

Ed Davey MP meeting with SWR and Network Rail, 13/4/18

Present:

Ed Davey and Researcher (Sapphire Bleach)

SWR – Andy Mellors, Jane Lee

Network Rail – Becky Lumlock, Aeneas Tole

A. Summary Report

Key Next Steps

- **ED to push Transport Minister, Grayling, for better compensation system** than franchise agreement currently requires
- **ED to set up new cross-party pressure group in Parliament, to hold SWR & Network Rail to account**, as he is unconvinced there will be sufficient progress on performance, quick enough
- **ED to push for new plans to improve all 10 stations in the Borough terms of cleanliness and appearance**, working with Kingston Council (after May's elections), SWR and NR, starting with Chessington South, New Malden and Tolworth
- **ED to continue several specific campaigns**: urgent safety case for 2nd staircase for platforms 3 & 4 at Surbiton, new disabled access at Chessington South and at rear of Surbiton

Overview of meeting

- **Both SWR and Network Rail (NR) accepted their service has been poor** – with March's figures amongst the poorest since the new franchise began. I made clear passengers needed rapid improvement, as current poor service was seriously affecting people's lives
- **SWR and NR presented their latest improvement plans** (*detailed below*)
- **I remain worried that the pace of improvement will be too slow**, even in the medium term (between now and 2020), and partly depends on decisions by DfT and ORR on major operational and capital investments.
- **I have therefore decided to set up a new cross-party group in Parliament**, to consist of MPs whose constituents are affected, to hold NR and SWR to account, and to lobby for additional investment in our franchise region's infrastructure. I am now in the process of setting that new Parliamentary Group up and hope to have the inaugural meeting in May.
- **Main non-service issue discussed at meeting was the new compensation system** (Delay, Repay). *SWR say their hands are tied by the franchise so I am going to lobby DfT to let SWR be more flexible in how they operate compensation*
- **Some positive sounding news on a few constituency issues**, including a new incident response team to be based at Surbiton, positive tweaks to the 2018 timetable in response to my December submission and constituents' concerns **especially no reduction of trains from New Malden between 08:00 and 08:59** and renewed commitment to respond to our campaigns for a second staircase for platforms 3 & 4, to relieve evening peak congestion, and for new disability access at the rear of Surbiton station and Chessington South.
- **No time to cover a range of other issues including station cleanliness and appearance** for stations like Tolworth and the Chessingtons, so ED will follow up separately

B. DETAILED REPORT (including extracts from recent email correspondence)

1. Service Performance and Improvement Plans

We spent most of the meeting discussing the poor service, and plans to improve it. As a daily commuter myself, and having received hundreds of complaints, I was well-armed!

Their own chart of “public performance measure” (PPM – or a measure of train punctuality) confirms particularly poor months in September, November, December, February and March – i.e., there have been only 2 months during the new franchise where service has got even close to target and Charter standards. I also referred to the high level of cancellations (7.83% of suburban trains in March!). There was no dispute, the service has been poor – an understatement perhaps.

At this meeting, at past meetings and in emails, we discussed various incidents that have contributed to this poor performance – some of which were Network Rail’s responsibility, some which were SWR. For example, March was hit by the adverse weather. April 10th saw a points failure near Surbiton causing huge disruption. There is renewed focus on contingency planning, and how they can better manage such incidents and disruption – see below.

In an email to me before the meeting, Andy Mellors, SWR’s MD, wrote *“South Western Railway is responsible for around 25% of all delays to the services we operate. Around 70% of delays are caused by Network Rail and the remaining 5% by other operators.”* However, we the passengers don’t really care: they must sort it, and I think they understand that.

SWR and NR then presented their plans for significant improvement in 2018/19.

Their improvement plans include:

- Increased train capacity, to reduce station delay
- Opening of Waterloo International Platforms, to improve resilience/reliability
- New NR inspection teams and “incident response gangs”
- Continued investment in “intelligent infrastructure” technology, to predict and prevent failures in points, tracks and signals
- December 2018 timetable
- Additional platform staff (with megaphones) to improve departure times
- Renewed focus on “service recovery” – i.e., getting things going again when incidents occur
- Detailed list of train maintenance and initiatives specific to individual engine types (12 initiatives over 5 train classes), for example:
 - Class 456 and DMU (Class 158/159) – replace Square D relay with modern brake control relays to reduce risk of dirt ingress
 - Class 458 – door overhaul programme
- New analysts for performance team
- 20 specific performance initiatives, e.g., new response team at Surbiton, to reduce response times, extra control centre technicians in Wimbledon Signalling Centre

We discussed the list of operational and capital investments required – including programmes which would require additional investment agreed by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and Department of Transport (DfT).

I was particularly concerned to learn that, even if they hit the existing performance targets - significant improvement on current standards – those punctuality targets for the next FIVE years are still only 87.5% of trains on/nearly on time. In context, for almost all the years before 2015/2016, our train service was achieving at least 90% on time, averaged over the year.

The meeting confirmed for me that, to get the train service people expect, we need to see both SWR and Network Rail significantly improving their performance AND significant extra investment agreed by both Government and the Regulator.

While I will continue to meet SWR and Network Rail, I have decided that a strategic political response is needed in Parliament. **So I am proposing to MPs across parties that we set up what is called a “All Party Parliamentary Group” (APPG) to cover what is known as the “Wessex” region.** This would meet regularly (probably quarterly) to hold SWR and Network Rail to account and to understand what new investments would produce improved services, so we can lobby Government Ministers and rail regulators to approve such investments.

