



HELEN WHATELY MP
Member of Parliament for Faversham and Mid Kent

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Claire Perry MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

HW/LY

18 March 2016

Dear Claire,

NEW APPROACH TO RAIL PASSENGER SERVICES IN LONDON AND THE SOUTH EAST

As you know, performance on Southeastern routes is woeful. Therefore it is good to see the Government looking at ways to improve services, such as the proposed partnership between Transport for London and the Department for Transport. If TfL can improve performance in the London part of the Southeastern franchise, I am hopeful there will be knock-on benefits for my constituents travelling beyond the London region to and from Kent. However, I would like several assurances as these proposals are developed;

Firstly, it is imperative that the partnership does not result in confusion about who is accountable. There is already some confusion about whether problems are down to Southeastern or Network Rail. During the briefing in Parliament, I was advised that the Southeastern franchise would be split in future, with the inner suburban services becoming the responsibility of TfL and the outer suburban services remaining the responsibility of DfT. This strikes me as critical to ensure services outside London are not disadvantaged, since they would likely be a lower priority to a Mayor of London with a London electorate. However, the consultation document was lacking in detail on what services would be classified as inner suburban as opposed to outer suburban, and this is clearly needed in order to make an informed judgement on this point.

The document was also very light on detail about the governance arrangements of the partnership and exactly how the entity would help improve decision-making. I would like much greater clarity on the Governance and Operating Processes that will ensure we won't see any future passing of the buck between Network Rail, Southeastern (or their successor), TfL and DfT.

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Secondly, the Partnership must not result in passengers in Kent losing out, but rather, in getting more frequent, faster and more reliable services. Safeguarding and improving outer suburban services should be a clearly stated principle in the partnership terms. As investments in infrastructure enable more trains to be operated, outer suburban services must get their fair share. I would like to see specific commitments to service improvements for Kent passengers in the next iteration of documents. The consultation document set out principles for success including more frequent services, better interchanges, increased capacity and greater reliability. These principles must apply as much to passengers travelling from outside London as to those travelling within it, and to long distance routes as much as to shorter stopping services. Shorter running times on long distance routes should also be a commitment. I would particularly like assurance that at the point of specifying the future franchises, the Outer Suburban franchise will not lose out to the Inner Suburban franchise.

Thirdly, the commitment to consult with local authorities and LEPs is welcome. Kent will see significant population growth in the next 15 years, along with economic development. These organisations are well placed to provide the partnership with the information it will need to plan for the future demands this will place on the rail network. I would also like to see the partnership commit to consulting groups representing residents with particular interests and needs, whether that is commuter action groups or organisations like the Kent Learning Disabilities Partnership.

Finally, I welcome the intention to provide high standards of customer service, including a set of minimum standards, better information, accessibility for disabled passengers and the introduction of smart ticketing across the South East along with automatic refunds. I would also like to see the introduction of season tickets for part-time workers as soon as possible. For stations to be fully accessible, not only must they be physically accessible with lifts, ramps etc, but also trains must be operated in such a way as to make sure people with disabilities feel safe travelling. This problem has been raised with me by local disability groups, and I would like to see it addressed in the commitments to customers.

I look forward to seeing these concerns addressed in the next stage of this process.

Helen Whately MP
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