I am writing to you regarding the very poor service provided between London terminal stations and my station Blackheath as well as the withdrawal of services to the Medway towns (from May 2018).

Since the timetable change in May 2018 the service has deteriorated:

The issues concern:

- Poor timetabling resulting in a poor use of resources and a service which is not customer friendly, especially on Sundays;
- Unreliable service in terms of punctuality and reliability. You can never be confident that your service will turn up, will not break down or arrive on time;
- Short trains. Back in British Rail days the trains were 10 coaches long in the peaks, reduced to 4 off peak but now we often get only 6 and 8 coach trains in the peaks and never the 12 coaches we have been promised. Ridership has increased enormously since then. This has led to horrible overcrowded travelling conditions as well as delays due to long dwell times at stations and even people being left behind due to overcrowding.
- Poorly designed trains inappropriate for the journey - not enough doors, long delays at each station before the doors are opened, no luggage space, exacerbated by too short trains, cramped uncomfortable seats and old tired trains.
- No air conditioning and insufficient window openings together with no blinds leading to sweltering travelling conditions in summer but unpleasant draughts in winter.
- Journey times. For the short distance journey times are very long and these have been extended since the May timetable (apparently these extra delays, according to Southeastern, are due to Thameslink) - our trains are slower than the 1950s.
- Incompetent customer hostile provider.

In detail:

Post the rebuilding of London Bridge station we were led to believe that we could expect an improved train service but a perusal of the timetable shows that this is not the case.

First of all, without consultation and very sneakily the trains from Blackheath to the Medway towns has been withdrawn. Although the line was very slow it was possible to get to Canterbury or the Kent coast with one change of train at Gillingham. Now it will be necessary to change once at Dartford to get to the Medway towns or twice at Dartford and Gillingham to get to the Kent coast whereas going back a few years there was a limited service of through trains to the Kent Coast. It is at the same expensive and slow and very inconvenient to use if two changes are necessary so effectively to get to Canterbury or the Kent Coast you are now more or less forced to drive.

Secondly, the timetabling is very poor. It is almost as if Southeastern go out of their way to make the timetable as inconvenient as possible for the passenger. Incredible but true, from London Bridge two trains depart at exactly the same time from London Bridge to Blackheath, one from Charing Cross to Blackheath and one from Cannon Street to Blackheath both leaving London Bridge every half hour at 21 and 51 minutes past each hour. This is important because it effectively reduces the service frequency from London Bridge to Blackheath from 6 trains an hour to 4 trains an hour and appears to me to be a very inefficient and poorly planned use of resources.

The service on Sundays is as bad as ever. There are four trains an hour from central London but the interval between them is poor so that maximum customer inconvenience is achieved. One train leaves Victoria at 06 and 36 minutes past the hour arriving at Blackheath at 29 and 59 minutes past the hour and another train leaving Charing Cross just 6 minutes after the train leaves Victoria at 12 and 42 minutes past the hour arriving just 4 minutes behind the train from Victoria at 33 and 53 minutes past the hour. It's like it has been designed to cause the maximum inconvenience and extend long distance journeys through poor connections. Again a very inefficient and poorly planned use of resources.

It would be reasonable to expect train speeds to improve over a 70 year period but this is not the case. Journey times to Charing Cross are woefully slow. For example the 08.15 from Blackheath to Charing Cross calls only at London Bridge but takes 25 minutes for the 7 mile journey and has a pathetic average speed of 16.8 mph. Historic railway timetables are available on line and if you look at the British Railways Southern Region timetable from September 1950 trains were regularly timetabled to take 18 minutes in the rush hour from Blackheath to Charing Cross and they made more stops than they do today. For example, in 1950 the 08.21 from Blackheath to Charing Cross took 18 minutes to arrive at 08.39 stopping at Lewisham, New Cross, London Bridge and Waterloo East. I know the line has had very little investment over the years but some progress should be expected not going backwards.
It seems to me that Southeastern has zero focus on the passenger and passenger satisfaction and the Department for Transport appears to do a very poor job of holding them to account.

I would appreciate any help which you can provide so that Blackheath can get a proper fast, reliable, frequent turn up and go service i.e. at least every ten minutes to London Bridge and Charing Cross.

*September 2018*