

02 MCH 15

Friars Bridge Court
41-45 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NZBoris Johnson, Esq
The Mayor of London
London Assembly
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

27 February 2015

Dear Mr Johnson

Thank you for your letter dated 3rd February 2015, regarding overcrowding on South West Trains services into Central London.

Tackling this challenge is a major focus of the South West Trains-Network Rail Alliance. We share the frustrations which have been expressed by yourself, our passengers and others. There is no overnight solution to improving reliability whilst also providing the major increase in capacity which is required. However, we are absolutely determined to take the right short, medium and long-term actions to address these issues and I have outlined our approach below.

By way of context, the South West Trains-Network Rail Alliance runs one of the busiest commuter networks in Europe, with more than half a million passengers every day. Since 1996 the number of passengers using our trains has more than doubled from just over 108 million to more than 222million. We appreciate that means many passengers are travelling on trains which can be overcrowded, particularly at peak times. The sheer number of passengers, particularly during the morning peak on suburban routes, is at a level which is not consistent with either passenger comfort or the capability of the infrastructure to provide the level of train performance reliability our customers deserve..

A great deal of work has been done to optimise the trains and stations to accommodate rising demand since 1995. Nevertheless, we simply cannot increase capacity further without major infrastructure improvements.

Planned new trains and infrastructure improvements will deliver a 30% capacity increase by 2018

Improving reliability, boosting capacity and catching up on years of under investment all while carrying over half a million passengers every day is no easy or quick fix and we are acutely aware how much needs to be done.

However, the unique partnership we have between the train operator, South West Trains, and the infrastructure operator, Network Rail, means our Alliance is providing the best possible environment for the transformative works to happen in the shortest possible time.

As you rightly point out, 2017 is a crucial year for the network, with hundreds of millions of pounds of improvements being delivered to benefit passengers. The close partnership working through our Alliance means we are able to identify issues, plan solutions and deliver improvements far more quickly than achieved by the rail industry in the past.

These plans include a £210million fleet of brand new trains which will start to be introduced on the network during 2017. When this roll out is completed in 2018, we will have increased peak time capacity by 30% for our suburban passengers.

In parallel, we are planning major improvement works at London Waterloo – already the UK's busiest station – which will help to increase capacity and reliability across the network. This investment includes the rebuilding of the former Waterloo International Terminal, as well as lengthening platforms to allow 10 car trains to run on the suburban routes for the first time.

This package of measures will provide the biggest improvement seen on this network for many decades. It will help to reduce overcrowding and deliver better journeys for our customers. We are working closely with the Office of Rail Regulation and the Department for Transport to secure the necessary funding to deliver these works.

Immediate improvements are already underway

It would be incorrect to assume all measures to improve services for passengers are in the years to come. Indeed, a significant increase in capacity is already well underway. This includes additional trains, extra staff at key locations and major improvements to stations.

A total of 108 additional refurbished carriages are being introduced to allow us to run longer trains, boosting capacity for passengers on some of our busiest routes. As well as increasing capacity, these additional Class 456 and Class 458/5 carriages feature improved seating, wider doors to speed up boarding, full CCTV and a remote monitoring system which will help to further improve reliability. We are half way through this programme and the rollout will be completed by the end of the year.

The timescale for the full delivery of these carriages is later than originally anticipated, however making use of this rolling stock remains the best way to increase capacity in the timeframe.

In order to accommodate these longer trains, we have already lengthened platforms at more than 60 stations. This is in addition to various other improvements works, such as better accessibility, more ticket machines, increased facilities for cyclists and more station staff at key stations, including Clapham Junction, Vauxhall and Earlsfield. For example, the extra platform staff at key locations has improved performance and reduced dwell times for trains as follows:

- Morning peak at Earlsfield – 93% of trains had no excess dwell time
- Morning peak at Vauxhall – 84% of trains had no excess dwell time
- Morning peak at Clapham Junction – 76% of trains had no excess dwell time – a significant improvement on previous figures

The unique nature of the Alliance has also allowed us to secure the temporary use of platforms 21 & 22 in the former Waterloo International Terminal in times of disruption to provide additional capacity and contingency options.

Focus on further passenger improvements

Even with these plans, we do not see the job as done and we have submitted proposals for further improvements to the Department for Transport in recent months. These improvements include providing more smartcard payment options on the network, increasing train length and delivering more weekend capacity for passengers.

We are also working hard to make it easier for passengers to make a claim for compensation when things go wrong. We frequently provide customers with compensation which is greater than specified by the government in our franchise. In addition, we have put proposals to the Department for Transport to enable us to offer our customers a more generous statutory "Delay Repay" scheme. This would enable all ticket holders to claim compensation for journeys delayed by 30 minutes or more, regardless of the cause of the delay.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to reassure you regarding our ongoing efforts to engage with our customers. We run numerous events to proactively engage with people, including Passenger Forums at London Waterloo, Tweet the Manager sessions and webchats. We also provide one of the UK rail industry's most valued Twitter feeds, which operates 24/7 and interacts with 147,000 followers.

We regularly meet with local authorities and other stakeholders both in private and public meetings and functions. Engaging proactively with passengers and stakeholders is very important to our business and we would welcome any suggestions on additional channels or opportunities which you feel would be of benefit.

The South West Trains network performs a key role in keeping London's economy and communities moving and I would welcome your support as Mayor in working with me to ensure we are able to deliver the best railway possible.

In particular, I would hope we could work together to ensure that the investment priorities for the next control period for the railway, CP6, and the specification of the franchise, are tailored to deliver a medium-term strategy that addresses the challenges I have outlined for the long-term. As part of this, my team has engaged with plans for Crossrail2 which provides a long-term solution to accommodate future growth.

Thank you for your support and I look forward to working with you to deliver the best outcomes we can for London and the wider regions across our network.

Yours sincerely



Tim Shoveller
Alliance Managing Director