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Dear 

Evening Peak Restrictions and Rolling stock of FCC

Thank you for your letter of 20th November outlining the capacity issues facing First Capital Connect (FCC) that also proposed the Department should identify rolling stock options to increase capacity.

Whilst I do not want to micro-manage the deployment of rolling stock by TOCs and the RoSCOs, I assure you that we are actively considering options for rolling stock that may be released in the short to medium term. This forms part of the Department's rolling stock strategy that I mentioned to you when we met recently. I also want to be clear that the Department is keen to secure debate on the development of options for easing crowding on FCC and other routes.

The rolling stock market is particularly active at present. Soon we will announce the results of the Brighton Mainline consultation, which will inform some rolling stock decisions, so I expect to be in touch shortly after this.

In the meantime, we continue to engage with both FCC and Southern and you will be aware that Southern has agreed to sub-lease one unit to FCC from the start of the winter 2006/07 timetable. This is good news and will strengthen two of the most overcrowded four-car services to eight-cars, one in the morning peak from Bedford and one in the evening peak from Wimbledon. We acknowledge that this does not overcome all of the issues but it is a start. The East Midlands franchise specification includes a new hourly service between London and Kettering with proposed calls at Kettering, Wellingborough, Bedford and Luton. Overall the specification for the East Midlands franchise will enable a significant increase in capacity, in terms of seats moved into and out of London St Pancras, in both the morning and evening peak. The Thameslink project is also a key consideration going forward. So further options to address capacity issues are an active consideration of the Department.

We will continue to discuss the ability to transfer the Class 319s currently on lease with Southern back to FCC. As you know these units are on lease to Southern until the end of their Franchise in December 2009 and whilst the Department does not have any legal or contractual powers to compel Southern to terminate the lease early or to sub-lease the units to FCC, we shall continue to work with them and explore options for their earlier release.

I hope this provides you with more information on our plans on this regard.

Yours sincerely.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Mitchell', is written over the typed name and title.

Mike Mitchell
Director General - Rail