

15 December 2020

Chris Heaton-Harris
Minister of State for Rail
cc Valerie Shawcross, Richard Schofield, Jane Jones
(sent via email)

Dear Minister,

Rail passenger service to Heathrow Airport

I am writing to seek your intervention to resolve a dispute between Heathrow Express and MTR Elizabeth Line, which has resulted in over 1,000 passengers per day being inconvenienced and with longer journey times from Sunday 13 December 2020.

From this date, Heathrow Express reinstated four trains per hour express service on their route to and from London Paddington. This resulted in the need for MTR Elizabeth Line to cease operating their services to Heathrow T5 and instead run them to a closed Heathrow T4. This strange situation arises from the outcome of a railway contract disputes resolution process that has determined that the pre-coronavirus contracted arrangements must stand, even though T4 is unlikely to reopen for at least another year.

London TravelWatch has been in touch with Valerie Shawcross, the independent Chair of the Heathrow Area Transport Forum on this issue. She has been in touch with all the relevant parties and there is agreement that with an appropriate decision by you as Secretary of State a much better arrangement can be made that will benefit passengers and meet the commercial needs of the train operators.

This centres around the track access agreements with Network Rail, which currently do not give any reduction in costs to Heathrow Express if they reduce their service from four to two trains per hour, thus allowing MTR Elizabeth line to serve Heathrow T5. Each operator agrees that at the present time there is insufficient commercial demand to sustain six trains per hour (four Heathrow Express and two MTR Elizabeth Line) to and from London Paddington. Network Rail do not have the power or authority to alter the Heathrow Express track access charges, but would like Heathrow Express to remain on two trains per hour for the purposes of service resilience.

As we understand it, based on our discussions with the operators, a change to the timetable back to the pre 13 December 2020 arrangements could be implemented at short notice, if you are able to intervene in this dispute, by directing Network Rail to alter the track access charges for Heathrow Express until it is commercially sensible to reinstate full services.

Our concern for passengers is the number inconvenienced by this (over 1,000 per day), with a longer journey time and the fact that passengers with luggage need to take that on and off the

MTR trains at Heathrow T123. This is especially important where such passengers will want to reduce the number of trains they need to use for fear of contracting or transmitting the coronavirus. We also know from our previous research amongst passengers travelling to airports that additional requirements to interchange will often mean that they will instead choose to travel by private means rather than public transport.

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely,



Arthur Leathley
Chair
London TravelWatch