



Department
for Transport

From the Secretary of State
The Rt. Hon. Chris Grayling

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13 October 2018

Thank you for your letter of 3 September, about the delay to the opening of the Crossrail central section and the South Eastern franchise competition's specification for High Speed services from Maidstone.

I understand your concerns over the delay to the opening of Crossrail's central section and I appreciate how important this and High Speed services are to passengers travelling from Maidstone. I share your disappointment over the delay to the opening of the Crossrail central section. As you know, Crossrail Limited determined that a revised schedule is needed to complete the final infrastructure and extensive testing required to ensure the Elizabeth line opens as a safe and reliable railway.

The safety of passengers and staff and reliability of services is the overriding priority and we accept Crossrail Limited's assessment that more time is needed to fully test the railway before passenger operations can commence. I remain confident that Crossrail will deliver a great improvement to passengers' journeys once it is fully operational.

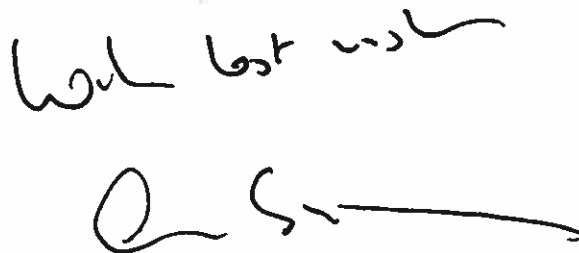
In regard to services from Maidstone stations in the specification for the South Eastern franchise competition, the winning bidder must run at least two peak trains between Maidstone West and London St Pancras – however they are urged to introduce more services, as well as bring in other benefits such as shorter journey times. From December 2019, new Thameslink services between Maidstone East and Cambridge will also provide an extra two trains per hour in each direction all day.

Additionally, the commencement of the Thameslink route in December 2019 will provide all day connectivity between Maidstone, the City and St Pancras. Journey times to the City are expected to be comparable to those using the High Speed service today.

You may be reassured to know that the specification makes clear that bidders must continue to provide a minimum of two High Speed services from Maidstone West in the morning and evening peak. Bidders are also provided with the option to run services to Abbey Wood (to connect with Crossrail) as an alternative to running the two High Speed services in the morning and evening peaks.

This has the potential to offer an alternative option for passengers to complement Thameslink services from Maidstone. It is envisaged this option will provide attractive journey times to locations such as Canary Wharf. However bidders proposing this would need to demonstrate the clear benefit to passengers over the High Speed service.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Handwritten signature of Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP, consisting of a cursive 'C' followed by 'S' and a long horizontal stroke.

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT