



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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

7 August 2017

Dear Paul,

Thank you for your letter of 31 May in response to the enquiries I had made about the cost and timescale of procuring additional rolling stock on the Southeastern network. While I continue to be grateful for your personal efforts on this matter, your response unfortunately made little attempt to answer a number of the legitimate questions I had raised.

Severe overcrowding while travelling to and from work is an everyday challenge for many of my constituents. As you know, your Department's recent publication of figures relating to standard class weekday journeys, coupled with the recommendations included in the Gibb Report, has seen this issue resurface in the media, exposing in very stark terms the scale of this problem. Commuters are spending a considerable portion of their wages on fares, and in exchange they understandably expect a reliable, comfortable service from an operator that invests in new stock. The reality is very different, and reflects poorly on us all.

In our last meeting on 28 March, you indicated that a decision on the joint proposal submitted by Southeastern and GTR on 24 March could be made within as little as five weeks. While I appreciate that we have had a General Election to contend with in this time, twenty weeks on Parliamentarians - and, more importantly, the residents we serve - have had no updates on the progress of this application. Considering the numerous public promises that were made by Ministers in your Department last year to secure additional stock, this perceived inertia, and failure to grasp the seriousness of this problem, leaves commuters with little confidence that the issue is being properly addressed. I would stress again that passengers cannot wait until the franchise renewal for this problem to be rectified. I would also be grateful if you could confirm details of the work at Slade Green you refer to in your letter of 31 May.

As you are aware, the South East has suffered from historic underinvestment in comparison to other less busy parts of the network. From what I understand, around 25 per cent of rail journeys take place in the South East – indeed, over a quarter of a million passengers use Southeastern every day – yet the local network only receives something like 15 per cent of the national funding. While I recognise the reasons why the publication of a Statement of Funds for Control Period 6, covering the years 2019 to 2024, has been delayed until October, I would suggest that this offers an opportunity to put right this disparity. A fair settlement is needed that acknowledges the value of rail in the South East, as well as the disproportionately high impact poor reliability can have on both passengers and the economy.



Finally, I would urge you to ensure that adequate steps have been taken to mitigate any problems resulting from the planned change to services to and from Charing Cross, Waterloo East and London Bridge between 26 August and 2 September. As you know, there were considerable delays after the opening of the new platforms at London Bridge in August 2016, and passengers are concerned that without proper oversight these could be replicated again later this month.

I believe the majority of customers understand that a level of disruption is to be expected when engineering works are being carried out. However, when this creates inexplicable problems with few avenues for recourse, people want answers. That is why the commitment in our Manifesto to introduce a passenger ombudsman received widespread popularity, and I would encourage the Department to implement this as soon as possible.

I would welcome your thoughts on the above.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bob Neill', written in a cursive style.

Bob Neill MP