

Southeastern Trains timetable changes 11 December 2022

I am writing to complain about the new train timetable serving Blackheath from December 2022. Our biggest objection by far is the implementation of major changes to the timetable without consultation with passengers and stakeholders, in contravention of the contractual requirement set out in the agreement between Southeastern and the Secretary of State for Transport. It is also against all good practice for evidence-based decision-making, failing to be transparent about the conflicting pros and cons of the changes and their wider implications.

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 and a timetable developed which addresses the concerns and meets the needs of passengers and the economy of areas served by this line.

Our objections:

- In no way can this be described as an improved and simpler service. Simple and straightforward longstanding journeys to Charing Cross and Waterloo East are transformed into difficult, complicated and inconvenient ones;
- For the disabled, those with heavy luggage, prams and children it presents logistical difficulties or even total barriers to travel;
- 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;
- Passengers hate having to change unnecessarily as it builds in stress, inconvenience, unreliability, delays and extended journey times;
- The unjustified withdrawal of the Sunday service from Blackheath to Charlton, Woolwich Arsenal and Dartford via Abbey Wood removes access to London City Airport and the Elizabeth line. In the opposite direction it removes access to leisure activities on Blackheath.
- It discourages rail travel, blights large areas of south east London where many new homes are being built or planned, and reduces easy access to the West End. In so doing it fails to achieve the government's objective to stimulate economic growth;
- The service is excessively slow - 32 minutes, with a forced change, for a 7 mile journey that once took just 18 minutes;

- The need to change will defeat the punctuality objective as it is likely to result in excessive dwell times at London Bridge and especially Lewisham because more people are changing trains;
- The justifications given for the change do not hold water:
 - No data or evidence has been provided to support these across-the-board changes;
 - Changes in peak travel trends are being used to justify major changes to the buoyant off peak service when there is no logical connection between the two;
 - When passengers were consulted about the possibility of diverting trains to Cannon Street in 2017 the response was overwhelmingly negative;
- Cannon Street is not a desirable destination, especially off-peak. It is not centrally sited and has poor transport links for onward connections. It is useful for City workers to get them to and from work nearby but off peak demand for this station is small.
- Why has major investment not resulted in improvements but slower journey times and this degraded timetable?

We need public transport 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 wants to improve the operational efficiency of the service then this should be done by consulting users and making the necessary investments, not by designing a timetable which blights a large area of south east London, causes hardship, difficulties and inconvenience for the travelling public.