



# HOUSE OF COMMONS

26 April 2017

The Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP  
Secretary of State for Transport  
Department for Transport  
Great Minister House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London  
SW1P 4DR

*Dear Chris,*

## **South Eastern Rail Franchise Public Consultation**

I am writing in my capacity as the Member of Parliament for Orpington in response to the Department for Transport's (DfT) consultation on the future of rail services on the South Eastern network.

The Orpington constituency combines the best of Kent with the best of London. We enjoy the quality of life and wonderful countryside of the North Downs while also benefiting from the convenience and employment opportunities that come from close proximity to central London.

Transport is, unsurprisingly, a key concern for the large proportion of residents who travel into London to work. Over 10 million journeys were made to and from the five stations in my constituency served by Southeastern in 2015/16. These rail-users place great value upon having fast, comfortable and reliable services in the peak hours.

Orpington station has 14 direct services that depart for London terminals between 0658 and 0757; however, only the 0704 and the 0752 to Cannon Street, and the 0715 to Charing Cross, are fast services with a journey time of 35 minutes or less. As a result, these services become overcrowded and uncomfortable, and it has been a priority of mine to make the case for increased train capacity in order to improve passenger journeys.

While the availability of fast services is a concern, residents most frequently express their dissatisfaction at the delays and cancellations that occur on the network. Unexpected delays impact on working patterns and reduce the amount of time that my constituents are able to spend with their families and friends.

**Jo Johnson MP**

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I understand that Southeastern operates one of the busiest and most complex networks in the country, a situation that has been further compounded by the London Bridge works, but these features of the service have persisted. Passengers have a right to expect a well-run and efficient service.

I welcome the opportunity that this consultation provides to contribute views, on behalf of Orpington residents, on how the network can best serve my constituency in future. I have addressed a number of the specific questions posed in the consultation document.

Above all, I welcome the consultation's overarching commitment to improving the passenger experience. Many of the priorities identified by the consultation – in particular providing more space on trains, improving communication for passengers and making trains run on time – reflect the concerns most regularly raised by my constituents.

Space for passengers on trains is a critical issue. Trains from Orpington to London regularly begin their journeys much further into Kent. The result is that services are often extremely busy by the time they reach stations in my constituency, forcing passengers to stand in cramped, hot and uncomfortable conditions for up to 45 minutes. It is important that a range of options are examined for increasing space on trains in the peak hours, and I am pleased that franchise bidders will be required to offer solutions as to how they will cope with rising passenger numbers.

Commitments to improving customer service and the passenger experience are also to be welcomed. Station staff are courteous and approachable. However, when delays do occur, the new franchise holder must ensure that hardworking staff are provided with up-to-date information to best assist passengers. The current 'delay repay' system of compensation is a complex and often arduous process. I encourage the DfT to continue to investigate options for creating a more straightforward structure for claiming compensation when delays do occur.

With regards to reducing delays and disruption, I support plans for the train operator and Network Rail to form a close alliance. This would help to improve joint-working between Network Rail and the franchise holder and the accountability of Network Rail to passengers. The majority of delays and cancellations that take place at the moment are caused by infrastructure issues that are out of the control of the franchise holder. This proposal identifies a strong way forward to improve collaboration, ultimately leading to service improvements for customers.



The ability to access numerous destinations is undoubtedly advantageous to commuters working across central London. Orpington residents can access services that travel to London destinations including Charing Cross, Cannon Street, Victoria, Waterloo East and London Bridge. I feel strongly that if the choice of central London destinations is to be cut, there would need to be significant and very tangible improvements in the reliability, frequency and rapidity of services to London from stations in Orpington.

Finally, I understand that proposals to reduce stops at less well used intermediate stations may lead to a slight improvement in journey times to some destinations in Kent and East Sussex. However, I believe that the loss of services at intermediate stations would have a disproportionately negative impact on the journeys of other commuters. Reducing the availability of services at certain intermediate stations would be deeply unfair to residents in these areas and serve to further exasperate overcrowding.

The consultation grasps the difficulties that rail users in Orpington are currently experiencing, and submits a constructive set of initial suggestions for the future specification of the service. I look forward to the DfT continuing to drive forward the reforms that are evidently required to improve services for every passenger on the South Eastern network.

Kind regards,

*Paul Turner*