Dear Jason,

Transpennine electrification and the East Coast Main Line

At the recent Transport Select Committee evidence session on 9th June 2014 you asked me about the electrification of the Transpennine route, and performance on the East Coast Main Line. I thought it might be useful to write to provide you with more information.

Transpennine electrification

1.1 We are due to complete the single option design phase of Transpennine electrification by March 2015. The designs will help inform our delivery programme, with the aim of commissioning the electrification of the Transpennine corridor by late 2018. The timescales for delivering this project reflect the technical challenges and scale of the undertaking. The project will require the design and construction of multiple National Grid electricity supply points, more than 15 electrical sub-stations for power distribution along with the construction of approx 5000 overhead line masts and foundations. In addition we have identified more than 120 structures requiring alteration.

1.2 Many of these modifications involve road bridges, which need to be co-ordinated with the highways and planning departments of local authorities, especially where temporary road closures and diversions are involved. This is a challenging project that needs to be efficiently delivered in an integrated manner, with the support of train operators, so that the railway continues to deliver a reliable service to our customers every day.

East Coast Main Line performance

2.1 We are working hard with East Coast and other operators on the line to improve performance but I am sorry that your family suffered a series of poor journeys.

2.2 Regrettably, severe weather has caused significant challenge. In addition, fatalities and suicides can cause cancellations and overcrowding - between June and September 2013 there were 25 suicides on the LNE & EM Route. We do accept that the performance of Network Rail’s electrification system used by East Coast’s services was a significant cause of delays and cancellations to East Coast services with 7,614 minutes of delay and 88 full and part cancellations.
2.3 We are taking extensive steps to reduce delays caused by severe weather and have targeted investment to reduce flooding across the route by improving drainage at known flooding hotspots and using technology to remotely monitor water levels. Work is also underway to improve the reliability of the electrification system – we are investing £58.9m on this over Control Period 5, which runs from 2014-19. This will allow significant parts of the electrification system, some of which date back to the 1970s, to be replaced including installation of a different support system for the overhead wires at key locations.

2.4 In addition, unaffected lines will be rapidly reopened if there has been a failure of the wires on an adjacent line, which will reduce delays and cancellations. We have also made changes to our front line teams to improve our responsiveness and management of incidents and implementing tactical command arrangements in the event of incidents.

2.5 The investment we have made is reflected in the recent excellent performance of East Coast’s services, with the industry Public Performance Measure (PPM) target having been exceeded in 2014-15 Period 1 by 6.2%, in Period 2 by 5.3% and in Period 3 by 3.6%. In 2014-15 Period 1 and 2014/15 Period 3 so far the level of cancelled and significant late trains was 2.7% and 2.9% respectively.

If you require any more information on any of the subjects mentioned above, please let me know.

Yours sincerely

Mark Carne
Chief Executive

Cc. Louise Ellman MP, Chair, Transport Select Committee
Gordon Clarke, Clerk, Transport Select Committee