

Paul Warne
Democratic Services Officer
St Albans City & District Council
District Council Offices
St Peter's Street
St Albans AL1 3JE

23 February 2012

Dear Mr Warne

Thank you for your letter dated 1 February to which I am pleased to respond.

1. The Committee asked FCC to reconsider the current car park charges at St Albans City and Harpenden stations, particularly in the light of the charges levied by the District Council

First Capital Connect's charges at St Albans and Harpenden stations as from 2 January 2012 are shown below:

Description	2012	2011	% change	2012 cost per day (5 day week)
Peak Daily	£7.00	£6.80	2.9%	£7.00
Weekly	£31.00	£30.00	3.3%	£6.20
Monthly	£120.00	£115.00	4.3%	£5.54
Quarterly	£320.00	£315.00	1.6%	£4.92
Annual	£1,050.00	£1,025.00	2.4%	£4.04
Premier	£1,175.00	£1,125.00	4.4%	£4.52
Off-peak after 1000 Monday – Friday until 0200 the following day	£3.00	£3.00	0.0%	No Change
Off-peak after 1700 Monday – Friday until 0200 the following day	£2.00	£2.00	0.0%	No change
Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays	£2.00	£2.00	0.0%	No change

Our charges for off-peak and weekends have been frozen for several years and therefore represent particularly good value for money. The percentage increases on those tariffs raised in January this year were well below the November 2011 RPI rate of 5.2%, the latest available at that time.

The current charges made to use St Albans City and District Council car parks are:

Description	2012
Daily	£8.50
Weekly Season	£28.00
Quarterly Season	£235.00
Annual Season	£925.00
Annual Premier Parking Season	£1,100.00

When setting the charges for FCC car parks, the charges made in nearby town centre car parks are always taken into account, as are supply and demand and the long term charge that we pay to our landlord, Network Rail.

The charges for our car parks at St Albans and Harpenden station are not dissimilar to those made by the District Council.

2. Members of the Committee also asked that further information be provided on accessibility issues for passengers using wheelchairs

We recognise the needs and concerns of disabled passengers when using public transport and our goal is to provide a train and station network that is as accessible as possible.

At St Albans, disabled passengers requiring a ramp to access the train will be assisted by a member of staff using a portable ramp. It is highly recommended that passengers book assistance 24 hours in advance to ensure that both staff and the necessary equipment can be made available. Once the new footbridge with lifts to all platforms has been installed and commissioned at Harpenden, a similar service will be available there.

On our older Class 319 trains, there are no restrictions on the number of wheelchairs that can be carried. Passengers in wheelchairs are normally boarded through the front set of doors immediately behind the driver and two wheelchairs can be accommodated in this area. Up to two additional wheelchairs would be boarded through the rear set of doors in that carriage.

On our newer Class 377 Electrostar trains, each four-car unit has two dedicated wheelchair spaces adjacent to the wheelchair accessible toilets. These trains were built to comply with the DfT Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 1998 (RVAR).

3. FCC was also asked by the Committee to consider further its compensation scheme in respect of those passengers who are affected during severe disruption to train services, and in particular, what information should be provided to customers about the criteria used in times of exceptional disruption.

At the meeting on 26 January we acknowledged that we could have been more transparent in the way in which compensation was calculated and paid following the major disruption that took place on 26 May last year. In the event that an incident occurs in the future in which the level of compensation judged to be equitable is outside the scope of the Delay Repay scheme, we will make sure that the information regarding the criteria used is properly communicated.

4. Members of the Committee also asked that further information be provided on ... the percentage increase in passenger numbers using the Thameslink route and what that means in terms of income to FCC; and the level of income derived from St Albans City station car parks.

When we took over the franchise in April 2006 there were tremendous capacity issues and since then we have invested heavily in addressing this, adding 47% more trains to our Thameslink route fleet (that's 36 more). We now have over 14,500 more seats in the morning and evening peaks combined on the entire Thameslink route.

At the same time there has been industry wide growth – the Office of Rail Regulation (<http://www.rail-reg.gov.uk/upload/pdf/nrt-yearbook-2010-11.pdf>, page 16) shows passenger growth from 769m a year in 2006/7 to 918m a year for London and the SouthEast (London-only figures are available but only to 2009/10; these are on page 120).

We are experiencing growth on the Thameslink route, which is encouraging in the light of the current economic climate. The Thameslink Programme is all about delivering growth in the future through increased infrastructure and rolling stock capacity. We are entering a closed period as the Department for Transport re-lets the franchise and cannot therefore disclose revenue information.

I hope that, at the next meeting of the Committee in September, we will be able to demonstrate further progress in our performance and in our communications with passengers.

Yours sincerely



Neal Lawson
Managing Director