



Department
for Transport

From the Secretary of State
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Dear Colleague,

As you will be aware the RMT union have called strike action starting on 8 November on five rail companies, namely Southern, South Western Railway, Greater Anglia, Merseyrail and Arriva North. Their dispute is about the role of the guard on trains.

The RMT's action is aimed at deliberately disrupting passengers. I want to assure you that the RMT's dispute is not about jobs: affected staff have been offered cast iron guarantees by the train companies involved. This dispute is not about money: affected staff have also been offered pay guarantees. And this dispute is not about safety: driver controlled trains have been ruled as safe by the regulator, and have been operating safely on some of the busiest parts of the rail network for 30 years.

What the RMT is insisting on is that trains full of passengers, which are perfectly capable of operating safely, should be cancelled just because a second staff member, a guard or conductor, is taken ill or delayed on an inbound train.

I met with the RMT during the summer to urge them to reconsider this position. I have called on them, consistently and regularly, to return to talks and work with operators to resolve this dispute in the best interests of passengers. Strikes are not the action of a pro-passenger union.

Please reassure your constituents that I will be taking every step to ensure that as many people as possible can use the railway to get to work, school and important appointments on the RMT's strike days. Contingency planning is well underway and I will write to you with a fuller outline of plans closer to 8 November. However, I would like to touch on how RMT strikes undermine the benefits train operators are trying to deliver for passengers and how strikes ignore the jobs and pay guarantees that staff have been offered.

This will be the first strike on **South Western Railway**, and the RMT have indicated it will run for 48 hours unless an agreement can be reached with the operator. My firm opinion is that the RMT will be subjecting passengers to deliberate and needless disruption. I would like to make you aware that South Western Railway have been very clear that no staff member will lose their job or any pay. They plan to keep a second member of staff on-board their trains and indeed will be hiring more drivers and guards. South Western Railway is overseeing a £1.2 billion investment that will improve journeys for millions of train passengers, including 22,000 extra seats into London Waterloo each morning peak and 30,000 extra seats out of Waterloo each evening peak and a fleet of 90 new trains.

For my colleagues with passengers who use the **Northern** network, you will be aware that Northern is at an early stage of modernising services to deliver the improvements passengers have asked for, including new trains and 2,000 extra services each week. Northern have guaranteed conductor jobs and current pay for the next eight years and management have said they will consult with employees on any changes to the way trains operate. So the RMT's action, even though there are currently no driver controlled trains on any Northern services, is premature and has a major effect on passengers' journeys, as just over 50% of Northern services do not run.

On the **Southern** network, passengers are now entering day 37 and 38 of RMT strike action, despite driver controlled trains operating safely on the route since January 2017. Please rest assured that the RMT's political game is backfiring – as Southern will run more than 90% of planned services during the 48-hour strike. We are also pleased that the executive of ASLEF, the main drivers' union, has reached an agreement with GTR on driver controlled operation, and results of the ASLEF members' vote is expected on 8 November.

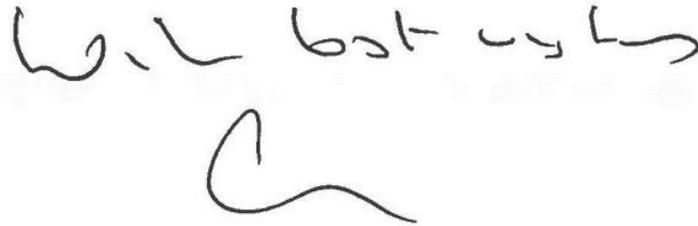
My colleagues with passengers who travel on **Greater Anglia** will be pleased to hear that the operator will run a normal service for passengers during the 48 hour strike. The RMT are protesting against Greater Anglia's plans to deliver 1000 new carriages for passengers by 2020, in line with what customers have asked for. These new trains will be fitted with the latest modern technology, allowing drivers to operate the doors, which frees up conductors for more customer-facing duties, which passengers tell us they want. I would also like to reassure you that guards on Greater Anglia have been offered an eight year job guarantee.

As you will be aware, **Merseyrail** is a devolved network, run by Merseytravel.

The RMT is playing a political game, and I am disappointed that some of your constituents who travel by rail will suffer in the process. Its leadership has been very clear that they are seeking to engineer a national rail strike designed to launch a political challenge to the government.

The RMT's dispute is not about jobs and no-one is losing any pay. This is not about safety, as the independent regulator has ruled that driver-controlled trains are safe. I am calling on the RMT to return to talks and work with operators to resolve this dispute and give passengers the efficient and reliable rail service they deserve.

I will keep you updated with contingency information that may be helpful to your constituents.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. L. best us L" on the top line and a stylized flourish on the bottom line.

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT