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Dear Bill,

West Coast Main Line

I am writing on behalf of passengers who have suffered delays and disruption on the West Coast Main Line over the past few days. This is the second year running that we have begun the new year with the headlines being dominated by major infrastructure problems – last year being the ‘engineering overruns’ at Rugby, Liverpool Street and Shields Junction. This is another desperately poor start to the New Year – especially since passengers are now paying more to use the train.

We are pleased that ORR is closely monitoring the current situation and that it will consider the need for further action once the causes have been investigated. In doing so I hope that you will take into account the concerns of passengers who, given the major investment in the West Coast Main Line, would have expected to see much greater resilience and a reduction of infrastructure problems. Passengers have legitimate concerns as to how, given the considerable attention and the degree of monitoring surrounding the modernisation programme, we are still facing the current problems.

Your own ‘Network Rail Monitor’ (Qtr 2 2008-9) publication refers to the detailed delivery plan surrounding the introduction of the enhanced timetable on the West Coast Main Line and states that the ‘full’ service was not provided in December but that it would be introduced “as soon as performance reaches the required levels.” Passengers will want urgent assurances that this series of problems can be quickly fixed. Without these assurances we believe it would be unwise to proceed with the final stage of the timetable expansion at the end of the month.

While reviewing the situation we would also ask that ORR takes into account the inconvenience, frustration and additional expenditure experienced by passengers. Virgin Trains and other operators will no doubt receive significant sums of compensation to reflect the fact they cannot operate their advertised services. Not enough of this compensation appears to reach passengers – especially when journey times have been extended, buses substituted for parts of journeys or when passengers incur consequential loss. The same argument applies in circumstances when fines are levied on Network Rail – as was the case with the possessions overrun last year – and the money is passed back to the Government rather than, as we argued at the time, invested in additional facilities of benefit to passengers. This is not to prejudice any



investigation into the current situation - it is still far too early for that. We mention it simply to illustrate our point that industry compensation / enforcement procedures do not always benefit passengers.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Anthony Smith
Chief Executive