



Department
for Transport

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From the Parliamentary
Under Secretary of State
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Dear Damian

Thank you for your letter of 14 July to Chris Grayling, regarding the views of Stockport Council about guards on trains on Northern services. I am replying as the Minister responsible for rail issues.

Let me start by reassuring you that, the Secretary of State and I take the issues of passenger safety, security and accessibility extremely seriously.

Firstly, in respect of operational safety, Driver Controlled Operation has been operating safely and successfully across the UK for over 30 years. The UK's independent rail regulator, the Office of Rail and Road¹, has also confirmed it is safe to run trains this way. More than half of all trains on the rail network operate with drivers in full control of the doors, and where this has led to a change in the role of the guard it has allowed staff to spend more time, not less, with passengers offering information and assistance.

With regard to wider passenger safety and security, the Department is committed to reducing crime, anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime wherever it occurs in the transport system. The transport industry, local authorities, the police and others are investing in and undertaking initiatives to improve the personal security of public transport passengers and staff and to keep our public transport systems as low crime environments. For rail in particular, we continue to work closely with the British Transport Police (BTP) to achieve higher levels of personal security for people using the network, including supporting the Secure Stations Scheme. We recognise the importance of staff in giving reassurance and assistance to passengers. If passengers are uncomfortable, they can contact staff using existing help points on the train, the help points on the platform or contact the police / BTP directly if they have concerns.

¹ www.orr.gov.uk/rail/health-and-safety/health-and-safety-strategy/driver-controlled-operation-dco

Specifically in the case of Northern, their plans for the future of rail travel in the North build on what passengers have asked for, and are focused on visible and available staff on trains and at stations to look after customers. Fifty five new Travel Safe Officers have been in place since September 2016 - a 150% increase in employees dedicated to the personal security and safety of customers. They provide a reassuring presence, especially in the evenings and at weekends, on stations and trains across the network.

In respect of accessibility, the Department's aim is to make services more accessible, not less. There are over twelve million people in the United Kingdom with some form of disability or access requirement and we are determined that they should be able to use the transport system, particularly trains, with confidence and ease. A clear programme is in place to ensure Northern's services are accessible for those with reduced mobility and by 1 January 2020 every carriage of every Northern train will be fully accessible.

As part of their license to operate each train operating company is required to have a Disabled Persons' Protection Policy in place. This sets out the level of services and facilities that elderly and disabled passengers can expect, how to get staff assistance and how to get help if things do go wrong. Each operator is also required to participate in the Passenger Assist² system which allows passengers to book staff assistance when they require it. By April 2018, passengers using this service on Northern, will only have to give two hours' notice when booking, rather than the previous 24 hours' notice.

Improving accessibility at rail stations is also a very important part of the whole journey experience. This is why we are currently continuing our Access for All programme³, which is delivering step-free routes at stations across Britain. Launched in 2006, the £390m programme completed 150 stations against the target of 125 in the original programme. To build on this success a further £160m was added to the programme to extend it from its scheduled close in 2015 until 2019. The Northern franchise will also benefit from two new stations with the announcement of Warrington West and Peterlee as winners under the New Stations Fund 2 programme. These new stations will be accessible with step free access.

Finally, in regard to your concerns about disputes, industrial relations are a matter for Northern and the unions. Northern have guaranteed that any changes will be carried out in full consultation with staff, unions, passengers and local stakeholders and it is disappointing that the RMT have been holding industrial action before Northern Rail has consulted staff on the

² www.nationalrail.co.uk/stations_destinations/disabled_passengers.aspx

³ www.networkrail.co.uk/communities/passengers/station-improvements/access-for-all/

modernisation programme. We urge the RMT to work with Northern on these improvements for passengers.

Thank you again for your letter. I hope this reassures you and the Members of Stockport Council about Northern's modernisation plans.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'pp. Paul Maynard', with a horizontal line under the name 'Paul'.

PAUL MAYNARD

(Signed by Private Secretary to avoid delay)

