

Chris Mole MP
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DR



8th December 2009

Dear Chris Mole

Rail Services From Maidstone East and Malling to London Bridge and Cannon Street

We have received your letter dated 27 November 2009 from Sir John Stanley. We can not express in words the dismay and anger of all the commuters that travel into London Bridge or Cannon street daily from Maidstone East and the Malling area (West Malling, Aylesford, Kings Hill, East Malling, Borough Green, Ditton, Barming, Larkfield, Leybourne, Snodland) and will suffer as a result of these services being terminated. Your decision to axe the services into Cannon Street and London Bridge from Maidstone East and Malling is shameful and it has serious consequences for thousands of people that live in the area. Moreover, the area will suffer and it is likely that business cease to invest and leave, house prices fall and people lose jobs.

Taking into account the seriousness of the matter and the implication on people lives and jobs your decision should have been based on proper research and data rather that on the misleading and inaccurate information you quote on your letter. We provided you with a comprehensive usage demand report (the "Report") on 14 August 2009 that you seem to have ignored. Thus, we have attached the Report again to this letter.

We have the following points in relation to your letter and we are asking that you review your decision as soon as possible on the basis that the information you used to make your decision was misleading and inaccurate.

Peak Trains

You claim on your letter that there are only 200-300 people travelling from Maidstone East and Malling to London Bridge and Cannon Street. In the Report (see attached) we gave you clear evidence of the people using these services and the numbers are significantly higher that the numbers you are quoting. We believe that this information is totally inaccurate and misleading. Furthermore, this information does not take into account the "hidden demand" (please see the Report. This covers people that are travelling to other stations but would travel from their local station if there were services to the London Bridge or Cannon Street).

“Journey Disbenefit”

You state in your letter that commuters will only face "a journey disbenefit of 15-30 minutes" as a result of your cancellations. This information is grossly inaccurate and misleading. This is factual information that was included in the Report.

Into London

The 9:01am train from West Malling arrived at London Bridge at 9:40am (39 minutes). In the new time table the same commuter will have to take: (i) the 8:29am train arriving at London Victoria at 9:23 (54 minutes); (ii) the underground from London Victoria to London Bridge (and assuming that Victoria is not closed for overcrowding and the underground is waiting in the platform) the DtF quote on average 15 minutes (plus walking from and to platforms 10 minutes (5 minutes each way)) (25 minutes).

Under the new time table the same commute will take at least 79 minutes (54 minutes train plus 25 underground). Thus, the **"journey disbenefit" is at least 40 minutes** (79 minutes minus 39 minutes).

From London

For this purpose assume the commuter leaves his/her office at 19:00 to London Bridge. The 19:18 train from London Bridge arrived at West Malling at 20:00 (42 minutes). In the new time table the same commuter will have to (i) take the underground at 19:18 from London Bridge to London Victoria (and assuming that the underground is waiting in the platform) the DtF quote on average 15 minutes (plus walking from and to the platforms 10 minutes (5 minutes each way)) (25 minutes); (ii) the commuter will arrive at London Victoria at 19:38; (ii) assuming it is able to make the 19:37 (although unlikely) it will arrive at West Malling at 20:28 (51 minutes).

Under the new time table the same commute will take at least 76 minutes (25 underground plus 51 train). Thus the **"journey disbenefit" is at least 34 minutes** (76 minutes minus 42 minutes).

The total "journey disbenefit" is likely to be at least approximately 74 minutes (40 minutes plus 34 minutes) rather than the 15-20 minutes you quoted on your letter. Moreover, your letter ignores the fact that people will have to pay the cost of the underground at £1.60 per day (due to go up to £1.80). Thus, for a normal commuter **the actual and factual "journey disbenefit" per day is at least approximately 74 minutes plus £3.20 per day.**

Your letter also dismisses the fact that there are disabled people travelling to the City and are unable to take the underground.

If you do not feel this is an accurate representation of the journey passengers will have to take with the new timetable, then one of our committee members will gladly meet you one morning and one afternoon at Maidstone East or West Malling so that you can experience the real journey that commuters will have to endure to travel to London Bridge or Cannon Street.

Off-Peak Trains

You state in your letter that "there is simply no business case for these off-peak services". However, as stated in the Report the use of the Maidstone East Line is vital for business in the area and for the local community. Moreover, the use on these services is no less, an in the case of some services (e.g. 15:14 from London) significantly more, than the off-peak use on other lines.

Ebbsfleet deliver "wider benefits" to the people on the Maidstone Line whose trains are being cancelled

It is a fact that Ebbsfleet is not going be used by commuters that currently use the Maidstone line because of the cost and distance implications (see the Report) and this was acknowledged by a representative of South Eastern trains that attended a meeting in the East Malling School. However, you seem to have been advised differently and have a different view. Please see the Report for the actual and factual "journey disbenefit" of travelling to Ebbsfleet compared with travelling from the local stations.

Decision to withdraw the services was "extensively consulted upon"

Commuters in the area where not consulted and heard no mention of these changes until this year. The Southeastern website is misleading as it states that there will be one more service but it does not state that all the services to the London Bridge and Cannon Street will be cancelled.

As stated above we are asking that you review your decision as you based your decision on information that was misleading and inaccurate. Furthermore, under the Freedom of Information Act we would like to know how you obtained the information you are quoting and who provided you with this information. We look to receive this information within the statutory period.

We look forward to hearing from you in the very near future.

Yours sincerely,

Malling and District Rail Travellers Association
(MDRTA)

Maidstone Area Rail Users Association
(MARUG)