

Alan Duncan MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

15 October 2008

Dear Mr Duncan,

CUTS TO TRAIN SERVICES FROM BOTTESFORD

You have received a letter from your constituent Andy McDonald and possibly other of your constituents living in Bottesford about the reduction in services calling at Bottesford. Better Transport has been leading a campaign against the savage cuts to services east of Nottingham. Some stations suffer a worse fate than Bottesford, not that the cuts at Bottesford can be considered at all acceptable or even sensible.

I am writing this letter on behalf of your constituents to provide further background information.

The campaign has been running some months and there are many documents on our website that give detailed data on what is happening.

http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/nottinghamshire_local_group

I will not repeat what is on the website here, but will underline a couple of key facts.

MPs and others have tended to direct their concerns to East Midlands Trains (EMT). This is valid of course, but EMT is not the cause of our problems. These days the railways are micro-managed by the Department for Transport (DfT) and the train service from December was defined not by EMT but by DfT. A 'top secret' document (it was only placed in the public domain in August) known as Service Level Commitment 2 (SLC2) are the DfT timetable instructions to EMT and the problems for Mr McDonald and other commuters travelling to/from Nottingham are defined there in SLC2.

Of the MPs I have lobbied in the greater Nottingham area the only one who has offered an intellectual response is Kenneth Clarke, who alone appears to understand how our railways are now structured. Quite rightly Mr Clarke questions if political lobbying is the right way to determine railway timetables. I agree, but it is New Labour via DfT that has determined the destruction of commuter services east of Nottingham, so the matter is political.

Now let me add here one paragraph from Mr McDonald:

I am desperate for this service to be saved¹ as I have recently switched over from driving and sold my car (at a huge loss) as I saw trains as the way forward - I will be down by several thousand pounds if I have to buy another car. Catching the later train is not an option as I have two young daughters (3 year old and 1 year old) who I hardly see during the week as it is. I work on NG2 Business Park in Nottingham from 9-5:30 so getting to the station by 5:33 is not going to be possible.

David Cameron is putting forward the Conservative 'green' agenda and investment in rail. Is there not huge political advantage in grasping the commuter rail fiasco east of Nottingham orchestrated by New Labour and supporting Mr McDonald and the rail passengers of Bottesford and Rushcliffe?

Just to add to the debate, the following was prepared to show a Labour councillor the imbalance between Labour and Conservative regions of Nottinghamshire. Simultaneously with the axing of commuter services to the east of Nottingham the Robin Hood Line to the north sees a new Sunday service and a new late train. I have taken a random Robin Hood Line station – Sutton Parkway – and compared it with stations east of Nottingham. 2008 is the current service and 2009 the future service:

Number of Sunday trains to Nottingham	2008	2009	
Sutton Parkway	0	10	Brand new service
Radcliffe	6 ²	1	84% reduction

Time of last train (M-F) to Nottingham	2008	2009	
Sutton Parkway	21:58	22:57	About hour later
Aslockton	22:10	20:02	About 2 hours earlier

Number of Nottingham commuter departures 16:30 to 19:00 M-F to:	2008	2009	
Sutton Parkway	4	4	No change
Radcliffe	4	2	50% reduction

So what are we seeking? There are so many deficiencies with the new timetable that every passenger will take a different view, but I believe the hierarchy reads:

¹ 17:50 Nottingham - Skegness

² Winter service. Summer total is 9 trains = 89% reduction.

- 1) 17:50 Nottingham – Grantham is a key commuter train and that train must call all stations between Nottingham and Grantham (except Elton & Orston).
- 2) To cater for long distance business travel via Grantham, one early train from Nottingham should call all stations (except Elton & Orston). This should be 06:45 Nottingham – Grantham, but due to incompetent timetabling this just misses connections at Grantham. Ideally it would start from Nottingham sufficiently early to call at local stations *and* connect into services on East Coast Main Line.
- 3) For return business travel, the last train from Grantham should call all stations (except Elton & Orston), 21:47 Grantham – Nottingham.
- 4) Many would argue that this should be 2). Some commuters even struggle to catch the 17:50 from Nottingham, especially those working east of Nottingham (e.g. Derby) and 18:45 Nottingham – Grantham should call all stations (except Elton & Orston).

As I explained above, EMT will not take action in isolation. It believes it is correctly fulfilling its contractual obligations with DfT. Any movement on this can only come from DfT instruction.

I trust you will use all your influence to reverse the nonsense of the new timetable east of Nottingham. And by the way, if both DfT and EMT say it is too late now as the new timetable is finalised, I say they are talking through their backsides, as indeed they have done for many months.

Yours sincerely,

David Thornhill
Chair – Nottinghamshire Campaign for Better Transport