



THE RT HON NICK HERBERT CBE MP

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR ARUNDEL & SOUTH DOWNS

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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

4 June 2018

Dear Chris

Further to my message this morning, I am writing about the appalling state of the rail service in my constituency. I welcome your acknowledgement in the House of Commons today that passengers have faced "totally unsatisfactory levels of service" and "unacceptable disruption" as a result of the implementation of the new GTR/Southern timetable.

Many of my constituents were unhappy about the new timetable in any case, and I met the Rail Minister, Jo Johnson, on 22 May to discuss their concerns. A raft of peak direct commuter services to London Bridge and Clapham Junction from Hassocks have been removed, increasing journey times, which is unacceptable, especially when the village and surrounding area are facing a large increase in housing numbers.

However, matters have been made far worse by the chaotic introduction of the new timetable. My constituents have faced the widespread withdrawal, cancellation and delay of peak-time services. In many instances the service has been so unreliable that commuters have been advised to check train times online after 10pm each evening. The changeover has been shambolic, with services being cut, cancelled or 'removed from service' without prior warning. The 'interim timetable' introduced this week has created yet more uncertainty and disruption. This situation cannot be allowed to continue over the summer.

I welcome your announcement today that there will be a special compensation scheme for passengers on affected routes. GTR must bear the cost of this disruption, not passengers who are already paying high prices for their tickets. I am informed that GTR is refusing to allow passengers with Thameslink-only tickets to use Gatwick Express services, even when their regularly scheduled train is cancelled at the last minute, forcing customers to wait even longer for a train or incur an additional cost. This appears to be completely unreasonable.

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Any passengers facing this level of disruption would be angry, but for my constituents it is the final straw. They endured well over a year of serious disruption as a result of the dispute over Driver Only Operated Trains, and further cancellations and delays as a result of the London Bridge upgrade. The infrastructure of the Brighton and Arun Valley lines is clearly inadequate to meet growing demand, and trains are frequently overcrowded. These timetable changes cannot be blamed on another party, but are the industry's own initiative. The changes may have been intended to improve services overall, but they have manifestly been abysmally planned and executed, and those responsible must be held to account for the failures. After such an extended period of disruption, and knowing the fragility of the service which was hardly in steady state, it was foolish for GTR and Network Rail not to foresee the risks of such a big timetable change and question their own readiness. The chaos appears to have been a major unforced error.

I welcome your announcement of an inquiry by the independent Office of Rail and Road into the timetable changes, and hope that this will identify the issues as soon as possible. I note your assurance that you will not hesitate to take enforcement action against GTR if it is materially in breach of its contractual obligations, and your comment that "there is unquestionably a large question mark over its future". Any such action, including the loss of the franchise, will have my full support. No more excuses can be made for this company, which has completely lost the confidence of my constituents. I hope the inquiry will also establish the extent to which Network Rail is responsible. If they share the blame then their senior managers must also be held to account for the failures and if necessary removed.

In the meantime, I would be grateful for your further assurance that all possible steps will be taken to restore rail services to my constituents as soon as possible, and in particular that you will review the new timetable as it affects Hassocks in my constituency to ensure that peak time services are returned.

I have approved this letter personally but am signing electronically.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Nick Herbert

NICK HERBERT