

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM, Chair of the Transport Committee

London Assembly
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Phil Hufton
Managing Director, Network Operations
Network Rail
1 Eversholt Street
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Charles Horton
Chief Executive
Govia Thameslink Railway
Hertford House
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Dear Phil and Charles,

London Bridge rail services

I would like to thank you and colleagues for attending the Transport Committee meeting last week to discuss the Thameslink programme and ongoing service disruptions at London Bridge station. In this letter I would like to set out some of the conclusions of the meeting and request the additional pieces of information we discussed.

As you know, thousands of rail passengers in London have been affected by these problems, which have been occurring since summer 2014, with services deteriorating again after Christmas. Although we appreciate that the Thameslink programme will require significant changes in services until its completion, there have been frequent delays and cancellations of services, over and above those removed from the timetable already. In February 2015, almost 60 per cent of Southern's metro services arrived late, for instance, with a quarter of these trains over five minutes late and over eight per cent cancelled, diverted or 30 minutes late.

This has left Londoners unable to plan their journeys, and often stranded on board trains or at stations which are severely overcrowded. This has caused enormous stress and inconvenience to many Londoners, affecting livelihoods and business performance. The cost to the London economy will be considerable.

At the meeting Network Rail's account suggested that the vast majority of the service disruptions since Christmas were caused by failures of points and signalling equipment installed at Christmas. This is the first time that Network Rail has given a detailed explanation of why these problems are occurring. It is extremely disappointing that it has taken so long for Network Rail to be honest with passengers. If passengers are to have confidence in how future works will be managed, we must see a much higher level of transparency in the future.

The biggest priority for the Committee is that problems are addressed urgently, so that passengers are able to rely on rail services again as soon as possible. What appears to have been lacking to date is any coherent management of the situation. We understand, Phil, that you have been appointed Gold Commander for London Bridge, and we welcome your personal commitment to improving performance. To date, it has appeared that Network Rail does not understand how these problems are affecting passengers and that it does not have the capacity or sense of urgency required to address them. We must see an improvement in the way Network Rail, train operators, Transport for London and others work together to keep services running, manage London Bridge station and provide accurate, timely information to passengers.

The provision of information has so far been poor. For instance, while online information has suggested some services are running without problems, passengers have arrived at the station to find the services have been cancelled or is significantly delayed. Station staff and train crew have not had the latest information, or the customer service to best assist confused passengers. The introduction of the new tabards for station staff risks causing more frustration, if it creates the impression that staff are on hand to help and inform passengers, without this being reality. We welcome your efforts to train staff and provide better real-time information; this has to be an urgent priority. We are concerned that it has already taken three months for Network Rail and operators to bring in extra station staff and to introduce a degree of enhanced joint working. It would be disappointing if another three months was required to ensure staff are fully trained and can access the information they need to assist passengers.

We note your assessment that London Bridge station is still a safe environment for passengers. However, situations where passengers are jumping over or scrambling under ticket barriers is clearly unsafe. We welcome Phil's commitment at the meeting that the ticket barriers will not be fully closed again, in order to prevent this from happening.

One of the recurring issues on London Bridge services has been the availability of train staff. In our analysis of Govia's public announcements in the four weeks from 19 February to 19 March, we found that Southern cancelled services due to crew unavailability on 57 per cent of days, and Thameslink did so on 47 per cent of days. Clearly, this is unacceptable and needs to be rectified through better workforce planning and recruitment.

The Committee believes that better use could be made of Transport for London capacity, to help mitigate service disruptions. In particular, additional buses could be provided to and from London Bridge. We understand that this has happened to a limited extent. Network Rail and train operators should explore extending the provision of buses where possible. It is also vital that passengers are fully informed of the availability of these alternative services.

Appropriate compensation needs to be provided to passengers affected by these issues. The Committee is concerned that the current rules for delay/repay compensation are inadequate,

chiefly because passengers are not eligible to claim unless their journey is delayed by 30 minutes. For inner suburban passengers, this means that journey times could be doubled or longer, without them becoming eligible for compensation. We believe that delays of longer than 15 minutes should be eligible for compensation, and hope that both Network Rail and Govia will support this in your discussions with the Department for Transport.


Furthermore, awareness among passengers of how to claim compensation is low, and the voucher system used to provide compensation is not convenient. Operators should take steps to publicise the availability of compensation, including the fact that eligibility is based on delays to a passenger's journey, not just the specific service he/she was travelling. Payments should be made directly to passengers, in line with TfL practice.

Specific pieces of information we hope you will be able to provide to the Committee are:

1. The performance data prepared by Network Rail for the Department for Transport. It would be convenient if this could be shared with the Committee on a weekly basis.
2. An estimate from Network Rail of the economic cost to London of the disruptions of London Bridge services since 5 January 2015.
3. Figures from Govia on a) how many Thameslink, Southern and Southeastern passengers have received compensation for delayed journeys to, from or through London Bridge since 5 January 2015, b) the total value of this compensation, and c) an estimate of how many passengers are eligible for compensation for individual journeys based on the level of disruption experienced on London Bridge services.
4. Figures from Govia on a) how many Thameslink, Southern and Southeastern passengers have received enhanced compensation for repeated delays in journeys to, from or through London Bridge since 5 January 2015, b) the total value of this compensation, and c) an estimate of how many passengers are eligible for compensation for repeated delays based on the level of disruption experienced on London Bridge services.

I look forward to hearing from you about these important matters. I would appreciate if you could provide responses by Friday 8 May. As you may be aware, I have also invited Mark Carne to join me and the Deputy Chair in visiting London Bridge during the evening peak to view the problems first hand. We also hope that Network Rail and Govia will participate in our investigation into rail services in London, which we plan to launch after the general election.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Pidgeon', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM
Chair of the Transport Committee