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for Transport

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From the Secretary of State  
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Thank you for your email of 2 July, enclosing correspondence from your constituent, Stephen Rose, Co-chair of the Letchworth Rail Users Group, about disruption to Govia Thameslink Railway's (GTR's) Great Northern services.

I was deeply concerned to read of the disruption that your constituents are experiencing on their journeys from Letchworth, Royston and the Cambridgeshire village stations following the introduction of the new timetable. I fully appreciate the impact that this disruption has had on commuters, families and businesses and I understand how important the stopping service is to passengers travelling from these stations.

I acknowledge that over the past weeks passengers on GTR's Great Northern services have faced totally unsatisfactory levels of service, and I apologise to passengers that have experienced and are experiencing disruption.

Both the Minister of State and I are continuing to monitor the situation very closely and my Department's overriding priority is to restore the reliability of service across the network. We are taking action to resolve the problems as quickly as possible, to compensate passengers appropriately, and to learn the lessons that will prevent this happening again in the future.

In regard to Mr Rose's point on stopping services, I should explain that the Department is aware of the long gaps in service on the Cambridge line. Mr Rose may be pleased to know that in the interim timetable scheduled to run from 15 July, there will be stopping services leaving Cambridge at 05:59, 06:28, 07:27, 07:57 and 08:25. This provides commuters from the village stations with a half hourly service in the peaks, except between 06:28 and 07:27.

In the evening peak in the interim timetable, there is a half hourly service to the village stations apart from an hour long gap between the 17:21 and 18:21 departures from King's Cross. Both of the services that have been removed are high peak services which I am pleased that GTR plan to prioritise reinstating once the service has stabilised.

Please be assured that since the introduction of the May timetable, my Department and the industry have been working round the clock to restore the reliability of the service across the network. Hour by hour, my officials are in contact with GTR and Network Rail to work to improve the service to passengers.

I am deeply frustrated that what should have been a highly beneficial development for passengers, with the introduction of new services, new routes and expanded capacity, has had such a poor start.

This was the most significant timetable recast in a generation - designing a robust, well-integrated timetable that works for the majority of passengers is highly complex and timetabling practitioners have worked hard for more than a year on the challenges involved. We were aware that there may be some disruption in the early days of any new timetable change of this size, however, the scale of the problem has far outstripped any expectation. The Department is determined that this is not repeated in the future.

Network Rail was far too late in finalising planned timetable changes and this must not happen again. GTR was not sufficiently prepared to manage a timetable change of this scale either. The rail industry has collectively failed to deliver for the passengers it serves.

The process of introducing the new timetable was overseen for the last two years by an Industry Readiness Board, made up of Network Rail, independent rail regulator the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and the train operating companies and an Independent Assurance Panel. Both of these groups have told me that they had been given no information to suggest that the new timetable should not be implemented as planned – albeit with some likely early issues as the timetable bedded down.

Indeed as few as three weeks before the timetable was to be implemented, GTR itself assured me personally that it was ready to implement the changes. Clearly this was wrong, and it is totally unacceptable.

The interim timetable from 15 July will allow GTR to slowly build up services to the new full timetable. In the meantime, Great Northern have declassified first class on services, to help ease overcrowding on the network. This arrangement began on 29 June 2018 and continues until 15 July 2018 when a temporary timetable will make services more reliable for passengers. Details of the new interim timetable were published on Friday 6 July.

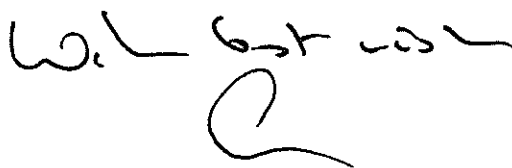
An inquiry by the ORR into the May timetable implementation is now underway. The inquiry will consider why the industry as a whole failed to produce and implement an effective timetable. Its findings will be shared as early as possible with me and the rail industry, so that lessons can be learnt in advance of future major timetable changes. The ORR aims to publish the final report by the end of the year. In the future, the Department will insist on a gradual approach to timetable change wherever possible and not the significant changes that we have seen this past month.

Passengers are encouraged to apply to GTR for Delay Repay compensation for affected journeys. As you may be aware, on 4 July, GTR announced a special compensation scheme for Great Northern passengers. The scheme will be designed to refund season ticket holders up to one month where they have suffered severe disruption and up to one week where disruption to services has been moderate.

Further details of the scheme, the passenger categories and stations eligible for compensation will be set out by GTR this week. We expect the scheme to open for claims in the coming weeks for timetable disruption suffered between 20 May 2018 and 28 July 2018.

The scheme will work in a similar fashion to last year's Southern compensation scheme, and GTR will be implementing administrative processes that worked well for customers and helped make claiming a refund as easy as possible. When the details of the compensation scheme are public, I have asked GTR to clearly communicate with passengers how they can make their claim and ensure the process is straightforward.

I acknowledge that this is small comfort to Mr Rose when things are not working as they should, but please be assured that I will continue to do everything possible to ensure passengers get the service they deserve.



**Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP**

**SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT**

