE
Ramsgate	1,375,666	1,288,768	+11.9
Thanet Parkway	123,724	57,238	+116.2
Folkestone West	970,078	678,666	+42.9
Dumpton Park	45,098	31,974	+41.0
Maidstone East	1,727,430	1,283,080	+54.6
Bekesbourne	37,720	29,130	+29.5