



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
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15 January 2016

Thank you for your letter of 15 December in response to my queries about securing additional rolling stock on the Southeastern network.

While I appreciate that the Department is working hard to achieve improvements for pay-feeing customers using Southeastern trains, I must be frank and say that I have seen no tangible progress in the last twelve months. As you point out, the franchise faces real challenges, with thousands of passengers in London, Sussex and Kent continuing to experience a wholly unsatisfactory service, including many of my constituents who have faced significant delays every day this week. Indeed, on Tuesday services were disrupted through my constituency due to, what Southeastern have termed, 'strong sunlight'.

This is now one of the biggest problems I receive in my mailbag, and the widespread dissatisfaction of passengers should not be underestimated. It is something I witness travelling up on the network from Chislehurst everyday myself, and strength of feeling is currently being exemplified in the online petition calling on your Department to strip Southeastern of the franchise. At the time of writing, it has 7,236 signatures. As you know, I have long made it clear, as have many other local MPs and, incidentally, the majority of London Mayoral candidates, that I would like to see the franchise renewal brought forward with an operator such as London Overground taking responsibility for the city's suburbs, who operate their services infinitely more efficiently.

Clearly, this problem lies not only with Southeastern but also Network Rail, and any solutions must therefore be found by working on a cross-organisation basis. The meeting you convened last January was extremely constructive in highlighting the main areas of concern – namely, punctuality, overcrowding, and ineffective communication – yet I would stress that all of these problems still exist. I would urge you to arrange a similar meeting with all parties involved as soon as possible, and would also ask you again to seriously consider the introduction of financial penalties, as was discussed at that meeting.

Bob Neill MP