



WILLIAM WRAGG MP
Member of Parliament for Hazel Grove Constituency
13 Stockport Road, Marple, Stockport, SK6 6BD

Mr David Brown
Managing Director
Northern Rail Ltd
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13th June 2018

Dear Mr Brown,

As you are doubtless aware the recent changes to the Northern Rail timetable has caused significant disruption across the network and is having an unacceptable impact on passengers. I share the anger of my constituents who are some of those passengers. They have been seriously let down by the new service and I write to urge you to take all necessary steps to urgently improve the situation.

There are a number of problematical elements to the Northern's new timetable, but in my own local area the most pressing one is the glaring 45 minute gap in morning peak services which people rely on. This is owing to the removal of the two most popular commuter services - the 7.50 and the 8.01am from Hazel Grove station into Manchester Piccadilly, which also called at Woodsmoor and Davenport stations. This has meant that these well used commuter stations have a 45 minute gap in trains to Manchester from around 7.30am until around 8.20am and then no services again until after 9am. In addition some evening services out of Manchester have been cut or brought forward, for example the last train back from Manchester to Bredbury, Romiley, Marple, Strines, and other stations on the New Mills Line, is now at 21.45, meaning people wanting to spend an evening in Manchester have to cut it short.

It has left hundreds of local commuters unable to get into Manchester for work on time: forced to either arrive much too early or much too late. It has disrupted pupils being able to get to schools, as well as having a significant effect on parents having to co-ordinate dropping off their children in the morning, sometimes to multiple schools and nurseries. When passengers are able to get on trains they are faced with huge overcrowding issues, with many unable to get seats, and some trains are now 2 car when they used to be 4 car. It also forcing some commuters to abandon rail and to travel by car instead, adding to the already far too congested local roads. I am also concerned that the timetable chaos is overshadowing what should have been welcome improvements involving more services overall and upgrades to rolling stock, such as the replacement of the pacer trains.

In April I met with Northern Rail's regional director to raise concerns about the draft timetable. Over the past few weeks, since the introduction of the timetable, I have raised in Parliament the problems of the new timetable and the unacceptable impact it is having on passengers on

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three separate occasions. I have held multiple meetings with the Transport Secretary, the Rail Minister, and a joint meeting with representatives of both Network Rail and Northern Rail.

I am aware the timetable change was implemented to enable Northern Rail to run extra services as it undergoes the biggest modernisation programme in its history. I am also aware that the key issue behind the disruption is Network Rail's failure to deliver electrification on part of the network (Manchester to Bolton) in time for the timetable change. This resulted in a number of knock on effects including a shortage of trains to cover the increased number of services, timetable changes also had to be made late in the day, so there was less time than required for the logistical planning; other train operators 'got-in first' with their timetable bids and took the most popular platform slots at busy Manchester stations, leaving Northern at the back of the queue.

I understand that both your colleagues and Government Ministers have placed a great bulk of the blame of this perfect storm of problems at the door of Network Rail. Whilst it is true the root causes lie with the engineering delays, questions must also be asked about why Northern Rail assumed they could cope, and did not make contingency plans for infrastructure delays, and why problems were allowed to escalate to the present levels. I would be grateful if you could address my questions below:

- Why wasn't Northern sufficiently prepared to deliver timetable changes of this scale, despite assurances to the contrary
- Do you feel you put too much faith in Network Rail's programme of delivery?
- Did you have contingency timetable plans for possible delays to engineering works? If not, why not?
- Why did you not flag problems in your timetable bid to Transport for the North and/or Government or ask for help sooner?

I am pleased that as a result of local lobbying from the Friends of Rose Hill Station, and my meeting with your regional director, that Northern Rail agreed to the reinstatement of an evening peak time service from Manchester Piccadilly to Rose Hill Marple, also serving Woodley and Romiley, which had been planned to be cut.

However, I am deeply concerned that the current indication is that the worst gaps in morning service on the Buxton line into Manchester will not be fixed until the next major timetable update in December, leaving passengers faced with a whole summer of disruption.

I write to you today therefore to seek answers to these further questions and to urge you to take urgent action to improve the situation for passengers:

- Will you implement an action plan to get more trains running as quickly as possible?



- What actions are you taking to improve driver rostering, rapidly increasing driver training on more routes, and can this be done faster?
- Can you ensure the re-instatement of 4 car trains instead of 2 car trains wherever and whenever possible on all lines serving my constituents to at reduce the overcrowding?
- Will you improve the compensation scheme for passengers, to ensure they are properly compensated for delays and cancellations of services, including season ticket and travel card holders?
- Will you co-operate fully with the Government's inquiry into the preparation processes and failures leading up to the implementation of the recent timetable change? This will mean those responsible can be held fully to account and that there are no repeats of current problems as we prepare for the next timetable change in December this year.

I look forward to your urgent response. As I have said before, the current situation is unacceptable. I am determined to keep working constructively with all concerned to get the urgent improvements to rail services that my constituents deserve.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "William Wragg".

William Wragg MP

Member of Parliament for the Hazel Grove Constituency