

Our ref: Ref: 342336/106389 (0870)

Your ref: -

Christopher Thomas  
Chairman - Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum  
c/o Samantha Timms  
Town Hall  
Royal Tunbridge Wells  
KentTN1 1RS

20 June 2008

Dear Mr Thomas

I have been asked to reply substantially to your letter of 18 May, in follow up to our acknowledgement letter of 29 May from Barbara Giles, our customer relations manager.

I would like to provide you with some background to the changes planned to the timetable for December 2008 and through this, answer the points you have raised in your letter.

The changes to the Horsham/Gatwick Airport - Tunbridge Wells line are to be introduced as part of the Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy (BML RUS) changes due for 14 December 2008. The overall aim of the BML RUS is to increase the space available on trains for the increasing numbers of passengers by getting the very best out of the existing infrastructure. This is done by creating timetables that serve the maximum amount of people possible at the correct times, and by intelligent use of the allocation of trains to meet this need.

The background to this is that following detailed analysis and extensive consultation, the Department for Transport (DfT) set out a timetable framework in April 2007 for the implementation of the RUS strategy. This noted that Southern would take on the running of the Gatwick Express service in its current form on 22 June 2008 and that in December a significant timetable change would take place to include extending six Gatwick Express services to run from Brighton in the morning and six return trips in the evening. There are also significant changes in the Redhill area to increase passenger capacity to London in the peak periods and improve the frequency in the off-peak.

The period of consultation on the main proposals for the timetable change started in October 2007 with bodies such as passenger groups and local councils for example. Following a review of the consultation replies and more detailed work on the

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timetable with the DfT and Network Rail, the preferred timetables have now been established for each of the routes affected by the RUS.

This includes services on the Tunbridge Wells - Gatwick Airport/Horsham line which Southern will take over in December 2008. It is currently operated by Southeastern. We are two different companies and Southeastern also run the service to Hastings to which you refer (from London). We also operate a service to Hastings but along the coast from Brighton not from London. I have enclosed a Network Map which provides more information on what services are run in the South-East, and by whom.

The changes proposed in the consultation - to remove direct trains between Tunbridge Wells and Gatwick Airport/Horsham remain. This decision was taken as the number of passengers currently using these services did not justify their retention, and as always we need to balance resources and make provision elsewhere on the network to provide maximum benefit for the majority of our passengers and particularly where there is demand.

The BML RUS project is all about providing increased space on trains where there is a need now to help deal with crowding and suppressed demand, but also to look to the future and the projected continued increase in demand. As with most significant timetable changes, there are some areas or lines that lose out but overall the changes are very positive, many more people will be able to travel by rail as a result of them and they therefore very much support the wider environmental benefits of rail.

It is also important to note that both Tonbridge and Redhill stations are 'accessible' stations and can provide onward connections to other destinations, including Tunbridge Wells and Gatwick Airport/Horsham. To support the changes to this service, Southeastern intends to operate an additional half-hourly service between Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge, which will maintain the current four trains per hour frequency on that route.

I hope this letter has helped to explain the rationale behind the changes.

Yours sincerely

**Yvonne Leslie**  
**Stakeholder Relations Manager**