I have already contacted a number of MPs, and had a positive response. I hope this new APPG for our train services can hold its first meeting next month.

2. Compensation arrangements – beyond Delay, Repay.

I have received more complaints about the new compensation mechanism than the poor train service performance itself – though the two are linked! Previous to this meeting, I have raised multiple, in-depth concerns about the Delay Repay system.

SWR’s latest email reply on Delay Repay (just before the meeting) said this:

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As far as our Delay Repay (DR) scheme is concerned, this was launched on 4 September 2017 and formed part of our franchise agreement. The DfT opted for the Delay Repay scheme following a consultation into the future of the South Western rail franchise. The stakeholder briefing document published by the DfT in February 2016, following that consultation referred to a more appropriate form of compensation linked to the actual delays experienced, rather than the annual average performance. As such, the DfT concluded that franchise bidders needed to provide Delay Repay compensation arrangements.

I appreciate that Delay Repay has not been well received by some of our season ticket holders, who now have to take positive action to claim compensation when their train is delayed. This system, now widely used across the industry, was set up to be fairer than the old Passengers' Charter system as it offers compensation for every delay of over 15 minutes no matter what the cause or who is responsible. It is important to note that people

that bought their season tickets before 4 Sept last year can claim both under the terms of the former Passenger's Charter system and the new Delay Repay process

Earlier this year we introduced online delay repay accounts to reduce the amount of information passengers need to input when they claim, and we are now working on automating the whole process for smartcard season ticket holders. We hope to do this by the end of the year, several months earlier than our committed obligation. I note your constituent's comment regarding overcrowding and how this is not being recognised by the system, which assumes passengers' were able to board a following service. I have checked and in such cases the customer should make sure they claim against the train they intended to take and make clear in the comment box if they were unable to board the following service due to overcrowding,

While poor performance results in a spike in delay repay claims, I am pleased to report we now expect the delay repay process to take around three weeks between submission of the claim and payment. Claims where further investigation or information is required may take a little longer, and I am aware that our external supplier has fallen behind on handling paper claim forms submitted by post, which we have now taken steps to address.

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Whatever improvements SWR make now and in the future to this Delay Repay system, my concern is that it will still disadvantage many of my constituents compared to the old system – especially season ticket holders.

Busy people don't want to waste time, however efficient the system is, making continual claims for compensation: the averaging system will work better for most season ticket holders. Delay Repay *may* be preferred by other users.

Given the Secretary of State, Chris Grayling, signed off this new compensation system requirement, I told SWR I would be contacting DfT to establish what flexibility Transport Ministers were now prepared to consider with respect to the franchise obligation on SWR, for compensation mechanisms.

I told SWR I thought DfT should require them/allow them to operate both an annual averaging system, and a Delay Repay and passengers could choose the compensation option they preferred.

3. Proposed new timetable for December 2018

Last year's consultation by SWR on a new timetable from December 2018 was controversial, and following responses from constituents, I made a detailed 5 page submission to the consultation.

This month, SWR published its response to the consultation, though its proposals now have to go to Network Rail, before they can be confirmed later this year. Andy Mellors confirmed to me that:
"...we have adjusted our plans to reflect the feedback we received. One such area was the Weymouth line and direct services to London, where after listening to local concerns, we

have changed our plans to still offer two through trains an hour to London. This will of course reduce the journey time saving we had hoped to achieve.

“Although the level of peak services between New Malden and Surbiton services is not specifically covered in the summary document, I can confirm that in the timetable we have submitted to Network Rail, New Malden retains the same number of services as today between 08.00 and 09.00. Detailed timetables will not be available until later this year.”

With the New Malden peak hour service now retained, this means that almost every existing service is retained. Other concerns constituents raised e.g., on the timing changes for half hourly services on the Chessington South branch line, however have yet to be answered: I will pursue.

4. Second staircase (platforms 3&4, for evening peak congestion relief)

Our campaign for a second staircase has certainly hit home – thank you for everyone who has responded. In the meeting, Network Rail confirmed that it remains a priority, and they are in discussions with DfT on timings etc. In his 12/4 email to me, Andy Mellors confirmed:

“As one of the busiest stations on our network, I am conscious that Surbiton has particular challenges in accommodating the number of services, and number of passengers travelling to and from the station. I know you have met with Network Rail and ourselves at the station to consider how these challenges can be addressed and the Network Rail led plan for a second staircase to improve access and egress from platforms 3 and 4. Network Rail and DfT are working together to deliver the scheme subject to funding for detailed design and delivery.”

While everything sounds promising, I remain concerned about the delays on this plan. When I left office in 2015, it was due for completion by 2019, but during my time out, this slipped to the next Control Period, after 2019. Unless and until we get a specific date, as soon as possible in the next Control Period (i.e., 2019 or 2020), this must remain a priority.

5. Surbiton station rear lift / disabled access, and Chessington South disabled access

With my Surbiton Hill ward colleagues – Cllr Hilary Gander, Cllr Malcolm Self and Cllr John Ayles – I have been pursuing the case for disabled access to Surbiton Station from the rear. There is already a lift, but it comes out behind the old ticket office and there is currently no ticket barriers, etc. I have asked both Network Rail and SWR to look at this as an early station investment priority – alongside disabled access at Chessington South.

I have received assurances that their property teams are now on the case, but I will continue to pursue this. I have made the case that there is actually a huge space there, at the rear of the station, that is going unused, and that this represents revenue foregone, so any scheme could pay for itself.

ENDS