

Steve White MD

Southeastern

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Monday 15 May 2023

Dear Steve,

Thank you for meeting us on 6 April to discuss Southeastern services and providing us with the opportunity to present findings from our recent passenger survey, carried out with the support of Transport Focus.

As you will recall, the survey was conducted in early March. We asked over 500 Southeastern passengers in the south London ‘metro’ area about their thoughts on the new timetable that was introduced in December 2022.

I attach a final set of slides containing the key survey findings. We would like to highlight three key messages:

1. While many passengers have been either positively impacted or not impacted by the December 2022 timetable changes, a sizeable minority has been adversely affected by them. The main issues for those passengers are experiencing longer journey times and/or (especially for commuters) having to change trains, and so interrupt their journeys, more than before
2. A lot of respondents want to see at least some further change to the current timetable. The recently-announced service enhancements are a welcome step in the right direction, but ideally we would like to see Southeastern go further and introduce further improvements to address the concerns of those passengers who have been adversely affected by the changes, as well as further post-pandemic growth in demand should it arise
3. Consultation and engagement matters. This is important not just for Southeastern, but for the wider rail and public transport industry. It may not be a surprising insight, but by consulting *before* any major timetable changes are introduced and seeking feedback from passengers, train operators and Network Rail can plan services better, mitigate adverse publicity and, most importantly, build trust among passengers

According to our survey:

* **35%** of commuters whose journeys have been affected by the new timetable said they had to change trains more in the previous two months due to the changes
* **43%** of those passengers who now have to change trains more said their journey was worse
* **42%** of those affected by the timetable said their journey takes more time
* **almost two thirds** of Southeastern passengers said they want the timetable to change
* **and 82%** said train companies should consult passengers before they introduce changes to timetables

When we met, we also discussed two other related issues which have been causes of concern in recent months: incidents which cause disruption to services, and crowd management at London Bridge, particularly at times of disruption.

We welcome the joint work being done primarily between Southeastern and Network Rail on these issues and we will continue monitoring developments. Although it was good to hear that performance had improved since January, we noted your recognition that at the time there were still too many disruptive incidents, particularly those arising from infrastructure and fleet failure as well as trespass. It is also important to continue with the programme of improvements to crowd management, throughout the station and especially in safety-critical areas such as platforms.

In the recent Southeastern update on the forthcoming May timetable, you helpfully set out your commitment to keep the timetable under review, enhance services and continue to improve customer experience. We hope you will use our survey to inform your approach and we encourage you to work actively with local communities to develop the business cases for further service improvements.

I will shortly place the letter and slidepack on our website. I am also forwarding this correspondence under separate cover to Huw Merriman, Minister for Rail at the Department for Transport.

Yours sincerely



Michael Roberts

Chief Executive, London TravelWatch