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Dear Secretary of State

South West Trains off peak fare rises

When we met recently - a very useful meeting I felt by the way - I said that I had some concerns about the way some TOCs might behave under the code of practice that had been discussed to follow Saver deregulation.

This week's announcement by SWT has made it even more difficult to feel comfortable about how the TOCs will act in respect of discount walk up fares. In my discussions with them they have made much - as has ATOC - of their keenness to preserve discount walk up fares and their inclination to hold prices rather than raise them. Last year First Capital Connect restricted the availability of cheap day returns, now with SWT's announcement it begins to look as if there is a move towards making the capital an off peak free zone.

This raises a number of issues. First in itself the erosion of the periods of the availability of these fares as well as the discount they carry is a serious detriment to passengers. It makes the railway not just dearer, but less accessible. Second it must have implications for modal shift and I fail to see how it fits in with the green agenda. However, it also is a factor we both need to take into account when assessing the prospects for successful voluntary operation of the saver regime. I think it will be much harder for Passenger Focus to feel it can regard the current proposals from the train companies as workable. And I would be surprised if it enhanced your view of the potential for a successful public launch.

For some time now it has been rumoured that the DfT was aware that SWT had such plans. That information can only make passengers extremely sceptical of the abandonment of regulation. The way in which SWT dealt with this matter has also not helped. Our concerns are set out in the attached sheet.

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I understand that the SWT and FCC fares are unregulated and that the Department's stance is that it cannot be responsible for them. However, I do not think the Department should stand by and allow this shift towards a dearer and less affordable railway. Can you find a way to discourage further rises and restrictions by these companies and indeed others? It is rumoured Southern may be next.

Colin Foxall CBE
Chairman

Enc.