

Councillor Matt Hartley

Leader of the Opposition, Royal Borough of Greenwich
Councillor for Mottingham, Coldharbour & New Eltham ward

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Steve White
Managing Director
Southeastern Railway
2nd Floor, 4 More London Riverside
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By email

10th October 2022

Dear Mr White,

December timetable changes on the Sidcup, Bexleyheath & Woolwich Lines

I am writing – further to my earlier email correspondence with Southeastern’s Senior Stakeholder Engagement Manager between 27th and 29th September – to share with you my strong objections to timetable changes to the Sidcup Line, Bexleyheath Line and Woolwich Line coming into effect on 11th December.

As you will be aware, these changes are **strongly opposed** by residents who use these services (as evidenced by more than 10,000 signatures on SE9 Magazine’s petition on this in a matter of days), by local community groups and by elected representatives across the party political spectrum across South East London.

I am writing in my capacity as Leader of the Conservative Group in the Royal Borough of Greenwich, to **add my objections** and those of my colleagues Councillor John Hills and Councillor Pat Greenwell, based on many conversations with our residents since these plans emerged – in a haphazard fashion – at the end of September.

Together the wards we represent comprise more than 20,000 residents, all of whom live in communities south of the A2. Our comments therefore chiefly concern the Sidcup and Bexleyheath Lines – however I have also included concerns over changes on the Woolwich Line, which will also have a significantly negative impact on our borough.

Concerns over Sidcup Line changes

Starting with the Sidcup Line, which serves New Eltham and Mottingham stations in the ward that I represent, I note that:

- During the morning (6.30am-9.30am) and evening (4pm-7pm) commuter peak times, there will be a loss of 3 train services from New Eltham to Charing Cross and 1 service to Cannon Street. This will be only partly offset by New Eltham gaining 1 peak direct service to/from Blackfriars. The proportion of stopping and non-stopping trains at Mottingham appears unchanged.

- The result is 18 trains to/from London from New Eltham at peak times (12 Charing Cross, 5 Cannon Street and 1 Blackfriars) – down from 21 currently
- Off-peak and weekend services direct to Cannon Street on the Sidcup Line will end, with the majority of these services being transferred to Charing Cross, resulting in 4 trains per hour to Charing Cross.

I further note – though this change does not appear anywhere in the information published by Southeastern – that the half-hourly “loop” service from Mottingham and New Eltham stations to the Woolwich Line appears to have been dropped entirely from timetables after 11th December. **This ‘loop’ service is the only viable direct public transport link from the very south of the borough to the Elizabeth Line at Abbey Wood, and is also widely used by Charlton fans going to The Valley.**

Its loss – and replacement by a much longer journey with a change at Dartford – makes it even harder for the residents I represent to access the benefits of the Elizabeth Line, the opening of which is seemingly part of Southeastern’s rationale for the changes.

The ‘very south’ of our borough (the communities of New Eltham, the Avery Hill and Coldharbour Estates and Mottingham) is particularly poorly served by public transport options – for example, with no fast bus linking to the better transport links in the north of the borough despite repeated calls for this over the years – and this cut will therefore have a highly detrimental impact.

I would be grateful for answers to the following questions in relation to the Sidcup Line:

1. On what data is the reduction of peak services from/to New Eltham to London from 21 to 18 services based, given the fact that post-pandemic peak time services from New Eltham and Mottingham are regularly over-crowded? What analysis has been conducted to predict levels of overcrowding on each of the 1) Charing Cross, 2) Cannon Street and 3) new Blackfriars services under the new timetable?
2. On what basis is the introduction of a direct Blackfriars service judged to be in any way a compensation to residents travelling to Charing Cross?
3. What is your justification for removing the half-hourly “loop” service from Sidcup Line stations to the Woolwich Line, which is currently the only viable direct public transport link to the Elizabeth Line from the very south of Greenwich borough?

Concerns over Bexleyheath Line changes

On the Bexleyheath Line, serving residents commuting from Eltham, Kidbrooke and Blackheath, I note that:

- During the morning (6.30am-9.30am) peak there will be an overall loss of 2 train services, with 5 Charing Cross services being lost, 3 Cannon Street services being gained, and no changes to Victoria services. The result is 21 trains to London in the morning peak (6 to Charing Cross, 9 to Cannon Street, 6 to

Victoria) down from 23 currently.

- In the evening (4pm-7pm) peak, there will be a total gain of 1 service, with the loss of one service from Charing Cross offset by gaining two services from Cannon Street and no change to services from Victoria. The result is 19 trains from London in the evening peak (5 from Charing Cross, 8 from Cannon Street and 6 from Victoria) - up from 18 currently.
- Most significantly, the Bexleyheath Line will lose direct off-peak and weekend services to Charing Cross, with these services being transferred to Cannon Street - meaning 2 trains per hour to Cannon Street and 2 trains per hour to Victoria.

During the peak, the shift to more direct services from Eltham, Kidbrooke and Blackheath to Charing Cross and fewer direct to Cannon Street will mean even more overcrowding on the remaining Charing Cross services which are more useful to the commuting patterns of a significant proportion of residents. **The new imbalance between Charing Cross and Cannon St. services will exacerbate overcrowding.**

Your planned changes to peak services are particularly perplexing given the continued **growth of Kidbrooke Village** – a major new population centre in our borough and one populated almost entirely of residents who commute to London some or all of the time.

