

August 2012

For many years Southeastern commuters faced increases higher than the rest of the Country thanks to the formula put in place by the previous Government. This formula set fare increases for rail users across Kent at RPI plus 3% compared to the plus 1% that other users faced. My colleague Mark Reckless and I have both campaigned against the unfairness of the increases on Southeastern users and were therefore pleased that last year users faced a RPI plus 1% increase, along with the rest of England. It was still a tough increase, especially as improvements in services have never been proportionate to fare rises, but finally there was parity.

However it is no secret that we both find it incredibly disappointing and frustrating that the Treasury has reverted back to the plus 3 formula which will hit our rail using constituents hard when it comes into effect in January.

There is an assumption that those living in the South East are rich. The reality is that most people who commute into the City are not taking home eye watering salaries and are therefore unable to accommodate an increase of hundreds of pounds for their train fare.

I already know of constituents who have switched to alternative means of travel into London including using the coaches and I expect that many more will do so in the future. It takes longer and is having an impact on family life, but it is cheaper.

Household budgets are being squeezed as the Coalition tries to reduce the huge deficit left to us by the last Government. Most understand that some difficult decisions are being made but both Mark and I believe that a plus 3% increase would do more harm than good and have urged the Government to cap any increase at plus 1% if we want to ensure that people can afford to still travel to work or use the trains.

Along with other MPs, I've written to Ministers and Southeastern urging them to apply a minimum increase for those using the trains from my constituency. This is a battle that won't seem to go away, but it is one that we won't give up on.