

Answers from Southeastern

Apologies for not being able to attend this session, we have already committed to attend another borough council this evening. We will be happy to meet the chair and other members on another date of their convenience.

Southeastern – Effect of services not now going to Cannon Street from Lee; what happens when issue at e.g. Waterloo East/Charing Cross line, as opposed to planned engineering works. Not everyone commutes at “rush hour”. (Councillor Hilary Moore (Labour), Representing Grove Park

In the event of problems arising in the day, services would either start and terminate at London Bridge, or run to an alternative London terminal.

On strike days we have been running all services to and from London Bridge, which has proven to be a successful mitigation in such circumstances.

- 1. Given the current poor service from Southern Rail into Charing Cross, residents using New Cross Gate station would sometimes walk to New Cross station (6 to 10 minutes) in order to make their journey or, on the reverse journey take a train from Charing Cross to New Cross and walk. However all New Cross services now run to Cannon Street. All Charing Cross services now seem to run fast to Deptford or Lewisham creating significant inconvenience to those living in the New Cross/New Cross Gate area. Is there a possibility that Southeastern services through to Charing Cross, stopping at New Cross, will be restored?**

Since the completion of Thameslink in 2018, no services from New Cross operate to Charing Cross. From 11 December, all services on the Woolwich, Bexleyheath, Sidcup and Hayes Lines will stop at London Bridge, providing interchange into Charing Cross.

In the Morning Peak (0700-1000) there are 59 services from London Bridge to Charing Cross, providing a connection approximately every three minutes and in the Evening Peak (1600-1900) there are 62 services from Charing Cross to London Bridge, with the same connection frequency.

- 2. What rationale is there for the cuts to off-peak services to Charing Cross through Blackheath station?**

We look at demand modelling which we obtain through train loading data, gateline data, and periodic passenger counts. The new timetable allocates capacity to where it's needed most.

The cuts to off-peak service equate to less than 10% of total off-peak services and will be better spread to ensure that everyone will normally be able to get a seat in the off-peak period.

There will also be a significant increase in punctuality and reliability because of our simpler, more resilient timetable. We expect there to be 12% fewer cancellations and 300,000 more on time station stops a year.

- 3. In November 2017, 89% of respondents to a questionnaire referenced in the South Eastern Rail Franchise Stakeholder Briefing Document opposed a reduction of “choice of central London destinations served by individual stations with the aim of providing a more regular and reliable service.” It notes also opposition was greatest in Blackheath. Why now have no steps have been taken to consult with Blackheath residents and why was the London Borough of Lewisham not informed prior to the public press release?**

Throughout the pandemic, we had to rewrite our timetables at pace, and even today we are still experiencing unpredictable demand for our services. It takes many months to design and consult upon a timetable change. Since March 2020, we have changed our timetable 15 times and the December 22 timetable is our next timetable, not our final timetable.

We want to give customers a timetable that is fundamentally simpler and which will perform better. To create a better base for our future, we worked closely with Network Rail to develop and announce our new timetable. Our plans were developed earlier this year and the Department for Transport gave us a derogation to proceed without a formal consultation programme given the need to deliver changes quickly including the withdrawal of first class. It would have been disingenuous to seek consultation without time to change the timetable based on feedback. Equally maintaining the current timetable has several disbenefits which will only get worse as customers return to the railway.

The new timetable means trains on our network will run on time more often, with fewer cancellations and sufficient space to match our current demand.

We welcome feedback on the new timetable. Customers can contact our Customer Services team via our app or website and leave feedback. Future changes will be based on customer feedback, demand and, of course, funding available.

We did have a programme of engagement with stakeholders planned in the run-up to the release of public data which we were compelled to suspend due to the 10-day mourning period for HM Queen Elizabeth II. This situation was exacerbated by a journalist deliberately breaking a press embargo before we'd had a chance to engage with everyone.

4. What impact does Southeastern believe an increased number of passengers changing over in Lewisham and London Bridge will have on service quality in general and accessibility for those with mobility difficulties in particular?

We are conscious of the importance of ensuring that passengers with accessibility needs can use our network with ease following this change.

London Bridge is a modern, £1bn redevelopment which has step free access on every platform, lots of staff, free Wi Fi, connections to Thameslink and the Underground, new facilities, defibrillators, and new equipment. It is well-lit, safe and has CCTV coverage and customer help points.

Additional Mobile Assistance Staff will be based at London Bridge from early December and will meet customers on arrival and transfer for them, if requested.

It has already performed well during periods of higher usage, including for HM Queen Elizabeth II's mourning period when we saw an unprecedented number of passengers use the station to join the lying-in-state queue and on strike days when all Southeastern services terminate at London Bridge.

At Lewisham we will have dedicated staff available to help those with accessibility needs interchange at the station.

5. With the reduced use of tracks by services to Charing Cross from Blackheath station, are there plans for other lines be run through the station without stopping? If so, which lines are these and why do they take priority over the needs of Blackheath residents? (Councillor Luke Warner (Labour), Representing: Blackheath)

Trains on the Woolwich Line and off-peak services on the Bexleyheath Line will now go straight to Cannon Street and Victoria and will not be stopping at Charing Cross. Customers for London Charing Cross will now need to change at London Bridge.

On the Hayes Line, trains will no longer call at Cannon Street as all services will now run straight to Charing Cross. This is to reduce the number of crossing moves by two-thirds and thereby significantly reduce the cause of delay.

Customers have repeatedly told us that their top priorities are punctuality and reliability which is the number one factor driving satisfaction – as highlighted by numerous surveys, including those undertaken by Transport Focus, over recent years.

We have therefore made some structural changes to enable our trains to be more reliable and punctual by reducing congestion at busy junctions, such as the notorious bottleneck at Lewisham Junction, by reducing the number of train crossing moves by two thirds in the December timetable.