A letter of concern regarding Harpenden Thameslink Commuters

We write together as church leaders in Harpenden to express our concern for the residents of our commuter town. Many lives are being adversely affected by the current disruption and projected reduction to our train services created by the introduction of what is, for this town, a much diminished railway timetable.

We are concerned not only for the commuters of this town who depend upon a regular train service in order to get to and from work, but also for children travelling to school, as well as those who do not drive, including many of our older residents. As church leaders, we see at first hand how physically and emotionally draining this reduction in service is. The quotes at the end of this letter give an indication of the impact not only upon individuals but also their families and friendship groups.

We appreciate that there are ongoing discussions, prompted by the Harpenden Thameslink Commuters group and involving our member of parliament Bim Afolami. As those who are seeing the impact of these difficulties on the people of our town, we ask that every effort is made to restore the service to its previous levels.

This letter is signed by Rev Canon Dr Dennis Stamps on behalf of Churches Together in Harpenden who have agreed the sentiment of this letter and endorsed it as an expression of Harpenden Churches Together.

Harpenden Churches Together includes all the local Anglican, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, Methodist and Free Churches serving the town.

July 2018
A sample of what Harpenden Thameslink commuters have told us…

Elizabeth said:
“I am a Sixth Form student, and I commute every day from Harpenden to St Albans, and the changing timetable and delays were a huge cause of anxiety for me during my recent exams. There were many times where I had to pay to get an Uber or taxi to school because I had no way of being certain that I would get to school on time, and missing any exam means failing that paper.”

Ruth said:
“I work two days in a week in a London. I observe student teachers as a part of my role and so my schools are basically waiting for me to call to let them know I am on a train and then they arrange the children’s literacy lesson for when I arrive. So this is disrupting the routine of children who don’t even live in Harpenden. I have made my working day shorter to guarantee I get train home to collect my own children as it is so unreliable. This means I have to work at weekends to make up my hours and so can’t spend time with my children. I am just glad I only do two days. I have not been doing lectures, that will be from September again. My boss has timetabled me for afternoons mostly. If I had had my usual lectures and not school visits this last two months I would have struggled to teach them. I am worried whether it will be fixed by September.”

Emily said:
“My daughter (4) did a Father’s Day card with 3 people on the front. When I asked her who they were, she told me: me, daddy, Daphne (her older sister). When I asked her where I was, she said: at work. I am away from home longer each day and at work less making the balance even more difficult!”.  

Jos said:
“I took my disabled son to see a show Friday evening. First 2 trains cancelled on the way in, so had to rush. No trains for 75 minutes when we were going home, so had to get an Uber as he can’t stand on a platform for that long and then would probably have to stand on a crowded train on the way home. It puts you off going into London completely.”

Andy said:
“It has caused a reduction in family time and stress and uncertainty around attending appointments or meetings. I have a client-facing role and it is just unacceptable to be late, so I have to go extra early to try and ensure I make it. If I am scheduled to attend something connected to our son in the evening, I have to try and work from home or miss out which doesn’t sit well with trying to be a good parent. There is also the impact of the personal stress of having a tortuous journey at the beginning or end of a long work day.”

Janice said:
“I am finding the reduction in trains really stressful and wake up feeling stressed about my journey. I don’t always feel 100% in the morning but have found I have to go in early to get a half decent journey, and this is eating into my sleep which makes me more tired so I feel unwell more often. If this carries on it will impact my health I am sure.”

Lucy said:
“My 17-year-old son has had to cancel his driving test as I am never home in time to take him out practicing.”
Lesley Anne said:
“The problems for me have meant the difference between seeing my 19 month old little girl before she goes to bed and not. On the days that I pick her up from nursery, I either simply can't risk going into London and not being able to pick her up, or I have to give myself at least two hours to make what was a 35 minute train journey to be absolutely certain that I get to nursery on time. We have no family close by to rely on, so the unreliability of the trains adds a fair bit of stress to our lives. I also don't really see doing anything after work in town as a viable option anymore, as past 8pm it feels like the reliability gets even worse. This leaves us pretty isolated from friends.”

Mary said:
“It has impacted my social life. Apart from the daily strain of commuting, I am now missing out on events with friends and colleagues. Having enjoyed a good social life previously, I am now so concerned with ensuring I get home, I'm turning down invites. I feel as if I am living under a curfew at the moment. And becoming incredibly depressed about it.”