

Swale House, East Street,
Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3HT
DX59900 Sittingbourne 2
Phone: 01795 424341
Fax: 01795 417141
www.swale.gov.uk



Mr Mike Gibson
Public Affairs Manager
Southeastern
Friars Bridge Court
41 - 45 Blackfriars Road
London

Please ask for: Philippa Davies
philippadavies@swale.gov.uk
Direct Line: 01795 417329
Our Ref: JTB/2013
Your Ref:
Date: 7 October 2013

Southeastern Franchise Extension

At Swale Borough Council's Joint Transportation Board meeting held on Monday 9 September, Members considered an invitation from you to respond to consultation on a new contract for the operation of the train service in our area from November 2014 to June 2018. Members agreed to feed into the consultation. However, further to this, Members of the Board requested that I write to you separately as well.

There was discussion on a note from Kent County Council, which suggested that a Newington stop had been removed from one morning service to allow your company to hit punctuality targets. This means there is a 50 minute gap in services from Newington to Cannon Street in the morning rush hour, which Board members felt was unacceptable. Does Southeastern trains think it acceptable to remove a train stop to improve performance against targets?

I look forward to receiving a response from you on this matter.

Yours sincerely

MIKE WHITING
Chairman, Swale Joint Transportation Board

Cllr. Mike Whiting
Chairman
Swale Joint Transportation Board

Your ref: JTB/2013

Dear Cllr. Whiting

Thank you for your letter of 7 October regarding the withdrawal of a stop at Newington in May of this year.

We have had previous correspondence with a Mr. Harris of Newington Parish Council on this issue and rather than repeat the points made have copied both his emails and our response into the attached PDF document. *(not included in this paperwork)*

To summarise, this one stop was withdrawn to improve performance on the North Kent Line in the morning peak. You will see from the attached correspondence file that that making this station stop had a knock on impact on other trains and performance on this line was a cause of complaint amongst passengers.

Following the change, performance was monitored and I can confirm that overall punctuality on the line has improved.

It's a fact of life in the railway industry that no timetable change will please everybody, but you'll appreciate that we have a duty to everyone who uses our services to take all steps within our remit to improve performance.

You have our assurance that we do not make such changes lightly as we recognise that our commuting passengers build their working day and family commitments around the times of peak trains. So when weighing up the performance improvement options available to us, we will take account of those likely to lose out as well as the interests of those who are likely to gain. And if, on balance, there are likely to be more losers than winners, we'll obviously reconsider.

We're also mindful of the reputational impact of timetable changes that are likely to be very unpopular. For example, last year we proposed to withdraw a limited number of stops at Meopham and Longfield in order to reduce journey times on this line from the Kent coast. We had received representations from stakeholders on this issue and this aspiration formed part of Kent County Council's Rail Action Plan for Kent. However, we received over 700 objections from passengers, including representations from Passenger Focus, MPs and local authorities. Given the weight of opposition, there was little point in our putting these proposals to the Department for Transport (DfT) for approval and they were not pursued. However, this particular timetable change has, to date, attracted just five objections, including that from Mr. Harris.

I am sorry I can't write in more positive terms but hope this and the attached correspondence explains the reasons behind this particular change.

I know this will come as a disappointment to some local commuters and if you need to discuss, please give me a call.

Best wishes

Mike Gibson
Public Affairs Manager
Southeastern

BRIEFING NOTE

From: Stephen Gasche
To: Cllr Mike Whiting, Swale BC
Re: Newington Rail Service
Date: 14 November 2013

1. WITHDRAWAL OF 06:54 NEWINGTON STOP

- 1.1 I understand that there is continuing concern at the withdrawal of the 06:54 Newington stop to Cannon Street. I have studied the long exchange of e-mails between Southeastern and Newington Parish Council, and I recognise that this particular change has inconvenienced a small number of regular commuters.
- 1.2 The problem is that all railway timetables are compromises. I understand that the reason for this timetable change was to improve reliability along the whole of the route between Faversham and London via Chatham, and that is what appears to have happened following this change. The problem was centred on Rochester Bridge Junction, which is a pinch-point for services on three different routes and is the cause of delay to several services if one train is regularly and significantly late arriving at this junction.
- 1.3 This was clearly the reason for the change to this service, a change which has now largely resolved the problems of delays to successive services that this particular train had caused. While I appreciate that this stop withdrawal has inconvenienced a small number of commuters at Newington, it has benefitted a much larger number of commuters who now have a more reliable service on several other journeys.

2. PUNCTUALITY TARGETS

- 2.1 The issue raised about punctuality targets at Rainham and Newington needs some clarification. It is not the case that punctuality is measured only at Rainham in this section of route on the up line. Punctuality targets are measured at every scheduled station stop, including Newington, and so performance at Newington – early, on-time or late – will be recorded as just that. The punctuality targets recorded at Rainham are therefore for that station only, and not for the whole section of route including Rainham, Newington and beyond.

3. RAIL ACTION PLAN FOR KENT

- 3.1 One of the key outcomes intended in KCC's Rail Action Plan for Kent (April 2011) was:

"Journey times on Mainline between stations on the North Kent line and Victoria / Cannon Street have been greatly increased with the new timetable – there needs to be a realignment of the station stopping pattern to reduce these journey times"

(Rail Action Plan for Kent, para. 5.4 (v))

The intended outcome here was to re-align these stopping patterns, so that Longfield and Meopham were removed from the fast services, with the principal stations on the route having two stops per hour off-peak and the smaller stations one stop per hour off-peak. This would have speeded up the service from the main North Kent line towns to London considerably.

- 3.2 However, this proposal will NOT now be introduced, following overwhelming objection from residents in Longfield and Meopham at the proposal to reduce their off-peak service from 3tph to 2tph. There are no longer any plans to do this, or to change the stopping pattern significantly from the one that exists today. So there should not be any concern about this proposal in the Rail Action Plan for Kent adversely affecting Newington or any other stations on the North Kent line.
- 3.3 KCC is still discussing with the DfT and Southeastern options to improve the service on the North Kent line in a different way. As soon as these discussions result in any definite proposals for the Direct Award period (October 2014 to June 2018) they will be announced publicly.

Contact Officer:

Stephen Gasche
Principal Transport Planner – Rail
Transport Strategy Delivery Team
Kent County Council