



Councillor Averil Lekau

Deputy Leader, Royal Borough of Greenwich

Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment & Transport

Mr. Steve White,
Managing Director, Southeastern,
Second Floor, 4 More London Riverside,
London SE1 2AU

27th January 2023

Dear Mr. White,

I write following the e-mail sent to you by Councillor Okereke and I on 5th October and your attendance at our Transport Scrutiny meeting on 20th October. I am writing to further express my concerns regarding the impact of Southeastern's recent timetable changes.

We requested your representation at the Scrutiny meeting, which you gratefully accepted. We made it very clear that we were really displeased with how Southeastern went above the changes to the timetabling without undertaking any consultation with the many commuters it would affect.

It was expressed to us that Southeastern were granted permission by the DfT to amend timetables post Covid without consultation, and although we expressed our dismay at the impact these changes would have to our residents, they went ahead.

As previously outlined, we had significant concerns about the proposed timetable changes and reduction in service across the Southeastern network. We felt strongly that that these changes would significantly and detrimentally impact our communities, right throughout the borough and beyond.

We also raised concerns about the risk that these changes to the borough's main rail services will have a very negative impact on the shift to more sustainable modes of transport. Our Carbon Neutral Plan and our recently adopted Transport Strategy both set out how we are going to play an active role in tackling the climate emergency. We want to work more closely with all transport organisations to encourage modal shift across our borough, supporting more sustainable modes of travel. Public transport needs to be a viable alternative to driving vehicles for both our resident and visitors to the Royal Borough. However, we are heavily reliant on Southeastern and Network Rail to provide these essential services to achieve this.

These changes have had a major impact on Royal Greenwich residents. They mean significantly more passengers are changing trains at London Bridge, with long waits on station platforms. We were

The Leader's Office, Town Hall, Wellington Street, Woolwich, London SE18 6PW

☎ 020 8921 5062

averil.lekau@royalgreenwich.gov.uk

Thamesmead Moorings Ward

reassured that the £1bn redevelopment of London Bridge station meant it had the capacity and infrastructure to handle the additional passengers. However there was very serious overcrowding at London Bridge on Wednesday (25th January) which raises major concerns about this.

I am very concerned by what happened. As you'll have seen from all the social media posts, that was a potentially very dangerous situation, with hundreds of people kettled inside London Bridge station. There was no communication from station staff, there were reports of physical fights and people experiencing panic attacks due to pushing in the crowds. I fully understand there may be delays when there are trespassers on the line and appreciate this is for Network Rail and the BTP to tackle. When issues like that happen, they need to be solved quickly; there should always be contingencies in place and passengers should be kept fully informed of delays and diversions. Most importantly, overcrowding should be managed carefully to ensure passengers are kept safe. The crowds at London Bridge were totally unacceptable and present a real danger to safety, as well as affecting Southeastern's reputation.

We strongly believe that the situation has been severely exacerbated both by the arbitrary reduction in Southeastern services without consultation and by the reduction in route options. It means thousands of commuters must now change every day at London Bridge, going down one escalator over the concourse and up another escalator, sometimes with up to a 20-minute wait on the concourse.

Since the December 2022 timetable was implemented, we were made aware that the next opportunity to make minor amendments to the timetable will be in May 2023. We were told a range of criteria will be used to consider options for change, which include looking at demand, customer feedback and passenger growth, as well as available funding, to ensure that capacity continues to match demand.

We are extremely concerned that, without proper engagement before the next opportunity to amend timetables in May 2023, we will be at a loss to how we can move forward. With the industrial action passengers have endured, there needs to be a service in place, that deals with the demand and reliability our residents deserve, as well as understanding future growth; this service must not grind to a halt.

We want to see a proper 10-minute metro service restored for the May timetable so we can have a "turn up and go" service to relieve congestion, even if off-peak trains are shorter. We would also ask for an independent evaluation of the withdrawal of services on the Bexleyheath and Woolwich line to Charing Cross and on the Sidcup line to Cannon Street and the impact this is having on operations, on journey times and overcrowding at London Bridge, with a view to restoring the choice of routes that operated well before the latest cuts.

As previously outlined, we'd urge you to meet us personally, to discuss these issues and how we can work together to mitigate the disruption to the lives of residents in, and visitors to Greenwich.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Averil Lekau

Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment & Transport