

Valerie Shawcross AM

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The Combined Franchise Replacement

Sponsor

Department for Transport
Zone 3/15
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
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Our ref: VS/ai

Your ref:

Date: 14 August 2012

By email

Dear Sir or Madam

Thameslink rail franchise consultation

This letter sets out my response to the consultation currently underway regarding the specifications of the new combined Thameslink/Southern/Southeastern rail franchise, due for re-let next year.

I am particularly keen to contribute to this consultation as National Rail services are absolutely key to the welfare of South London. Unlike other parts of the capital, vast swathes of South London do not have easy access to the Underground network, and so overland National Rail train services fill an important gap, and provide vital commuter links. South London also includes a number of neighbourhoods which suffer above-average levels of deprivation, and these areas commonly have much needed regeneration ambitions. Transport links are a vital part of the infrastructure which can spell success or failure for attempts to rejuvenate a community so I believe it is absolutely essential that the new Thameslink combined franchise is something which must be 'got right'.

To this end, I have a number of representations to make regarding the requirements to be fulfilled by the new franchisee and hope that these will be taken into account fully and favourably.

Timing of consultation

Firstly, I have heard comments from numerous constituents and colleagues regarding the timing of this consultation – that is, over the summer months, and when the Olympic Games are in progress to boot. Some parties have expressed a view that holding the exercise when many people are likely to be on holiday or otherwise engaged devalues the process. This has certainly led to difficulties for the Assembly Transport committee who have been unable to co-ordinate a response to this consultation for this reason. It is for these reasons I would like to request that the consultation be extended for a period of

one month, to enable the maximum number of stakeholders possible to contribute their views.

Sutton/Wimbledon 'loop' services curtailment at Blackfriars

I have received numerous representations from concerned and angry commuters who use the Wimbledon/Sutton 'loop' services via Herne Hill to commute to the City and beyond. It is clear that this proposal will cause disbenefit to users of these services if they are all terminated at Blackfriars.

I understand the technical engineering issues relating to new track layout, which previous Route Utilisation Strategies have assumed, and that the thus assumed view is that terminating these services at Blackfriars is necessary for increased frequency on the rest of the Thameslink network.

However, many of my constituents in Tulse Hill and Herne Hill have a 20-year long expectation of being able to rely on the current service for their pattern of travel to work. I believe that many people moved into the area because of this service, not unreasonably expecting it to continue long term - in particular the direct link to Farringdon and City Thameslink. I also understand that these trains are currently overcrowded. I therefore do not find it reasonable to entirely remove this transport link as it will cause disruption to many of these commuters.

I would like to ask that more work be done to assess the numbers of commuters who will suffer disbenefit from this proposal and ask that consideration be given to maintaining some level of 'through service'. South London rail users are taking a number of 'hits' - loss of services - currently, and any mitigation or improvements to services from these stations would be welcome. I do feel that South Londoners are being disproportionately negatively affected in comparison to other parts of the capital and I would like to see moves to ameliorate this. I understand that Transport for London agree that this level of disbenefit to affected passengers is unacceptable without some degree of mitigation and that they may be suggesting that additional services be provided to Wimbledon/Sutton loop stations following the Thameslink works. I would fully support this.

I would like consideration be given to finding ways of continuing some level of through service for all passenger cohorts who currently enjoy this link, and I would ask that steps be taken to ensure that no one group of London passengers is caused any more disadvantage than any other. Finally on this point, I would like to insist that inner London commuters do not find their services diminished in any way for the benefit of those passengers on the Thameslink routes from outside the Greater London area.

I am also aware that a number of stakeholders have been in touch with you making alternative suggestions for service patterns which aim to avoid the need to halt all Wimbledon/Sutton trains at Blackfriars and I hope these will all be considered fully on their merits.

South London Line mitigation measures

Despite a long running cross-party campaign, the South London Line (SLL) service from London Bridge to Victoria via Denmark Hill is to be withdrawn in December 2012 and the previously proposed mitigation measure of a part replacement service between Victoria and Bellingham via a number of former SLL stations is not currently funded. I would urge the new franchisee to include such a service in their new timetable, during both peak and

off peak hours. Not only would this mitigate the loss of the SLL for stations such as Wandsworth Road and Clapham High Street – who are losing their direct services to Victoria – but this would also benefit passengers along the Catford Loop – currently one of the very few lines in inner London to only have a two tph service.

The SLL is also a valued local link to Kings College and the Maudsley Hospitals and, as aforementioned, its removal has sparked a long running and extremely well supported cross-party campaign for the retention of a Victoria/Bellingham service. I personally undertook a residents' survey in the Clapham/Wandsworth Road area last year, which yielded a 9.4% response rate – very high for this kind of survey, with 92% of the 236 respondents stating that they would be inconvenienced by the loss of the SLL service. Almost 70% of respondents said they used the service to go to work or school and nearly a quarter said they used it to attend hospital appointments.

As well as the removal of the SLL there is a related issue, causing further difficulty for South London rail travellers. That is, a forthcoming reduction in services to Victoria from Peckham Rye and Denmark Hill. These stations, post December 2012 and the demise of the SLL will only be served by Victoria to Dartford via Nunhead and Lewisham trains. Not only is this, again, only a 2 tph service but these trains do not operate after 7.30/8pm on Monday to Saturday and not at all on Sundays. This will create a serious service gap which I would expect the new franchisee to rectify. As an aside I would also expect that the relevant bodies enter into proper discussions with Southeastern – who operate the Victoria-Dartford service, about running trains later into the evening and some level of Sunday service.

Improved Reliability

Historically, the performance of the previous franchisee has been held by passengers to be poor in terms of reliability across all former Thameslink routes. I would expect those awarding the new franchise to bear this in mind and also the new franchisee to make improved reliability of these train services a priority. I would like to see measures to reduce overcrowding, increase capacity and provide more frequent services across the new franchise. Indeed, there should be a clear aspiration to provide a 'metro' style 'turn up and go' level of service on as many of these routes as possible.

Station Staffing & Improvements

I would expect the new franchisee to ensure that stations are staffed at all times while train services are running. This is of great value to passengers in terms of health and safety, personal security and is vital to assist less mobile passengers.

I would also expect the new franchisee to undertake improvement works to station buildings and facilities. Clearly rebranding work may be necessary and beyond this I would expect efforts to be made to make stations as clean and safe as possible with good signage and information and security systems in place. I would expect the franchisee to lobby and engage with local stakeholders to secure monies to improve accessibility at their stations from relevant funders. You will be aware that there are a number of stations in my constituency along these routes which require significant capital works to improve access and to tackle various physical constraints with their location etc. i.e. where stations are located on viaducts.

As a specific example, Loughborough Junction station would benefit greatly from fresh decoration and improved signage, lighting and passenger information. This station is also

only accessible by a long and fairly steep flight of stairs and would benefit from access works such as lift installation. The same can also be said of stations such as Tulse Hill.

Summary

In summary, I would like the following key points addressed:

- The consultation period should be extended by one month.
- Through services on the Thameslink core route should be retained to/from all destinations at some level, and in particular to and from stations on the Wimbledon/Sutton loop
- At least a part-replacement service for the South London Line should be implemented.
- Increased reliability and capacity on the former Thameslink routes is needed, and a Metro style rail service should be made available for all routes.
- Stations to be staffed while trains are running, clean and safe, with good signage and information and every effort made to improve accessibility.

I look forward to a favourable outcome of this consultation and hope that my points above will all be acted upon by the new franchisee.

Yours sincerely



Valerie Shawcross AM
London Assembly, Lambeth & Southwark