

19 December 2016

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Rt Hon. Amber Rudd MP and Huw Merriman MP
House of Commons
London, SW1A 0AA

Dear Amber and Huw

Performance - Hastings line

Thank for your letter of 12 December 2016 regarding service disruption on the Hastings Line over the past few weeks. Your constituents deserve a better service, particularly in periods such as now when there is significant disruption on other parts of the South East route. On behalf of Network Rail and Southeastern we offer our personal apologies to you and your constituents whose journeys, in this crucial period before Christmas, have been so severely disrupted.

We note that Mark Carne, CEO of Network Rail has already written to you. As the senior leaders of the railway in your area we willingly take up your offer to provide both a joint response on the causes of the delays to the line and our plan to resolve them. As always we would be very happy to jointly discuss this further. In the interim, please encourage your constituents to claim compensation, and if they have difficulty doing so they may contact Mike Gibson, Public Affairs Manager at Southeastern on mike.gibson@southeasternrailway.co.uk

As we outlined to you and your fellow MPs who attended the joint Southeastern Trains and Network Rail roundtable with the Rail Minister Paul Maynard on 21 November, it is our number one priority to significantly improve performance across the route. Only by doing so can we improve the experience of our customers – your constituents – thousands of whom use our services every day

The line from London to Hastings has experienced a lot of disruption over the past few months. While we have seen a general improvement in performance over the past five years, from October this autumn the route has seen the worst performance for five years. We know that leaf-fall has a significant impact upon asset and train performance, and as you would expect, we have undertaken the largest programme of rail treatment and lineside foliage clearance in years. However despite this we have had the following failures with the infrastructure, and against each we have summarised our plan to prevent these happening again:

- 1) **a number of track circuit failures, the device used to detect the absence or not of a train on the track to inform signallers and control relevant signals** – we have instigated a programme of replacing critical track circuits across the route

- 2) **a cracked crossing at North East Kent junction on 23 November, a major point for all trains on their journey into Central London via London Bridge station** – as part of our regular monitoring of the track, our maintenance team was aware this crossing was deteriorating, but had failed to escalate this news to senior colleagues, including ourselves. Once the crossing finally cracked on the 23rd we had to instigate an emergency 5mph speed restriction during the day and then fixed the crossing over-night. At the request of John Halsall, the Chief Operating Officer for the South East route, Andy Derbyshire, has personally briefed the maintenance teams on the need to immediately escalate news of the potential failure of key parts of the infrastructure.

- 3) **a number of overruns of weekend and overnight engineering works, including on the Tonbridge to Hastings line** – we have allowed our engineering contractors both weekend and weekday overnight access to our railway to undertake maintenance work on the track. However, as you will know from the most recent disruption on Wednesday 14 December caused by works undertaken the preceding night, these works too often overrun. This is not good enough. In order to guarantee their further work with Network Rail on this route, John Halsall and his team have made it explicitly clear to the contractors that they need to significantly up their game before being allowed access to the track at any point in the future. Assurances have been given that there will be Director level supervision on site, and if these works overrun in the future we will take further action.

From Southeastern's side we have or will be:

- Recruiting more conductors and on-board managers
- 100 new drivers in training
- Increasing resources at our control centre
- Focusing on right time railway by eliminating the minutes lost that add up to knock on delays
- Recruited more platform staff to help passengers
- Working with Network Rail to remove temporary speed restrictions
- Working with Brighton University on a live information flow to be fed directly into our systems to provide more up to date information
- Educating passengers on the best course of action to take when a passenger falls ill on the train
- Invested in fleet improvements by replacing components likely to fail

Network Rail research has established that the first eight miles out of London from Cannon Street and Charing Cross stations is where over 40% of all our delays occur. Based on this evidence Network Rail has, in addition to the three immediate problems detailed above, begun an 18 month programme to renew, upgrade, and enhance the track, electrification and signalling assets which are the primary causes of those delays.

Network Rail is also increasing coverage of their rapid response teams who in some cases are now able to call on dedicated BTP resources to allow the use emergency blue lights to get to sites quicker to fix infrastructure failures or respond to trespass, vandalism or fatality category incidents.

In addition, Network Rail have set up remote condition monitoring on all critical junctions in the London area so asset performance can be monitored in real time and proactive intervention measures can be undertaken before components fail. It is estimated that without the remote condition monitoring, 45% more failures to the infrastructure would occur.

We hope the information provided in this letter will demonstrate that we are working together on a daily basis to implement our joint plan to ensure right time performance across the route. We understand that none of this will be any consolation at the moment to your constituents, who naturally will want to see improvements delivered sooner rather than later, but we assure you that we're working hard together to give passengers a service they can rely upon. We both welcome the Secretary of State's recent announcement calling for greater joined-up working between train operators and Network Rail and look forward to receiving more details of the Government's proposals in due course.

We appreciate the pressures on your time, but would be happy to brief you in more detail on the measures we are taking to improve performance. I understand that both of you have had a train cab ride, but you may be interested in a visit to our joint control room which would give an insight into both the challenges we face and how integrated our operations already are.

If you would like to take up this offer, please let us know.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Halsall".

John Halsall

Route Managing Director, South East, Network Rail

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Statham".

David Statham

Managing Director, Southeastern Trains

