



THE RT HON NICK HERBERT CBE MP

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR ARUNDEL & SOUTH DOWNS

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Charles Horton
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24 April 2018

Dear Charles

I am writing about the proposed changes to direct peak-time services between Hassocks and Clapham Junction. The proposed timetable, which will be coming into effect soon, is a dramatic change that will leave residents in Hassocks with no peak-time trains at all stopping at Clapham Junction.

I have been contacted by a number of my constituents who are very upset about this, including the local Hassocks Rail Group which has been contributing to your timetable consultation over the last two years. They welcome an additional off-peak service to London Victoria as well as a later train from Brighton, but the removal of three peak-time direct services from Hassocks to Clapham Junction (06.23, 07.29 and 08.19) have caused the greatest concern. Many people have chosen to live in Hassocks precisely because of the available train services and destinations, but the proposed changes are disruptive for many.

Hassocks passenger numbers are far higher than at other stations on the same line and yet all other stations on the route will continue to be served. The rail station at Hassocks was used by almost 1.3 million passengers in the year 2016-17 (ORR 2016/17 data of estimated station entries and exits). Wivelsfield station, which is on the same line, by contrast only had 419,000 passengers and offers no parking for commuters. Preston Park also has far fewer passengers travelling through it as well. My constituents are understandably asking why Hassocks is being singled out to lose its direct service in peak-time.

Hassocks Station serves a number of surrounding villages which are not on the rail network, including Hurstpierpoint, Henfield, Partridge Green, and Ditchling. Schoolchildren and college students also rely on services stopping at Hassocks.

This proposed change to Clapham Junction services will have a very disruptive impact on the lives of my constituents, especially commuters. The change will add around 20 minutes to an average journey (assuming trains arrive on time); my constituents will have to wait for their connection and they will potentially be standing for the remaining leg of the journey

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into London when they make the change at Haywards Heath or East Croydon, preventing them from working continuously on the journey as they currently are able to do.

The proposed change seems to stem from an apparently unbendable rule that Gatwick Express trains which serve this route have to run non-stop to London Victoria from Gatwick. Gatwick Express operates two direct services every hour and my residents are only asking for one of these two half-hourly services on the Gatwick Express to be allowed a stop at Hassocks to take passengers to Clapham Junction. It is the rail group's understanding that there is time in the timetable to allow this.

Over the past 12 years passenger numbers on the Southern Network have doubled. In May we will have through trains to Cambridge via London Bridge and Crossrail will operate from December this year, with significant journey connections at Farringdon. Surely this is an opportunity to re-examine the rigid arrangements of the Gatwick Express being a non-stop premium service from Gatwick to London Victoria?

I spoke to Phil Hutchinson about this when he came to a meeting at the House of Commons on 28 March. However, he told me that there could be no change to the proposals - a stance which was in contrast to the very helpful revisions which you made to the Amberley station in response to concerns and to the needs of commuters. I am dismayed that our concerns have been dismissed.

Hassocks is experiencing rapid growth, with new housing plans which will increase the size of the village by nearly a third. It is perverse that at the same time crucial public services are not being expanded to match, but are actually contracting. My constituents in Hassocks have had to put up with a great deal over the past two years, with a regularly disrupted rail service and persistent closure of Hassocks station. On top of this the proposed reduction in services is intolerable.

I look forward to hearing from you. I am writing separately to Jo Johnson MP, Minister of State at the Department for Transport and Minister for London, about this matter, as I do not intend to let it rest.

I have approved this letter personally but am signing electronically.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely

NICK HERBERT