



Department
for Transport

From the Secretary of State
The Rt. Hon. Chris Grayling

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Dear Colleague,

Northern Performance

I am writing to you concerning the wholly unsatisfactory levels of disruption on rail services following the huge timetable change last week.

I am frustrated that what should have been good news for passengers, with the introduction of new services, new routes and expanded capacity has had such a poor start.

The industry collectively has failed the passengers it serves. A combination of delayed Network Rail infrastructure works and reduced planning time meant that the new timetable was finalised much too late to permit adequate logistical planning for the timetable changes.

Network Rail's failure to deliver the electrification to Bolton and Preston in time for the new timetable had already caused severe operational planning issues, as the introduction of new electric trains has had to wait, leaving a shortage of trains to cover the increased number of services originally planned for the timetable change. The reduced time to plan a modified timetable has made this situation much worse. A significant number of Northern's services have had to be changed at very short notice leaving no time to resolve train scheduling issues which have arisen,

Network Rail's System Operator division is responsible for taking all planned timetables and making sure that the plans for the whole network are workable and do not create conflicts between different types of service. Because this happened so late in the process, it has caused chaos for the train companies. A change on this scale requires reworking of train crew schedules, train deployment and a whole range of other complex issues that affect the running of what is a very congested service. The current industrial action has also exacerbated the situation.

We were aware that there might be some disruption in the early days of any new timetable change of this size, but the scale of the problem has far outstripped any expectation. I am determined both that the problems are dealt with as quickly as possible, and that this is not repeated in the future.

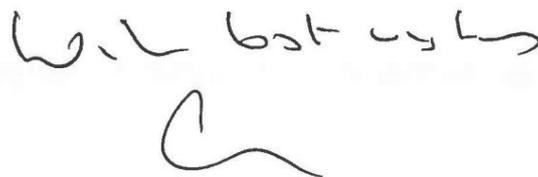
This franchise is managed by the Rail North Partnership in Leeds on behalf of the Department for Transport and Transport for the North - representing the leaders of different local authorities in the North. We have been in regular contact with the leadership of TfN as well as Network Rail and Northern Rail in the last few days, and Jo Johnson and I are continuing to monitor the situation closely. We have insisted that TfN and the two rail organisations put whatever resource they need to into resolving the situation, and in making sure that there is proper leadership of the recovery effort.

We will be holding a meeting for affected colleagues as soon as the recess is over, when I hope we will be able to give you more encouraging news about the recovery effort. I have also asked both Northern and Network Rail to organise a briefing meeting for MPs next week so they can explain the detail of what has gone wrong and how it is being solved.

I am also clear that the way timetabling is done has to change. It is obvious that Network Rail's current timetabling system simply cannot cope with the volume of work that it has to complete, and I have asked both the current leadership and the incoming Chief Executive, Andrew Haines, to ensure that this issue is addressed as a priority. Network Rail's current performance on this is simply unacceptable.

Until this has been done, I will insist on a gradual approach wherever possible to timetable change and not the significant changes we have seen this month.

Once these problems are resolved, we will have a much better service for passengers. That is small comfort to them when things are not working as they should, but once we are through this difficult period we will have a better railway – particularly once all the new trains start to arrive later this year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W.L. best us" with a flourish underneath.

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT