

Southwark Rail Users Group (SRUG)

c/o Peckham, SE15 4LE

SRUG@southwarkrailusers.net

www.southwarkrailusers.net

Minister of State
The Rt. Hon. Theresa Villiers MP
Department for Transport
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

25th January 2012

Dear Minister

Your Department has written to us in response to the many emails you received from local rail users about the impending deterioration in our local rail services in and out of Victoria. Thank you and the Department for acknowledging local concern on these points. We are very pleased to hear that consideration is being given to additional peak hour stops. We will as requested post the Department's statement on the website.

THE GAPS IN VICTORIA SERVICES

But may we clarify the Department's statement that there will continue to be 'a service of two or more trains per hour both to Victoria and to Blackfriars'? This is in fact the crux of the problem which will result from the cessation of the South London Line (SLL) without any mitigation services: in the evenings and at weekends there will be no regular service to Victoria, and there will be gaps between trains, and in some hours there will be no trains at all, (and the trains to Blackfriars end early at 9pm, and do not run at weekends.)

These Victoria gaps arise from an unintended outcome of decisions taken at both London level - to introduce the desirable but different rail service in the East London Line, and also at national level by Network Rail and the Dept for Transport - to rebuild the important national railway station at London Bridge.

We understand fully the Government's commitment to its localism agenda and therefore its decision not to intervene in the Mayor of London's decision to ensure the completion of the East London Line. Indeed we support decisions on the future of London's transport being taken by London's own authorities, to enable London to develop the integrated transport approach it needs. We appreciate and welcome the increased journey opportunities that the new East London Line (ELL) extension will offer to south London.

THE NEED FOR FULL SERVICES WITH NO GAPS

Train services need to be regular to encourage confident and consistent use. This is especially important for services to Victoria (and Blackfriars) from Denmark Hill and Peckham Rye. Many workers, patients and visitors to the two major hospitals - Kings and SLAM - through Denmark Hill station rely on these rail services throughout the day and in the evenings and weekends. So too do the increasing numbers of visitors from across London to the growing creative and leisure industries in Peckham. Here a partnership between local community and borough council, recently supported by the London Mayor, is restoring the historic Peckham Rye rail station to realise its potential as a major gateway to the town centre. It would be so inappropriate at just this moment to make the rail service to and from central London so irregular.

INTERIM SOLUTION

We are aware that the franchise for the trains serving our stations, currently held by SouthEastern Rail, is due for renewal in the next few years. We have been assuming that the gaps in the services will then be corrected by the introduction of revised train services providing the full regular minimum 2, but preferably 4, trains per hour for 7 days a week to Victoria (and Blackfriars) in the new franchises.

We therefore see this as a transitional temporary issue. Because of this, and because there are both national and regional London origins for the predicament in our Victoria rail services, we feel a joint national–London solution to provide the trains needed to fill the gaps in the evenings and weekends can be consistent with localism in this case. It would need to be only a short term interim measure, between December 2012 and the introduction of the new franchise to Victoria, to leave us with a 7 day a week full service of at least two trains per hour. This would still be a deterioration in what there is currently by reducing by nearly half the trains to Victoria, but it would fill the gaps and provide a regular service in the meantime before the new franchise.

We are not the rail experts and do not know all the intricacies of the track capacities and rail time tabling issues so we will not presume to make specific suggestions. But a simple change, which illustrates an example that would fill these gaps, would be the extension of the current two trains per hour Dartford to Victoria service via Peckham Rye, to a full day and evening 7 day a week service. There may well be other and better ways to provide the interim solution. It is the full and regular service that is important for the user rather than the precise details of how it is achieved.

We hope that you and the Department will find these comments and suggestions constructive, and ask if you would reconsider, in this particular case, the role of the Department and Network Rail so they can join with the London Mayor and TfL to provide together the solution to the problem of filling the gaps to Victoria in the evenings and weekends in the interim period.

CC Mayor of London

Yours sincerely

Eileen Conn

pp Southwark Rail Users' Group

<http://www.southwarkrailusers.net>