



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP  
Secretary of State for Transport  
Department for Transport  
Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London  
SW1P 4DR

20<sup>th</sup> September 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

**Re: Train services from East Grinstead station**

I am writing to you regarding train services from East Grinstead station, on behalf of my affected constituents, as their local MP, who are deeply fed up and frustrated by the decline of services from the station.

Since I was first elected as the MP for Mid Sussex in 2019, I have been regularly engaging with Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) about the vital need to increase services from East Grinstead as soon as possible, as well as engaging with them on wider Mid Sussex needs including trains through Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath. I was pleased that finally, back in March, they announced that there would be a reinstated peak time service introduced from East Grinstead to London Blackfriars at 07.15am with the inclusion of a return service from London Bridge to East Grinstead departing at 17.41pm. This is a start in terms of my commuters' needs, but symptomatic of how much the service has disintegrated for commuters and those going to school in south London.

However, since this announcement, many constituents have contacted me to express their ongoing frustration at the repeated cancellations and poor services from East Grinstead station, despite assurances from GTR that my constituents could expect exactly the opposite.

In the mornings, the 07.15 service to London Blackfriars, which was only reintroduced in May 2022, is frequently cancelled with erratic pre 7am services to boot. This peak time service is one many of my constituents rely on to get them into the City including London Bridge for work and these repeated- and often short notice- cancellations mean they are no longer able to guarantee they will be at their desks in time for the start of the work day. The early morning cancellations also affect students travelling to schools and colleges, impacting their education and causing anxiety.

In the evenings, the 18.04 direct service from Blackfriars to East Grinstead is often cancelled, leaving many of my constituents facing a longer commute home, due to the lack of subsequent direct services to East Grinstead meaning forced changes at East Croydon. This is not the service expectation GTR promised, leading me and my constituents to enquire what is their commitment in their contract of a minimum expected service for commuters. It is hard to envisage this level is anything close to acceptable and I am keen to understand if they are delivering on their contractual obligations.

*Member of Parliament for Mid Sussex*

*Serving Burgess Hill, East Grinstead, Haywards Heath & the Villages*

East Grinstead is a commuter town, less than 30 miles from London. Commuters pay above average in ticket fares but continue to experience a reduced service.

Over recess, I have held further meetings with affected constituents who are apoplectic at the lack of services and unreliability of the services that do run. This repeated and often last-minute cancellation of direct services to and from London by GTR is giving my constituents the impression that the train services on which they rely are expendable. As a result, there is a perception that East Grinstead is turning into a 'backwater' instead of being known as a commuter town with good transport links. This is truly unacceptable. A lot of the justification and promotion for new local housing development has been the town's "excellent" train services, and the fast and easy access to the City, leading people to feel misled once they move into the area and discover the services these days are simply inadequate.

I raised this issue in Parliament on 21<sup>st</sup> July during Business Questions and earlier this month I received a response from the then Rail Minister, the Rt Hon Wendy Morton MP. This was after previous letters and engagement with the Department and Ministers. She wrote, in reply, that the Department for Transport was aware of the recent high level of cancellations of services. These levels of cancellations were principally a result of a rise in driver unavailability. This long term continues to be the case and is not a way to run a franchise.

Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), which operates Southern services, has experienced a recent rise in short-term sickness, caused by an increase in Covid cases among staff, as well as facing longer term driver resourcing challenges. She informed me GTR was aiming to make improvements to its services as soon as possible and the Department for Transport was monitoring the level of short notice cancellations and service delays. Unfortunately, there has been little evidence of any improvements, as I have outlined, being made to services to and from East Grinstead. Even this morning, the 07.15 service to Bedford (via London Bridge and the City) was cancelled due to train crew shortage.

I recently visited East Grinstead station to celebrate the opening of a new footbridge and lifts, improving accessibility for passengers and made possible thanks to £4.5 million in funding from the Access for All scheme. Whilst I am pleased that the station is now more accessible, I am aware that less people are using it as the trains they want simply aren't there.

GTR have previously cited reduced demand as a reason for cutting services however, from my conversations with constituents, I know that less people are travelling from East Grinstead due to the lack of frequent services and the unreliability of the services that do run. It therefore becomes a perpetuating cycle, with GTR failing to meet the needs of their customers, leading to less people using their services.

I would welcome the opportunity to urgently meet with you formally to discuss how we can work together to resolve this worrying situation for my East Grinstead and wider Mid Sussex constituents and what steps the Department, under your leadership, is planning to take to hold GTR to account and ensure that adequate services are provided to and from East Grinstead.

I look forward to hearing from you.

*With many thanks*

*Mims*

**Mims Davies MP**

Cc Kevin Foster MP, Minister of State for Transport