



THE RT. HON. SIR ALAN HASELHURST, M.P.

(Member of Parliament for Saffron Walden)

Chairman of Ways & Means and Deputy Speaker

House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

7th April, 2010

The Rt. Hon. Lord Adonis,
Department for Transport,
Great Minster House,
76 Marsham Street,
London SW1P 4DR

Dear Andreas,

You are presently consulting on the new rail franchise specification to apply from next April on the services currently operated by National Express East Anglia (NEEA). The terms of the new franchise agreement will have important implications for many of our constituents, not least those who have to endure the current overcrowding on the West Anglia Main Line between Cambridge and Liverpool Street on rolling stock which is approaching thirty years old.

A key issue for your Department and the new franchisee will be the basis for allocating the 120 new Electrostar carriages which are due to start coming into service early next year, at around the same time as the new franchise commences. The current plan seems to be to give priority to the Stansted Express (STEX) by converting this service to new 12-car Electrostars. This would mean that virtually none of the new carriages would be regularly available for commuter rail services between Cambridge and Liverpool Street other than during off peak hours and at weekends.

This is a totally unacceptable proposition. STEX usage is in decline due to falling airport passenger numbers and a growing preference by Stansted's passengers to travel to and from the airport by coach. The net result is that STEX now carries just 6000 passengers to the Airport each weekday compared to 8000 in 2006.

Despite the decline in airport demand in recent years, the frequency of STEX was increased from two to four trains per hour in December 2005 and it now (largely) operates using 8-car trains compared to the previous 4-car norm. As a result, there is already substantial overprovision for airport passengers compared to local commuters and it would exacerbate this situation if STEX were to be increased to a 12-car norm. In fact we are advised that a 12-car STEX service on the present timetable would provide eight times more seats for airport passengers than the present level of demand.

Unsurprisingly, local commuters already find it irritating to see sparsely occupied STEX trains passing through their stations whilst they stand waiting for their vintage offering. This sense of irritation would be immeasurably greater if STEX were to be given priority usage of the new rolling stock operated in 12-car formation.

None of this would of course matter if local commuters were already well served or if there were enough good quality, modern and reliable trains to serve the needs of both Stansted Airport and local commuters. Sadly, this is not the case and so there needs to be a fair and reasonable basis for determining the allocation of the new Electrostar carriages between airport services and local commuter services.

Options for enabling local commuters to benefit more significantly from the new (taxpayer funded) trains range from ending the dedicated STEX service to reviewing its frequency, introducing more intermediary stops on STEX services and reconsideration of the plan to lengthen STEX to 12-cars. For example, leaving STEX as an 8-car service for the time being would enable five new 8-car Electrostar trains to be dedicated to local commuters. That would at least be a start to the long overdue upgrading of the service provided to our constituents.



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Finally on the question of prioritisation, it surely cannot be right to put the needs of occasional airport users – mostly travelling for leisure purposes – ahead of the needs of regular local rail users – mostly travelling to and from their place of work. The new franchise agreement must provide a fair deal for local commuters and stop treating them as second class citizens.

The best answer would be to require the new franchise to replace the whole fleet with new trains, but this would still leave a gap of some years of travel discrimination between airport passengers and regular commuters.

The contents of this letter are approved by my neighbouring colleague, Mark Prisk, and I am authorised to sign on his behalf.

Yours ever,