



HELEN WHATELY MP
Member of Parliament for Faversham and Mid Kent

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Paul Maynard MP
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

HW/WA

31 January 2017

Dear Paul,

Consultation on the south east rail franchise

I welcome this consultation on the future of the south east rail franchise. Thousands of my constituents depend on a reliable rail service to get them to work every day, however this service is all too often lacking.

To help inform my response to this consultation, I conducted a rail survey in my constituency. I received dozens of replies through the post and online, including some 5000 words of comments. These responses have thrown light on some clear priorities for rail users in my constituency.

- Reliability of train services during peak times is a critical concern. Some 69% of respondents to my survey said that train services have become less reliable over the past few years. Commuters often miss connections when trains run late, and their daily commutes can eat unhealthily into family time. This must improve under the new franchise.
- My survey did not explicitly ask people how they think reliability could be improved. However, on behalf of my constituents, I would like to make two suggestions:
 1. There should be more effective penalties for poor performance. This needs to address the problem of specific peak time trains running consistently late, which is currently masked by the better performance of off-peak services.
 2. If trains are late, passengers should not only receive compensation for their fare but also further compensation, given the inconvenience and potential loss of earnings or extra costs they have incurred. While it's clearly not practical for the amount compensated to vary according to actual financial impact, it should be greater than just reimbursement for the fare.
- A number of survey respondents specifically mentioned Delay Repay. I urge the franchise specification to require Delay Repay 15 to be implemented immediately. Improving access to compensation is key to improve reliability and value for money.

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If you would like to find out more about what I am doing in Faversham and Mid Kent, please do sign up to my newsletter on my website.

All personal information will be treated as confidential, but the MP may allow access to it by authorised staff, and may pass it on to official agencies where it will help your case. The MP may contact you from time to time to keep you informed. Please let her know if you have any problems with these arrangements.



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- Related to reliability is the issue of communication over delays. In my survey, 57% of respondents rated 'better communication about delays' the maximum score for importance. Live, accurate information about the running of services is crucial for passengers to make informed decisions when travelling, and this should be a franchise requirement.
- Annual season tickets are in the range of £4000-£6000 in my constituency, which is clearly a large investment. This is no doubt why 77% of respondents rated 'better value fares' the highest score for importance. In particular, there is a long standing anomaly on the Bearsted line where their fares are higher than for comparable services. Rectifying this long-standing error in the franchise renewal should be a priority.
- 60% of respondents said that train services have become 'a little less' or 'much less comfortable' over the past few years. Major issues include 'cramped', 'shabby' and 'draughty' rolling stock. I hope to see an upgrade in the rolling stock in the new specification. This would be an excellent opportunity to introduce wifi and plug sockets into carriages.
- Introducing part-time season tickets will provide an excellent opportunity for those with flexible hours and agile working schemes to benefit from the rail network. I received comments from parents with childcare responsibilities who are particularly keen for coupon-style season tickets. I strongly recommend including this in the specification.
- There were many calls in my survey for more frequent services, with some 68% of respondents calling for more services to London. Commuters departing from Bearsted and Lenham were particularly concerned about the lack of services going to London Blackfriars, London Bridge and London Cannon Street. There have been significant delays for my constituents from the upgrades to these stations in recent years, even though they don't have the option of travelling directly to them: I hope that in future they will be able to benefit from the station upgrades too.

I appreciate the efforts Southeastern have made to improve services and to engage with stakeholders in the last 12-18 months – though unfortunately the fact that this has been necessary reflects the extraordinary level of frustration among passengers who have endured so many late journeys.

I hope the new franchise specification will take on board the issues my constituents have raised to make meaningful improvements in the overall service.

Yours, Helen

Helen Whately MP
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