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9 September 2009  
(via email and post)

West Anglia and Stansted Express Timetable Consultation  
National Express East Anglia  
Oliver's Yard  
55 City Road  
London  
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Dear Sirs

### **West Anglia Timetable Consultation**

I am writing on behalf of Stop Stansted Expansion (SSE) in response to your consultation about the service and capacity enhancements you are proposing following the introduction into service of 188 new coaches on to the West Anglia network.

SSE represents some 7,500 members and registered supporters including 150 parish and town councils, residents' groups, national and local environmental groups and other organizations. While the main focus of our activities is directed at Stansted Airport itself, one of the most critical local impacts of the airport is on the surface access networks which serve both the airport and the local communities around it. Rail services, particularly those meeting the needs of commuters between Cambridge, intermediate stations and London, are directly affected by the services provided for airport users, the great majority of whom will be infrequent users of the West Anglia route. Ensuring that any plans to expand the airport do not worsen or delay improvements to rail services for local users is therefore one of our organisation's key objectives.

SSE welcomes the news that extra capacity is to be provided by introducing new trains on the West Anglia route. We now have the oldest fleet of trains still in operation on the London commuter network and standards of comfort fall well below those enjoyed by other passengers in the South East. We also have, according to Network Rail's Route Utilisation Strategy, some of the most overcrowded services in the region, with standing during the peaks occurring for much longer than the Government target of no more than 20 minutes.

We recognise that the present constraints of the route (only two tracks, flat junctions and a varied mix of services) mean that the line is operating at or near capacity for much of the time and that introducing a more frequent pattern of services, even if feasible, would prejudice reliability of performance. Running longer trains is therefore both the most immediate way in which increased capacity can be delivered reliably, and is in any case Government policy for the current Network Rail Control Period (CP4).

*Patron: Terry Waite CBE*

*Stop Stansted Expansion is a working group of the North West Essex and East Herts Preservation Association*

The current service pattern on the West Anglia route is largely dictated by the decision taken in 2005 to operate a regular, 15 minute interval Stansted Express (STEX) service throughout the day. This fixed interval service with few stops makes substantial inroads into the capacity available for other services and limits the remaining capacity available for regular local users. This adverse impact has been mitigated by stopping STEX services at intermediate stations (mainly Bishop's Stortford and Harlow Town) in the peaks to serve commuter traffic as well as airport users. But regular users of other stations have experienced less frequent services and extended journey times as a result of the capacity absorbed by this pattern of STEX services.

Introducing new trains provides a trigger for reviewing whether this service pattern optimises the use of capacity. We would expect that the extra capacity should be used first to eliminate standing on any peak service as far as possible and secondly to upgrade the quality of service for regular users whose financial contribution does most to support the operation of the line. We would therefore urge you to consider:

- whether, with declining air passenger numbers and the dramatic growth in the use of coach travel by users of Stansted Airport in recent years (from less than a million passengers in 2001 to almost five million last year), a 15 minute interval service to the airport during the commuter peaks remains a justifiable use of capacity, rather than diverting some of those services to Cambridge – the pattern of service before 2005;
- making commuter services rather than the airport service the priority for the use of the new trains.

We are encouraged in this view by the plans that have been published for infrastructure enhancements to accompany the introduction of longer trains. Running longer trains will require station platforms to be extended to allow the longer trains to serve them. At present, only five stations between Liverpool Street and Cambridge have platforms long enough to accommodate 12 coach trains. We note that Network Rail's Delivery Plan for the Greater Anglia route anticipates the following:

- capacity enhancements at Tottenham Hale (2010);
- replacing level crossings in the Lea Valley with over or under bridges or stopping up (2014);
- 12 coach platform extensions between Cambridge and Liverpool Street (2011);
- 12 coach platforms at Broxbourne (2010);
- new island platform at Cambridge (2011);
- power supply enhancement (2011).

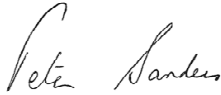
Extra capacity at Stansted Airport is mentioned only in passing in the Delivery Plan, because this is to be funded by the owners of Stansted Airport. If the current timetable is to continue to be operated with 12 coach trains, extra capacity there is essential because at some times of the day an 8 coach STEX and a 4 coach Stratford service completely occupy the same platform. Moreover, apart from Cambridge, the airport is the only station where trains can be turned round conveniently to make a return trip to London.

The need for more capacity at Stansted Airport Station was recognised at the Stansted G1 Public Inquiry which led to the airport being granted planning permission to expand to 35 million passengers per year. BAA's evidence to the inquiry (volume 11 Addendum Update para 4.8.2) said that BAA had developed the design for additional platform capacity at the airport through to GRIP 3. The G1 Inspector in his conclusions (para 14.220) noted that areas to the West and East of the station would need to be safeguarded for platform construction and extensions and decided that a condition was required to achieve this end.

However, when BAA published its G2 application (for a second runway) and TWA order, it argued that a fourth platform at the airport station was integral to the G2 application – not the G1 permission. SSE has been trying to persuade BAA to agree that a fourth platform should be considered integral to the G1 permission but BAA has refused to accept this and our concerns have been increased by the suggestion in Network Rail's Route Delivery Plan that the requirement might be met by platform extensions rather than a fourth platform. This would lead to no improvements in operational flexibility and seems to us an insufficient way of dealing with the problem regardless of the plans for G2.

We therefore suggest that this is an added reason for looking again at the current service pattern and for giving local commuter services rather than STEX the first call on the new trains. The scale of the downturn in air passengers at Stansted and the rapid development of bus and coach usage at the airport in recent years justify a review of rail service priorities. In addition, we suggest that the introduction of 12 coach airport services should be contingent upon the owner of the airport funding and implementing the construction of a fourth rail platform at Stansted Airport Station.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Sanders".

Peter Sanders  
Chairman

cc The Rt Hon Sir Alan Haselhurst MP  
Mark Prisk MP