



The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Andrew Haines
Chief Executive
Network Rail Infrastructure Ltd
Waterloo Station General Offices
Walker Suite
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SE1 8SW

24 October 2019

Dear Michael,

I'm very sorry for the delay in my reply.

You are right that in December 2017, South Western Railway (SWR) proposed, by way of public consultation, changes to services between Bagshot, Camberley and Frimley, and Waterloo. These were part of wider proposed revisions for their December 2018 timetable. Alongside the public consultation, the timetable was being analysed by our capacity planning team. The changes included faster journey times from Bagshot, Camberley and Frimley to Waterloo. The plan to achieve this was to introduce additional services on the Reading line, allowing the timetable through Camberley to be adjusted and achieving reduced connection times at Ash Vale without detriment to connection times at Ascot. The proposal also removed the three morning peak and two evening peak direct services via Ascot.

Public feedback to SWR's consultation regarding the removal of the direct services was not supportive. In parallel, our capacity planning team identified significant operational challenges with the overall proposed timetable. In response to the public feedback, SWR confirmed in April 2018 that they would retain the direct peak services via Ascot in the December 2018 timetable.

In the summer of 2018, following major disruption faced by passengers after the May 2018 timetable and recognising the need for greater industry assurance of timetable changes, the industry established the Timetable Change Assurance Programme Management Office (TT PMO). The TT PMO ratified the concerns that had already been identified with SWR's December 2018 timetable, and confirmed that the overall plan, including many of the changes proposed in December 2017, were not operationally workable. Instead, the existing timetable was largely rolled over, with the aim of at least introducing incremental passenger benefits as soon as possible – in May 2019, for example, SWR were able to introduce an additional evening peak return service via Ascot.

We continue to work hard with SWR to improve services for passengers and it is feasible that faster services could be introduced, but on the extremely congested Wessex network there are difficult trade-offs to be considered; introducing service improvements on one route can be detrimental to passengers on other routes or compromise overall reliability.

In this case, the workable plan for better connections at Ash Vale for London passengers means extended connection times at Ascot. We will continue discussions with SWR and the Department for Transport, and assess any forthcoming service change proposals. While I appreciate this does not provide an immediate answer or guarantee of a solution, I hope it at least provides some clarity as to the reasons the faster journey times were not introduced in December 2018. My office will contact yours to arrange further briefing if this is something that you would find helpful.

Yours sincerely

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

Andrew Haines
Chief Executive