



STOCKPORT
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Alexander Ganotis
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My ref; AG/KMK

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Dear Mr Brown

Arriva Northern May 2018 Timetable Proposals

We are writing to you in response to Arriva Northern's recently announced final timetable plan for May 2018. While we 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 prioritised. It's disappointing in the extreme that Northern's failure to engage with Network Rail in a more robust and timely manner resulted in the loss of essential track access rights.

The town of Stockport has grown around its excellent rail infrastructure with 19 stations across the borough. Stockport is one of the most economically active towns in Greater Manchester and the Council is ambitious for the future of the town and its residents. 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. Current rail services play a critical 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.

Despite the centrality of local rail services to the functioning of Stockport's transport system, the proposed 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).

Councillor Alexander Ganotis
Labour Member
for Heaton North

We have already received many complaints from local residents and businesses expressing their concern over the lack of service that the proposed timetable will provide. For many people the latest timetable announced will make travel by train simply impractical, with a likely increase in people choosing to use already congested roads. This new timetable will inevitably cause an increase in travel by car along the already overcrowded A6 and A34 corridors. This outcome directly runs counter to Stockport's local objectives and Greater Manchester's regional objectives; the A6 and A34 both form a part of GM's Key Route Network.

In addition to the loss of capacity, the proposed timetabling also creates unacceptable gaps in service, with all 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. We have already received several letters from residents stating that they will now have to revert to car travel into the city centre.

This timetable proposal is of particular concern for local schools whose pupils rely on the rail services and who have raised specific safeguarding concerns which may result from the proposed changes. Many students travel a considerable distance into Stockport and the gap in the timetable will require them to arrive very early in the morning before the schools are open. It appears that Northern gave little or no concern to the convenience or welfare of the travelling public when creating this timetable.

Council officers 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 Northern were unable to accommodate the suggestions made by officers and residents and this raises the question as to the values of a consultation process that is unable to respond to very clear feedback. This failure to respond to input from the public and the Council raises into question the value of the consultation process that Northern engaged in. We would like to know exactly what steps Northern took to implement the suggestions made and what efforts were made to engage with Network Rail on these issues.

Since the announcement of the timetable proposals officers have engaged with senior managers of Arriva Northern, to both challenge the proposal and to seek reassurance that the gaps created in the timetable can be corrected in the proposed December 2018 timetable update.

The explanation for the gaps in the timetable suggests that the primary issue is gaining access into Manchester Piccadilly at the pre 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 access rights, many of which are currently used by Arriva Northern. We 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.

We note, with concern, that Arriva Northern have as yet been unable to offer any reassurance that the gaps in service will be removed in the December 2018 timetable update; this suggests that the access rights lost to other operators may not be recovered. It is also very disappointing that Northern have failed to acknowledge the problems that this new timetable will create for passengers and offer any form of mitigation, such as rail replacement bus service.

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. It would appear therefore, that connectivity between northern cities has been prioritised over local connectivity.

Local rail services are of critical importance to Stockport, supported by both the Mayor for Greater Manchester and Transport for Greater Manchester. The Council seeks urgent dialogue with you to discuss your proposals for May and so that we can gain a clear understanding of your medium and long term strategic aims and so that we can secure a long term commitment to the provision of a rail service that meets our needs and ambitions. We would be grateful if early contact could be made with officers (Amy Beasley, Transport Strategy Manager, amy.beasley@stockport.gov.uk) to discuss these issues in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Ganotis'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Councillor Alex Ganotis
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL