



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

18th May 2008

Mr C Burchell
Managing Director
Southern Railways
c/o Southern Customer Services
P.O. Box 277
Tonbridge
Kent
TN9 2ZP

Dear Mr Burchell

Cessation of rail service from Royal Tunbridge Wells to Gatwick

Following the last Town Forum meeting held on the 15th May 2008 it was agreed by unanimous vote that I write to you and inform you of our total 100% opposition to any such closure. This stance being in line with our local M.P. Greg Clark.

In these days of being environmentally aware and needing to reduce usage of cars it comes as a complete contradiction in terms to hear that your company wishes to axe this service.

Whereas we understand you may have a financial incentive to enact such move we fail to understand how you come to such conclusion when your company fails to promote such service adequately in the first place and that by axing such service would mean that Kent would have no direct rail link to Gatwick.

As I understand it you currently Chair the Stakeholder Advisory Board and therefore I ask you what actions you have taken to ensure the needs of disabled people have been taken into account. I would welcome to hear the comments from your fellow SAB member Ann Bates, who herself is a wheelchair user.

Naturally I cannot argue that you have a company to run, but then if you apply that to the full use of the term then you should not purport to be running a public service. It is perverse to see that your company won an environmental award at a Network Rail gathering yet at the same time you are happy to contradict that in one swift move.

The Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum urges you to consult your public and hear what they have to say before you make draconian decisions. Why do so few people know of the service – you never advertise it.

I would be interested to hear your views as to why you should close lines without consultation with the public and would be interested to hear how you have battled with central government to ensure adequate funding for a service, which if correctly promoted would be a benefit to many more. Central Government proclaim the Disability Discrimination Acts as being an effective protection of the disabled yet they appear unable to grasp the nettle that they must ensure that you are able to make relevant adjustments to meet the needs of the disabled. How do you expect a disabled person can get to Gatwick if you do not provide an effective but simple service?

I note you advertise a service from Hastings on your website along with other towns in Sussex, yet no mention of Tunbridge Wells. Why not? Is the Hastings service one that could go through Royal Tunbridge Wells? If it is then can more investigating be made prior to any action taken that could be so damaging? I would expect that not one travel agent has details of this service given to them so that they can inform travelers. If I had personally known of a direct service I would have used the service.

Finally, we note that under the NSIP the station of Tunbridge Wells has been selected. In this we note that potential improvements include enhanced passenger information. Shame your company did not think of this prior to suggesting closure of a line which is not promoted adequately by any sense of the imagination.

I look forward to hearing from you soon and ask you to reply to myself c/o Samantha Timms, Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 1RS.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Thomas
Chairman
Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum
www.townforum.org.uk

18 May 2008

c.c.

Kent Messenger
Courier Newspaper