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SE Trains Limited (trading as "Southeastern")

Timetable changes 11 December 2022

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25th November 2022

Dear Mr White,

We, the St. John's Society are writing to complain about the published changes in the new timetable for the withdrawal of a number of trains, from St John's Station. Our fundamental objection is the lack of any consultation with passengers and other stakeholders. The fact that Southeastern currently has a Department of Transport exemption for Covid adjustments from the usual consultation requirement cannot have been intended to authorise the wholesale changes that you have published. Southeastern's contract with the Department for Transport requires a consultation in the event of material changes.

The experience of many of our members is that off peak use is steadily returning to prepandemic levels. As you say in your Q&As the number of weekend customers has recovered strongly; *weekday off-peak journeys are at around 77%*. It is also against all good practice to make decisions in the absence of sound evidence-based reasons and there are none to be found in the published information that is to be found on your website. This timetable quite simply fails to meet the needs of passengers relying on this line. Major changes have been presented as minor and a fait accompli. They should not be implemented until there has been a proper consultation, as required for other than minor changes by DfT, and a timetable developed which addresses the concerns and meets the needs of passengers and the economy of areas served by these lines. Our detailed objections are listed below.

Objections of The St John's Society

- In no way can this be described as an improved and simpler service. Simple and straightforward journeys are transformed into difficult, complicated, and inconvenient ones in view of the requirement to change trains at either Lewisham or London Bridge or indeed both.
- For the elderly and those with mobility issues, with heavy luggage and parents with children and babies in strollers or slings, this presents time consuming and logistical difficulties; for some they may be a total barrier to travel into central London.
- There is inadequate lift capacity at Lewisham and London Bridge to cope with the needs of these categories of passengers. Lewisham already suffers from severe overcrowding at peak times, frequently suffers from lifts out of services, and involves lengthy routes for interchange between platforms.
- The change may also influence decisions by some on whether to travel at all. It removes a key interchange at New Cross for travellers on the Hayes line on to the London Overground East London line. Thus, this fails to achieve the government's objective to stimulate economic growth.
- The need to change will also defeat the punctuality objective as it is likely to result in excessive dwell times at London Bridge and Lewisham because more people will be changing trains.
- Why has major investment not resulted in improvements but slower journey times and this degraded timetable? Over recent years, these include (at great cost and disruption):
 - adding platforms at London Bridge to improve capacity and reduce congestion;
 - building the Bermondsey dive under to aid crossover of trains;
 - dualling the fast line loop track at St Johns to increase access from Lewisham;
 - re-signaling the whole area to improve capacity and reliability;
 - making improvements to the crossover at Lewisham to improve reliability
 - lengthening platforms to accommodate longer trains (still not being regularly provided).

In summary, the changes discourage rail travel, blights large areas of southeast London where many new housing developments have been built adding demand to the railway infrastructure before adequate improvements to service and capacity have been delivered.

We need public transport by rail to be a viable alternative to using the car. Reducing frequencies and curtailing point to point journeys will only further deter people from using rail services, render major public investment nugatory, and deter private investment in housebuilding and business.

If Southeastern want to improve the operational efficiency of the service, then this should be done by consulting users and making the necessary investment (e.g. in flyovers and longer trains), not by designing a timetable which blights a large area of southeast London, causes hardship, difficulties, and inconvenience for the travelling public.

We repeat that before this timetable is implemented there must be a proper form of consultation so that the issues that we and others have raised can be adequately addressed.

In the meantime, a group from The St John's Society, representing the interests of members and residents who are frequent users of your railway would welcome a meeting to gain a better understanding of the proposals and comment on them, beyond what is included in the FAQs. Will you agree to such a meeting?

We are sending a copy of this letter to local MPs and councillors, Travel Watch and other local groups.

Yours sincerely

Litsa Breingan

Chair

The St John's Society