



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Jo Johnson MP
Minister of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

9 May 2018

Dear Jo,

I write regarding the timetable changes that are being introduced across the Thameslink and Southeastern networks on 20 May. I know that I have raised my concerns on this matter with you in the Chamber on previous occasions, but I remain unconvinced that the impact these considerable alterations will have on many passengers travelling in the London suburbs has been properly thought through.

I understand that this revision is being implemented as part of a much broader plan that seeks to improve connectivity to central London stations, and appreciate that there will inevitably have to be some trade-off if this is to be achieved. However, a number of these changes will almost certainly create real difficulties for customers of both Thameslink and Southeastern.

I am particularly concerned for residents who travel from some of the smaller local stations in and just outside my constituency, including Bickley, Shortlands and Petts Wood. As you will be aware, those travelling to the City from these areas will see a significant reduction in the direct services being offered by Thameslink, as will passengers who currently travel with Southeastern on the direct Orpington to Victoria service. This will not only cause a logistical challenge for many commuters – for example, those who have to organise their time of travel around the school run – but will also exacerbate the severe overcrowding that already exists on these services. Trains on this route, especially during the morning commute, are already at full capacity, and whilst the overall number of services into London may well be increasing, offsetting some of this pressure, I fear the proposed provision will not be able to cope with demand.

I have also received a large number of complaints about how these changes have been publicised in the run up to their implementation, particularly from Thameslink passengers. Many have found the information published in recent months to be convoluted and difficult to navigate, and it is disappointing that Thameslink are not holding any 'Meet the Manager' sessions in the weeks prior to the timetable revision, or indeed for some time after. I have heard from a number of residents that when they have attended one of these meetings and raised their concerns, they have simply been advised to contact their MP.

Although I do not doubt that these changes are well intentioned, the manner in which they have been managed reinforces the growing perception that metro services in constituencies



like ours are the poorer sibling of their mainline counterparts. I very much welcomed your commitment during the course of the Thameslink debate on 18 April, repeated in Transport Questions the following day, to monitor these changes extremely closely over the coming weeks. I believe we must be alert to any inadvertent consequences of the new timetable, addressing passengers' concerns as a matter of priority.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bob Neill'.

Bob Neill MP

cc. Charles Horton, Chief Executive Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway
David Statham, Managing Director, Southeastern