



Department
for Transport

From the Secretary of State
The Rt. Hon. Patrick McLoughlin

Great Minster House
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London
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Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

Dear Colleague,

8 June 2016

I am writing to let you know what is being done to expand and improve services on the Southern and Thameslink rail routes, following repeated poor performance, made much worse by unjustified industrial action. The current situation is unacceptable: I want to see the operator, GTR, and Network Rail work together to sort things out and I know they share my determination to make this happen.

This part of the network is the largest and most complex in the country, with rapidly-rising demand. That is why we are undertaking one of the biggest rail investment programmes anywhere in Europe. This includes the £6bn Thameslink programme, with new 12-car trains each able to carry up to 1,750 people, new trains on the Gatwick Express, a rebuilt London Bridge Station and a £700m rebuild of London Victoria Underground station. All of this is being done alongside keeping our promise to freeze fares at inflation for this parliament.

I know that this rebuilding has been disruptive, especially at London Bridge, where the new station concourse opens this August and while the work has been going on the system has been less able to cope with delays. My department has worked with GTR and Network Rail to put in place a timetable that reflects this, a contractual change that GTR were entitled to under the terms of their franchise agreement. They are not being - and will not be - let off the hook for performance.

The Rail minister, Claire Perry has worked hard over the last 12 months to hold the operator to account and drive improvements. GTR, for instance, has already hired 209 extra drivers and is hiring 2 more a week, soon to rise to 3.

The immediate challenge comes from the response of trade unions to sensible steps being taken to improve customer service and operational reliability. All Thameslink services and around 40% of Southern services already operate with the driver in charge of the doors and have done so safely for many years.

The intention is to extend this to the majority of Southern services, freeing up conductors to have more time to help passengers, check tickets and move through trains. This will also help train performance. At the moment, trains that require conductors cannot run if a member of staff without the right route knowledge is unavailable - delayed, for instance, on an incoming service. The new on-board role will be more flexible, so that staff can work any route, which means fewer cancellations.

This is not about worsening terms of employment. There will still be a job for every member of staff who wants one and no one will get a pay cut. Nor is it about changing safety standards. GTR already operate 2,000 driver-controlled-door services a day. It is about improving customer service and reliability, which is what passengers want.

I realise that the current situation is frustrating and that promises of future improvements do not reassure people trying to get to and from their jobs and homes now. Along with Claire Perry, I am making sure the operator and Network Rail respond.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick', with a stylized flourish above the name.

THE RT. HON. PATRICK McLOUGHLIN