Written evidence submitted by Mr Alexander Andrews (RTC0011)

I am responding to the invitation to make a written submission to the committee on the above subject.

I have commuted from Upper Warlingham on the East Grinstead Line to London Bridge for the last 10 years. Until the recent timetable change this was a service badly run by Southern. As an illustration of how badly in April 2015 I wrote a letter to Southern congratulating them for finally managing to run a train on time over 3 months into the year. In essence they seemed daily to find a new way to torture their captive passengers turning a half hour journey into an hour or longer or one that simply did not exist so that on numerous occasions I have slept overnight in the office. Yet since the introduction of the new timetable the service has, astonishingly, markedly worsened and the promise to the Hon Mr Soames to prioritise the East Grinstead Line is simply untrue.

So:

1. When the new timetable was introduced the rush hour morning trains to London Bridge were moved from Southern to Thameslink (so all now travel on to Bedford and none stop at London Bridge) timed at 0741, 0811 and 0841 of which the 0811 was the equivalent to the 0815 I had previously caught. Following the initial chaos on 4 June the 0811 was removed from the timetable and has not been reinstated such that a half hourly service has become at least in theory an hourly service.

2. In theory because the cancellations are frequent. Our local station master one morning announced the arrival of the 0741 as the Marie Celeste of trains having told me that he felt very sorry for us commuters, that nobody in management had spoken to him in months and that many people were leaving because morale was so poor.

3. Have in mind that the trains were overcrowded before the new timetable so the effect of halving/quartering the services such that on a number of mornings there has been a 2 hourly gap on a busy commuter line during the rush hour is to make the journey both extremely unpleasant and dangerous. Last week the guard told passengers to look out for anyone who seemed unwell and I have seen staff taking pictures of the overcrowded platform on London Bridge.

4. Matters are no better on the return journey. I used to catch most regularly the 2004 from London Bridge there being a direct train to Upper Warlingham every hour through to 2304. Those trains were always extremely busy. With the new timetable the direct service stops at an astonishing 1841 (here no train has disappeared) with the effect that those working beyond 1810 in the City must now change at East Croydon turning a 30 minute journey into a 45/60 minute journey depending upon luck.

5. Moreover the consequence of running all the trains to Bedford is that this significantly increases the risk of problems. Last Friday the 1741 train was held up outside St Albans. In terms of crowding my experience has been even worse and I have witnessed several angry outbursts directed at staff and between passengers.

I would like to add the following:

1. The trains have narrower seats with more often than not no tray. They were uncomfortably narrow anyway and are now worse. I regularly travel on trains in Switzerland and Korea. Their trains have comfortable seating, armrests and trays quite apart from being reliable. We have gone backwards over the years and now lag far behind.

2. The government seek to control fares but do not seem to have woken up to the fact that the train companies get around any restrictions by dramatically increasing station car parking charges year on year. As ever private enterprise appears to run rings around the public sector.

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