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Dear Secretary of State

Saver Fares

During our recent discussions we have received the impression that the Department is now moving towards recommending the removal of saver regulations. As you know we have recognised that the present Saver regime is in need of review and that in all probability there needs to be greater flexibility to meet the growing passenger demand.

Our preference would have been for this to be achieved through arrangements which had sufficient force to give passengers a strong degree of consumer protection. We worked with the industry and the Department to see if some form of industry self regulation or lighter formal regulation could be put in place to protect passenger interests and to prevent the exploitation by the TOCs of their monopoly positions. The train operating companies have discussed proposals with us for various undertakings, which give a measure of protection to passengers although as you know we have reservations about how far they would be effective and importantly how effective they would be seen to be by passengers. Independent research showed low degrees of passenger trust in the TOCs and some scepticism about their price undertakings.

I am not clear exactly how the department envisages removing the existing saver regulations if it decides to do so. I appreciate that part of the package will be certain changes to the ticketing regime and to fare structures, which in general we welcome and think worth having. However I think it would be unacceptable for the saver regulation to be withdrawn without some protection for passengers. We have two concerns; that walk up off peak fares will rise significantly and that a strategy of yield curve pricing will effectively spell the end of the affordable walk up railway. On behalf of passengers I urge you to ensure that if the Department decides to deregulate saver fares it obtains sufficiently strong undertakings to ensure walk up access at reasonable fares is maintained – that some form of backstop regulation is maintained – and that in addition

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the willingness of the TOCs to publish price promises is employed as a visible public commitment by them to the walk up railway.

Kind Regards

Colin Foxall
Chairman