

15 October 2010

Mr Keith Ludeman  
Chairman & Chief Executive  
Govia,  
1 Warwick Row,  
London  
SW1E 5ER

Dear Mr Ludeman,

The East Sussex Rail Alliance (ESRA) is becoming increasingly concerned that Govia subsidiaries, Southern Railways and Southeastern are not operating consistent business strategies across some parts of their franchise networks within our area.

Despite numerous meetings, representations and suggestions over a number of years, progress has been negligible; indeed, in some instances the service is getting worse with increasing journey times that already compared unfavourably with other regional transport hubs.

Hastings is nationally recognised as a deprivation hot-spot, and is fighting to return to its glory days, despite the recent Pier fire disaster. The lack of investment and improvement in rail infrastructure and services compared to elsewhere in the southeast – notably Kent and Brighton - coupled with a lack of strategic thinking continues to have a significant detrimental effect to the economic regeneration of coastal towns in East Sussex.

Eastbourne is also likely to suffer future economic disadvantage due to the poor rail services it receives vis a vis Brighton.

Nonetheless rail users in East Sussex have repeatedly suffered above-inflation fare increases to bankroll this investment in infrastructure and service improvements elsewhere, despite being unable to derive any benefit themselves.

It is imperative that all stakeholders engage and work together towards achieving tangible short and long term solutions, so that more companies like SAGA will move into the area and create much needed employment to generate economic wealth.

As part of our efforts to move this forward, we have arranged a meeting between Ms Amber Rudd MP for Hastings and Rye, and Samantha Hodder, Group Communications Director for Go-Ahead on Monday 18th October 2010.

Whilst not wishing to pre-determine the outcome of these discussions, we need to stress that Go-Ahead must lead strategically on these issues and not delegate them to their respective subsidiaries which operate in silos in regard to their service provision and marketing.

The single largest issue plaguing this area was recently summarised by David Walker, Head of Planning at Southern, at the recent stakeholder meeting. Mr Walker conceded that Brighton, with a population of approximately 120,000 is Southern's key market and that services are developed around this market resulting in ludicrous over-provision. From December, Southern and First Capital Connect will operate a total of 8 trains an hour each way between London and Brighton.

In contrast, the Victoria - Coastway services which actually serve a population of 300,000+ in East and West Sussex are deliberately curtailed and downgraded, to the disadvantage of rail travellers and the economy of coastal towns such as Eastbourne, Bexhill, Hove and Worthing.

Moreover, both the Southern service from Victoria to the Coastway via Haywards Heath and the Southeastern service from Charing Cross to Hastings via Tunbridge Wells appear to be something of an afterthought in the timetable, operating around the needs of stations further up the line.

The Southern service appears to be largely for the benefit of Haywards Heath and to be a cut-price alternative to the Gatwick express; while the Southeastern service is a component of a metro service for Orpington, Sevenoaks and Tonbridge. All of these stations are served or could potentially be served by other trains, but the resulting impact for East Sussex rail travellers is one of overcrowding - especially in the shoulder peaks - and extended journey times.

This alone is a potential reason for resisting the DfT's proposals for longer franchises and/or the devolution of timetable decision-making to franchise holders.

ESRA would welcome your personal interest in these matters which, we must advise, have also been brought to the attention of Government Ministers, including Norman Baker MP who has a local constituency (Lewes) and Gregory Barker MP (Bexhill and Battle).

We look forward to your thoughts and advice in due course.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs Belinda Fordham  
On behalf of **East Sussex Rail Alliance**

Cc: Tom Smith - Managing Director of Rail Development, Go - Ahead  
Norman Baker MP, Stephen Lloyd MP, Amber Rudd MP, Greg Barker MP

*East Sussex Rail Alliance represents the following commuter organisations*

