



STOCKPORT
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Alexander Ganotis
Leader of the Council
Town Hall, Stockport SK1 3XE

Telephone: 0161 474 3303
E-mail: cllr.a.ganotis@stockport.gov.uk

12 June 2018

MY ref; AG/KMK

Jon Lamonte
Chief Executive
TfGM
2 Piccadilly Place
Manchester
M1 3BG

Dear Jon

Arriva Northern Services

I am writing to you in response to Arriva Northern's recently launched timetable. While I recognise that many of the challenges faced by Northern are not of their direct making, in particular the delays in track electrification and the resultant delay in release of diesel rolling stock from other operators, we do have major concerns over what services Northern have chosen to prioritise. It's disappointing in the extreme that Northern's apparent failure to engage with Network Rail in a more robust and timely manner resulted in the loss of essential track access rights.

Stockport has grown around its excellent rail infrastructure with 19 stations across the borough. Our rail services continue to be a key factor in the economic wellbeing of the borough and are a vital asset for our residents and businesses. Passenger usage has grown consistently over the last two decades, according to the latest ORR figured available, 2016-17, passenger footfall across Stockport's stations increased by over half a million in the last twelve months alone. Rail services play a critical and growing role in connecting the town centre with the rest of the borough, ensuring that residents have frequent and reliable access to services, employment and leisure opportunities both in Stockport and Greater Manchester more widely.

Stockport Station is also an important regional and national hub station, with total journeys made being 3.8M and of those over 850k being interchanges to other services.

Councillor Alexander Ganotis
Labour Member
for Heatons North

Despite the centrality of local rail services to the functioning of Stockport's transport system, the latest timetable offers a greatly diminished service at five of our busiest stations; Heaton Chapel, Heald Green, Gatley, Davenport and Woodsmoor. These stations account for over 2.3m journeys annually (ORR 2016-17), and have experienced increasing demand. For example, ORR figures show Davenport, Woodsmoor and Heaton Chapel Station have seen passenger numbers more than double over the last decade (by 223 percent, 223 percent and 226 percent respectively), while Heaton Chapel remains the busiest two-platformed station in Greater Manchester. Planning for service reductions, as opposed to service increases would appear to be the opposite of what is required in this context.

We have received many complaints from local residents and businesses expressing their concern over the lack of services that the announced timetable provides and now Northern's apparent inability to deliver even that diminished service is cause for greater concern. For many people the current level of service and its unreliability makes travel by train simply impractical, this will almost certainly result in an increase in the number of people choosing to use already congested roads in particular the overcrowded A6 and A34 corridors. This outcome runs directly counter to Stockport's local objectives and Greater Manchester's regional objectives; the A6 and A34 both forming a part of GM's Key Route Network.

In addition to the reduction in frequency of services, the timetable creates unacceptable gaps in service, with many stations suffering from gaps in peak time services of up to 45 minutes. Such gaps will require people to either travel earlier than required, and for people with children this would mean incurring additional childcare costs or alternatively travelling late. Many people are employed by small businesses that simply don't have sufficient staff to be able to offer flexible working arrangements.

The new timetable is of particular concern to a number of local schools whose pupils rely on the rail services and who are now faced with safeguarding concerns which are a result from the changes. Many students travel a considerable distance into Stockport and the gap in the timetable requires them to arrive very early in the morning before the schools are open. It appears that Northern gave little or no thought to the convenience or welfare of the travelling public when creating this timetable.

Council officers working with Officers from TfGM engaged with Northern's management team throughout the consultation phase of the timetable development and responded with detailed comments based upon their own observations and those submitted by many residents that use the services. It is extremely disappointing that, despite the efforts of our and TfGM's officers, Northern were unable to accommodate the suggestions made by officers and residents, this raises the question as to the value of a consultation process that is unable to respond to very clear feedback.

Since the announcement of the May 2018 timetable officers have engaged with senior managers of Arriva Northern, to seek reassurance that the gaps created in the timetable can be corrected in the proposed December 2018 timetable update. We note, with concern, that Arriva Northern have as yet been unable to offer any such reassurance; this suggests that the access rights lost to other operators may not be recovered.

The explanation provided by Northern for the gaps in the timetable suggests that the primary issue is gaining access into Manchester Piccadilly around the 09:00 peak, due to demand from other operators, and changes to services running between Manchester and the Airport. Arriva Northern claim that they were unable to enter into a dialogue with Network Rail due to Northern's rolling stock and infrastructure issues, but that other operators were able to engage and negotiate their own access rights, many of which were previously used by Arriva Northern. I find it hard to accept that Arriva Northern were not involved in negotiations about track access while other operators were free to acquire Arriva Northern's paths. I would be interested to hear your view on this.

It is interesting to note that Transpennine Express Trains have also announced their new timetable which includes several new services into Manchester Piccadilly at peak morning times. I understand that further enhancements to Transpennine services are planned in the near future as is the introduction of Northern's own regional service 'Northern Connect'. It would appear that connectivity between northern cities has been prioritised over local connectivity. Can you tell me what steps are being taken to secure local connectivity in the face of growing regional travel demand? While I fully appreciate the strategic imperative in developing inter-city connectivity, I require reassurance that the growing need for increased local capacity has been included in the authority's transport planning.

Local rail services are of critical importance to Stockport. While we very much appreciate the support that we receive from TfGM officers and look forward to maintaining a close relationship with them we seek urgent dialogue with you to discuss your planned approach to Northern's December timetable and medium term rail planning so that we can gain a clear understanding of your strategic aims, so that we can secure a long term commitment to the provision of a rail service that meets our needs and ambitions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Ganotis', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Alex Ganotis
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL