



southeastern.

08 JUL 2011

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Wednesday 6 July 2011

Dear Caroline

Thank you for your letter regarding the problems on the Bexleyheath line on Monday 27th June. As you're aware a train broke down on a key junction near Dartford and caused delays to the passengers on it and other trains in the area as well as to many other passengers travelling home that evening. These delays were exacerbated by other unrelated infrastructure problems elsewhere on the network.

Although your letter is addressed solely to Southeastern a number of the issues you have raised are the responsibility of Network Rail, hence this joint response. Broadly the accountability for the maintenance of the train, compensation arrangements for passengers and the care of customers affected by the incident rests with Southeastern. Accountability for maintenance of the infrastructure, the control and operation of the railway including the signalling of trains rests with Network Rail. They also take lead responsibility for emergency situations including for example any decision to undertake a controlled evacuation of a train. Southeastern takes the lead in providing information to passengers but is reliant on Network Rail data to feed its electronic information systems.

In view of this we will both be pleased to attend a future meeting of the Committee. We are conducting a joint investigation into this incident which is still underway and when we attend the Committee we will be in a position to provide further information. However the fact finding process is now largely complete and we are able to provide the following initial response to your questions:

- **The causes of the train breakdown**

The problem onboard the train at Dartford was a failed relay that had been fitted just a year before by an external maintenance contractor as part of a 'heavy maintenance' programme conducted by the trains' owner Eversholt.

- **The actions of Southeastern staff to deal with the broken down train and keep passengers on other trains and at stations informed of the length and nature of the delay**

The fault created the same indication that occurs when a passenger emergency alarm is operated. This led those managing the incident to believe that the situation would be resolved fairly rapidly by the driver resetting the alarm. However this was subsequently found to be incorrect and technicians from a nearby maintenance depot were required to attend the train to identify and replace the failed component. Passengers on the broken down train and other trains delayed as a consequence were kept informed of the situation by drivers. Although there was some very understandable frustration about this situation, particularly the inability to give precise information about when services would resume, the staff involved have received some praise for their efforts to keep customers informed. However we fully appreciate it was annoying and for some very unpleasant to be severely delayed on such a hot day.

Unfortunately an already difficult situation was exacerbated and delays to many more passengers were made worse by a very small number of people choosing to ignore the driver's advice and warnings and alight from a train. Whilst we can understand their frustration, their actions put themselves and the driver at significant risk as well as substantially increasing the length of time, by approximately one hour, that other passengers were delayed on other trains. The driver managed the situation to the best of his ability and was able to regain some measure of control. He arranged for the electrical current to be turned off and then assisted the evacuation other passengers. The Metropolitan Police helicopter was used to ensure the tracks were clear of people so we could resume service once again.

The combination of this delay and other unrelated infrastructure problems resulted in widespread disruption to services on the afternoon and evening of the 27th June. Although the train failure near Dartford and the subsequent disruption caused by passengers walking on the track was cleared by 1730, there was an ongoing signal failure in the Waterloo East area. That particular afternoon had already seen a series of infrastructure problems including: Blackfriars junction multiple track circuit failure; Petts Wood junction points failure; and other infrastructure problems which affected our mainline services and had a further knock-on effect to some of our metro services.

Added to these issues Network Rail reported a failing of an element of its information system which meant that neither railway staff nor passengers were able to get updated 'train movement' information. Employees at stations rely on this data, as do customers, as it gives details of delays and cancellations. Electronic information screens at stations were either turned off or a message explaining the temporary fault displayed. This added to the frustration experienced by passengers and employees who were then unable to provide good, timely information to customers. Emails and messages were issued by our control room so employees could make announcements explaining the overall situation but without the entire Network Rail system working the detailed information needed to assist passengers to make alternative arrangements and travel plans was not available. The customer information screens were rectified at 1700 that evening but it's important to note that busy commuter stations such as Waterloo East and Charing Cross are on a separate customer information display system which is manually updated – so this took longer to bring back online as staff needed to update the delayed and cancelled services.

- **How those affected will be compensated**

Any passengers who were delayed can contact Southeastern and they will receive compensation under our Passenger Charter. Southeastern will also consider making gestures of goodwill where appropriate, as has been done during previous incidents where there has been significant disruption.

- **The procedure followed by Southeastern when passengers are stuck for long periods, particularly during periods of warm weather.**

We have procedures we follow when passengers are delayed onboard trains, and we're mindful of the environment they're in (warm weather, etc). Evacuation of passengers is considered if trains are likely not to be able to move for a very long period of time. Each situation will be judged on its particular circumstances taking into consideration the availability of suitable railway personnel to manage the evacuation; a place of safety for evacuated passengers; immediate and surrounding dangers such as live electrification and weather conditions; trackside environment and dangers such as adjacent train movements. Evacuation of passengers along a track is undertaken only after careful consideration. This is because of the significant risks associated with going onto the track arising from train movements, traction electricity, moving point work, trip hazards and uneven underfoot conditions. In the vast majority of cases the safest place is on the train.

- **The process put in place to ensure any lessons are learned as a result of the incident yesterday to prevent further incidents occurring again.**

We always review any incidents that cause delays and look to make changes and learn lessons where ever possible. Our aim is to continue to improve and as noted previously we will share the results of the joint investigation when we attend the Committee's meeting.

Yours sincerely



Charles Horton
Managing Director
Southeastern



Dave Ward
Route Director Kent
Network Rail