Furthermore, **off-peak and weekend services to Charing Cross are vital** for residents accessing the West End, and it is not clear – beyond a vague claim of improved reliability on other services – on what rationale the removal of this off-peak direct service is based. I am aware of Southeastern's long-held objective of reducing/eliminating cross-overs outside Lewisham Station, which are claimed to be a significant driver of disruption, however this disruption occurs chiefly during peak services, and not off-peak. It is unclear, then, how removing direct Charing Cross services from the Bexleyheath Line will have any real impact on this problem.

I would be grateful for answers to these questions in relation to the Bexleyheath Line:

4. What modelling has been carried out on the economic impact to the West End of the loss of off-peak and weekend direct services to Charing Cross on the Bexleyheath Line?
5. How many incidents of 'crossover' between lines will your planned changes remove outside Lewisham Station each week? Of these, how many are 1) peak, 2) off-peak and 3) weekend?
6. How has the continued growth of Kidbrooke Village been factored into your plans? Specifically, what analysis has been conducted of overcrowding in *future* years based on likely growth in commuting from Kidbrooke Station?
7. For peak services, on what data is the shift from direct Charing Cross services to Cannon Street services on the Bexleyheath Line based? What analysis has been done to predict levels of overcrowding on each of Charing Cross, Cannon Street and Victoria services under this new timetable?

Concerns over Woolwich Line changes

On the **Woolwich Line**, serving residents commuting serving Abbey Wood, Plumstead, Woolwich Arsenal, Woolwich Dockyard, Charlton, Westcombe Park, Maze Hill and Greenwich), I note that:

- All trains will now go to Cannon Street, with Woolwich Line trains from Charlton via Lewisham now ending at Cannon Street instead of Charing Cross.
- There will be 14 Southeastern services running via Woolwich to Cannon Street in the mornings (7am-10am), and 12 coming back in the evenings (4pm-7pm) with the 2-per hour Thameslink service unaffected by these changes. The result is an overall reduction of peak services from 12 to 7 in the morning peak, and 12 to 6 in the evening peak.
- There will no longer be a half-hour 'loop' service from Cannon Street to Cannon Street via the Sidcup and Woolwich Lines, as described above.

8. What is the benefit you are claiming to the network of the removal of the remaining Charing Cross services from the Woolwich Line, and what is your justification for the Woolwich Line seemingly becoming the only line with only one London terminal served directly by Southeastern trains from December?
9. What is your justification for the level of reductions in peak services on the Woolwich Line, which appear to be far in excess of other lines?
10. What modelling has been carried out on the impact on the remaining peak time Woolwich Line services in terms of overcrowding, which is already a significant problem?

Concerns regarding increased changes at London Bridge

Your planned changes on all three of the lines that run through our borough – and the inconvenience these will cause – will inevitably significantly increase the number of change-overs required at London Bridge. This raises several practical challenges for many residents. I would be grateful for answers to the following questions about this:

11. What analysis has been conducted on the likely change in the number of change-overs at London Bridge as a result of your planned changes on the Sidcup, Bexleyheath and Woolwich Lines? A full comparison with the current timetable would be helpful.
12. Of the total expected number of change-overs at London Bridge, how many will involve changes to non-adjacent platforms i.e. how many will involve commuters going down and up escalators to reach the right platform?
13. What travel-time modelling has been carried out to assess the impact of having to change at London Bridge for wheelchair users who currently use direct services to Charing Cross?

Lack of consultation, and future changes

Finally, as I communicated to Southeastern's Senior Stakeholder Engagement Manager at the end of last month, I would like to register my objection in the strongest possible terms to the lack of public consultation on these changes. The way in which these changes were announced is also deeply unsatisfactory, with both residents and elected representatives having to resort to piecing together information from the National Rail live timetable website to get to the bottom of what was being proposed.

The answer I have been given (by email) on why no consultation was carried out is that:

"Throughout the pandemic we've had to move at pace to re-write our timetables and we are still coming out of a fluctuating situation with customer numbers. It takes many months to design and consult upon a timetable change - which we simply haven't had as we continue to respond to the variations and fluctuations in passenger numbers."

The fact Southeastern is continuing to respond to variations and fluctuations in passenger numbers does somewhat undermine your central argument that these changes are necessary due to post-pandemic commuting patterns. If these patterns are still fluctuating, as per the above response, then your logic is highly questionable.

Given changes of these magnitude – which will bring significant economic, social and personal impacts on our residents (your customers) – **I believe it is wholly unacceptable that these changes were not consulted on first.** I further note that other rail operators have consulted on changes to their late-2022 timetables, which calls into question Southeastern's claim that there was not enough time to do this.

I understand from previous correspondence that the timetable is next due to be updated in May 2023 in any case. **I would therefore urge you to postpone your planned December changes to May 2023 so that a full public consultation can be carried out – and that you commit (now) to revising your planned timetable changes based on the results of the consultation.** These results would undoubtedly include the many concerns I have raised in this letter.

I would be grateful for a reply to the above suggestion, and also to the 13 detailed questions outlined in this letter. Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



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