

Date: Wednesday 30 October 2024

Rt. Hon Rachel Reeves MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer

Sent by email:

Action.Chancellors@hmtreasury.gov.uk

cc.

Rt. Hon Louise Haigh MP, Secretary of State
for Transport
Laura Shoaf, Chair of Shadow Great British
Railways

Andy Burnham
Chair, Rail North Committee
Transport for the North
Level 6, Town Hall Extension
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Dear Chancellor,

Northern Trains Performance

We share the Government's ambitions for sustainable economic growth and reducing inequalities, and we know efficient and reliable public transport is a critical enabler for us.

Unfortunately, in the North of England, Northern Trains' performance is at a level that is seriously hindering our shared ambitions. Transport for the North's (TfN) Rail North Committee called an exceptional meeting earlier today to discuss performance because it has reached unacceptable levels, impacting people's lives and businesses across our region.

Frequent multiple cancellations are occurring during the working week and 'Do Not Travel' notices are now regularly being issued in parts of the North on Sundays. Our committee members are hearing first-hand how this is affecting people getting to work and the knock-on effects for our economic centres, with some people abandoning Sunday travel by rail altogether, many switching to car use.

Through the Rail North Committee, we are holding Northern to account for the areas for which they are responsible and are pressing for an acceptable remediation plan that addresses not only the short-term challenges, but enables the modernisation needed to give the North a reliable and stable train service. This includes working harder to improve public communications (including earlier notice of which services are operating), better passenger assistance, arranging blanket ticket acceptance immediately with other operators (and on alternative routes) and replacement buses where there is no rail alternative. This becomes all the more pressing as we approach the festive period, when the ability to travel to be with family and friends and participate in events, such as our Christmas markets, will be important.

The Committee will be scrutinising their plan and seeking assurance that Northern is addressing the points we raised today. When the Committee meets again on 20 November 2024, we would welcome the Government's full support in implementing the necessary actions.

The Committee heard from Northern that some solutions which could make the biggest short-term impact on performance require Government support: a mandate to agree revised Rest Day Working rates with drivers and a mandate to unlock the issue where Sundays are voluntary for conductors as part of historic Terms and Conditions. We appreciate that these mandates are progressing through Government approvals, but it is clear we need urgent intervention on behalf of passengers and businesses in the North, particularly in the run-up to Christmas where an unacceptable risk to economic activity and events has been identified.

We will continue to work with Northern Trains to secure the improvements needed within their control but would like your commitment to urgent action on the two areas highlighted that could make an immediate difference, Rest Day Working and resolving Sunday arrangements.

We would be happy to provide any further information to your officials to enable resolution of these matters as quickly as possible, so the North's rail network can enable our ambitions for sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

We know that the Transport Secretary recently met with Northern and are grateful for their support in trying to resolve these matters. We are therefore copying this letter to them to keep them updated on the outcome of our meeting this morning.

Yours sincerely,



Andy Burnham
Chair, Rail North Committee
Transport for the North