

Southport Rail Transport Forum
Ormskirk Preston and Southport
Travellers' Association
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Email: ericwoodcock@gmail.com
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Dr. Richard Lutz
Chief Executive Officer
Deutsche Bahn AG
Stephensonstrasse 1
60326 Frankfurt
Germany

Dear Dr. Lutz,

Southport to Manchester Rail Services

On 8th March we expect to hear that the Southport - Manchester Piccadilly - Manchester Airport direct rail service will be ended in May. This is a service that has been in place for nearly thirty years and which is depended on by hundreds of people every day in Southport and communities west of Wigan and Bolton. If this service is withdrawn it will be a profound loss to the affected communities and cause severe economic damage.

The service is now run by your subsidiary Arriva Rail North (Northern), and this change was proposed when Northern took over the local rail franchise in 2016.

A vigorous campaign to avoid this loss has been run since. It has been led by our two passenger groups with tremendous support from the five Members of Parliament (MPs) whose constituencies border the route and the solid endorsement of local councils and transport authorities including Liverpool City Region. In January Chris Grayling MP, the Secretary of State for Transport, came to Southport and recognised the seriousness of the situation for himself.

We have produced a great deal of evidence to prove the social and economic importance of this service and its commercial value to Northern. Constructive discussions were held to find a way to retain the route but Northern abandoned these last September, even though the Rail Minister had directed them to develop a business plan with ourselves for maintaining the service.

We also have grave concerns about forcing passengers to change trains at Salford Crescent (a completely unsuitable station) or worse, change stations at Wigan. As well as worries about the safety and well-being of large numbers of people, neither option will meet the needs of disabled travellers. Any incidents would reflect very badly on Northern's reputation.

The only concession offered (which we are no longer certain to get) was a couple of direct commuter trains which will be of very limited benefit. This would provide no mitigation of the loss of direct connection with mainline services at Manchester Piccadilly to and from all points in the country and with the Airport.

Northern was strongly criticised by Transport Focus for its lack of meaningful public consultation over these plans and it clearly considers the retention of a direct service to Piccadilly to be in the best interests of passengers.

With electrification schemes delayed many months there is absolutely no operational necessity to cut this service at this time, and there are a number of practical means to maintain it. For example, our latest survey showed overwhelmingly that passengers would value retention of the direct Piccadilly service over retirement of the old Pacer trains that are the backbone of the current service.

In the absence of engagement from the Northern team, our MPs advised us to construct a business case (summary enclosed) which is currently being evaluated by the Secretary of State.

The Chief Executive of Northern, David Brown, and his Directors appear to be unwilling to speak to our MPs about this matter - even though Northern is tasked with running an essential public service and enjoys a large government subsidy. Neither, we understand, has he or his team responded to calls from the local councils and transport authorities which will be affected by the loss of this service to explain what is planned for this service in May and beyond.

All this reflects badly on Northern, and on Arriva, especially given the undertakings made in the franchise agreement and its public statements, such as this on its web-site: "Our business is our customers. By speaking with them and incorporating their needs into our services we are meeting rising expectations for safe, reliable and good value transport services". A charge of hypocrisy would not be unfair.

We now urge you to insist that David Brown engages properly with our elected representatives and demonstrates an unequivocal commitment to ensuring that Southport and communities west of Wigan and Bolton retain their vital direct rail link with Manchester Piccadilly and the easiest possible access to Manchester Airport throughout every day and evening of the week.

We thank you for your personal attention to this matter and look forward to your reply. We would be prepared to travel to Germany to meet with you directly in view of the UK team's reluctance to engage with ourselves or our elected representatives.

Yours sincerely,

Eric Woodcock
Southport Rail Transport Forum

Alan Fantom
Chair Ormskirk Preston and Southport
Travellers' Association

Copies to:

Damien Moore, MP for Southport
Rosie Cooper, MP for West Lancashire
Lisa Nandy, MP for Wigan
Yvonne Fovargue, MP for Makerfield
Chris Green, MP for Bolton West
Cllr Liam Robinson, Chair Merseytravel
Cllr Gordon Friel, Vice-Chair Merseytravel
Cllr Keith Iddon, Cabinet Transport Lead for Lancashire County Council

Enclosure: Briefing Note: Investment to protect direct rail service between Southport and Manchester Piccadilly