



email : chair@weardownsouth.com

9th February 2014

Mr. R McClean
Managing Director
Grand Central Railway Company Limited,
River House, 17 Museum Street,
York, YO1 7DJ

Dear Mr. McClean

I refer to my letter of 11th October 2013 when I requested you to review your relationship with the Sunderland AFC Supporters Association (London & Southern England Branch) and to urgently resume communications with us regarding our continued patronage of your service, and your subsequent response to that letter.

In that response you advised us that you could no longer continue our previous preferential travel rate, and rather than grant our request to a meeting, or even opening a dialogue with an account manager, you advised us to call your call centre number, and buy tickets. This despite being one of your biggest customers over recent years, and in fact, as I had pointed out in my letter, one of your earliest and most passionate supporters since your inaugural journey in 2007.

Despite our disappointment at your response, which we feel did not address any of our points at all, and despite as detailed in our letter it is not possible to book that far in advance for football fixtures, we took your advice and tried to book our group for a trip. We did speak to a very pleasant and helpful gentleman in your Chiltern office (Martin) who found us tickets for a whole £2 saving per person – despite us requesting a quote for 30 people. Unfortunately Martin also told us that if we did want to change the tickets, this would cost us £10 per ticket – and we feel a £300 change fee is rather over the top even for a branch the size of ours, given the likelihood that our travel arrangements are likely to change with fixtures.

Despite the difficulty in running trips using your advice, and the lack of any real financial benefit, we still decided to give it a try. However due to the likelihood of changing fixtures, and the inability to provide our members with a price before booking, we decided to fix the price we charge our members and subsidise any difference. Even at this rate due to the lack of flexibility we did not receive enough requests to qualify for a group booking. Going from 40 customers every fortnight to practically none is, you would certainly agree, not a great outcome for Grand Central or our branch.

Now since that conversation, I note with pleasure that you are now enjoying the patronage of many other Sunderland fans the weekend of March 2nd, and as I understand the Grand Central trains that weekend are already fully booked and more trains have now been put on. I'm obviously delighted that Grand Central as a Sunderland company are sharing in the delights of a Wembley weekend, and making a profit from the thousands of fans travelling down that weekend.

With this in mind, I wonder whether you would revisit our request to open up a dialogue with you, or someone at your organisation, simply for us to try and find a way to make the booking process work for us. For 40 people travelling every week, we'd like to hope that you at least have a discussion with us, a meeting with an account manager perhaps, to see if we can help each other.

At present there is no financial incentive to travel with Grand Central, say over East Coast, certainly as a group since there is no difference in cost. However we really would like to keep the relationship going, given our history and would really welcome the chance to simply speak to someone in your company to discuss our situation. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

(Helen Wright)
Branch Chair

Cc: David Martin, Chief Executive, Arriva

cc: Chris Waters, SAFC Supporter Liaison Officer

cc: Martin Hibbert, Finance Director, Arriva