

Date: 19 December 2023

**Rt Hon Mark Harper MP**

Secretary of State for Transport  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

*Sent by email*

**Lord McLoughlin**

Transport for the North Chair

**Mayor Andy Burnham**

Rail North Committee Chair

Transport for the North  
Level 6, Town Hall Extension  
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Dear Secretary of State,

**Re: Avanti West Coast: Unacceptable Performance**

At its meeting held in Manchester on 14 December, the TfN Board was unanimous in condemning the current performance of Avanti West Coast as being totally unacceptable.

Whilst the Board understood that there will be occasions where performance is affected by external factors, it is clear that in the case of Avanti West Coast, there are more fundamental issues at play. The underlying operational resilience of Avanti West Coast appears to be fundamentally flawed in a way that the North has previously observed on the TransPennine Express contract. The growth in reactionary delays on the West Coast is further evidence of this lack of operational resilience.

The deterioration of performance is all the more unacceptable given that it has become the new norm on the West Coast in the period prior to Christmas. Poor performance on this scale is impacting on the economy of the North as well as the well-being of its residents who are dependent upon Avanti West Coast services.

The TfN Board was clear: there is an urgent and pressing need for the Avanti West Coast operation to be subjected to a critical review by the Department as a matter of priority. This review should be required to identify and secure immediate action that restores performance to an acceptable level: in this the Department should actively consider all available options.

The Board was equally clear that because the performance level is so unacceptable, it is essential to ensure that all seats on Avanti West Coast services are available for use at all times. In this context TfN advises that until such time as performance is restored to an acceptable level, all trains should run with First Class accommodation declassified: the cost of this being borne by the operator at no cost to the public purse.

We know that a key driver of the Government's reforms for the railway sector is improving the customer experience. It is clear to all, that the Avanti West Coast



operations is failing to meet a minimum acceptable standard and that this needs to addressed as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,



Lord McLoughlin CH  
Chairman, Transport for the North



Mayor Andy Burnham  
Rail North Committee Chair