

Caroline Pidgeon AM, Chair of the Transport Committee

London Assembly
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London, SE1 2AA

The Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin MP
Secretary of State for Transport
c/o South Eastern Franchise Replacement Sponsor
Department for Transport
Zone 3/15, Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London, SW1P 4DR

13 September 2012

Dear Secretary of State

Response to consultation on the South Eastern rail franchise

I am writing, on behalf of the London Assembly's Transport Committee, to set out our response to the consultation on the South Eastern rail franchise.

This response is based on our past work on rail services in London. In recent years we have frequently highlighted the need for improvements to rail services in the capital to address the high levels of overcrowding experienced by passengers.¹ We have also shown that there is scope for train operating companies to make many other improvements including to their services during periods of bad weather, station facilities and ticketing.

As part of our work, we have often raised particular issues about the current Southeastern service. Most recently, in response to the Government's consultation on rail decentralisation, we expressed support for the Mayor of London and Transport for London (TfL)'s proposals relating to the South East London metro services which we argued would generate significant benefits for passengers. The remainder of this response details our work that is relevant to specific consultation questions.

Improvements to South East London metro services (consultation question 11)

Improvements could be made to the South East London metro services if the Mayor of London and TfL assume control for these services. TfL has a proven track record in the delivery of better rail services with the development of London Overground. Since TfL took control of the Silverlink franchise in 2007, passenger satisfaction has increased by almost a third. London Overground has become one of the most reliable rail networks in the country with passengers benefitting from better stations, rolling stock and a consistent fares and ticketing policy. We want TfL to be able to build on this success, with the metro services covered by the South Eastern franchise specified by TfL to Overground standard under a separate concession.² This would help to ensure a more effective, integrated suburban rail service in the capital.

Improving the customer experience (consultation question 16)

Rail passengers should receive better services especially during periods of disruption. Our past work on the impact of winter weather on rail services in January 2010 raised issues about Southeastern's service. Although much of London was affected by similar snowfall on 6, 7 and 8 January 2010,

¹ London Assembly Transport Committee report, The Big Squeeze: Rail Overcrowding in London, February 2009

² London Assembly Transport Committee response to consultation on rail devolution, 28 June 2012

Southeastern planned a significant reduction in its services on these days compared with other train operating companies. This adversely affected many passengers at short notice and raised some questions. Passengers queried if Southeastern's action was motivated by a desire to meet performance targets relating to punctuality and reliability and thus avoid a need to pay compensation if performance fell below target. Many passengers also reported that Southeastern failed to provide sufficient information on its website and at stations during this period of disruption.³

Although Southeastern has taken steps to improve its service during bad weather, there have been other occasions where we have raised issues about its service. For example, in June 2011, we highlighted passenger concerns when people became stranded on a train outside Bexleyheath in very hot weather and forced open a set of doors to leave the train. We were concerned that passengers felt the need to take such drastic action and also at reports that passengers received inadequate information during this period of disruption.

The successful franchisee will, therefore, need to prioritise good communications with customers. This should include providing better real-time information about other transport services in the capital especially on the approach to interchanges so passengers can make informed decisions about the next stages in their journeys.

Station improvements (consultation question 18)

There is a need to relieve congestion at certain rail stations in London. Our past work on rail overcrowding highlighted the most severely overcrowded train routes in the capital and found the worse crowding – or “pinch points” – occurred at 15 stations.⁴ These stations included Bromley South which is covered by this franchise. As demand for rail services in London is forecast to rise by 34 per cent in the next two decades⁵, there is potential for congestion at other stations too. The successful franchisee will need to ensure it works to relieve congestion at all stations where overcrowding occurs.

Cycling facilities (consultation question 19)

We support the provision of more cycle parking spaces at rail stations. In our past work, we highlighted the benefits of TfL's involvement in developing the specifications for the Southern franchise which had helped to deliver an additional 1,500 cycle parking spaces over the five-year term. Without making such specifications in the franchise, it was unlikely train operating companies would deliver more cycle parking since this could involve them having to replace retail outlets or car parking spaces with cycle stands, which would involve a loss of revenue.⁶

Ticketing improvements (consultation question 20)

We want to see the new franchise deliver improvements on ticketing providing these do benefit passengers. Our work on TfL's plans for the adoption of contactless bank cards as its primary ticketing system showed the need to maintain passenger confidence in any new ticketing system, and ensure broad access to its benefits. We have noted a range of risks and benefits from the adoption of smart card systems and it should be the aim of any new system to maximise the benefits while addressing the risks to passengers. One major benefit is the ability for passengers to move freely between different transport providers and regions; hence the enormous popularity of the extension of TfL's Oyster Pay As You Go to suburban rail services. We are thus supportive of

³ London Assembly letter to the Department for Transport Rail services in London during the bad weather, 17 February 2010

⁴ London Assembly Transport Committee report, The Big Squeeze: Rail Overcrowding in London, February 2009

⁵ Network Rail, London and South East Route Utilisation Strategy, 2011

⁶ London Assembly Transport Committee report, Stand and Deliver: Cycle parking in London, June 2009

ITSO being promoted as a national standard to allow passengers the freedom to move between regions and providers.⁷

Accessibility improvements (consultation question 21)

More of London's rail stations should be fully accessible to people with reduced mobility. In 2010, we identified that around one million Londoners had reduced mobility but just one-third of London's 300 rail stations had step-free access from street level to platform. Moreover, we found the forecast rise in the number of Londoners with reduced mobility would outstrip current plans to improve the provision of step-free access.⁸ We want the successful franchisee to deliver more accessibility improvements at stations in conjunction with other organisations such as Network Rail as appropriate.

In summary, the new franchise should deliver considerable improvements for rail passengers in London. We argue that this will happen if the Mayor of London and TfL assume control for the South East London metro services. The successful franchisee should deliver a highly reliable, comprehensive set of rail services with passengers experiencing less overcrowding on trains and at stations. The new franchise should result in the same minimum standards of service for passengers as found on London Overground, namely:

- A 'turn-up and-go' frequency of trains throughout the week;
- Improved station ambience by deep cleaning and refurbishing;
- A visible staff presence across the network throughout the day;
- Improved passenger security with networked CCTV and Help Points at all stations, plus improved lighting and more stations gated;
- Visual and public address systems providing real-time train service information, supported by a comprehensive online and mobile enabled journey planning system; and
- High quality cycle parking facilities to promote cycling as a means of accessing stations.⁹

We trust this response will inform the consultation and look forward to seeing the outcomes in due course.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Pidgeon AM

Chair of the Transport Committee

⁷ London Assembly Transport Committee report, The Future of Ticketing, November 2011

⁸ London Assembly Transport Committee report, Accessibility of the Transport Network, November 2010

⁹ The Mayor of London's Rail Vision, February 2012, p18