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Andy Burnham
Mayor of Greater Manchester
GMCA
Churchgate House
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11 January 2017

Dear Mr Burnham

Compensation for rail passengers

We are writing following your speech on 13 December about rail performance and the need to improve compensation for Northern passengers. We welcome you highlighting passengers' concerns and wanted to set out our view.

Given the news today about further extended disruption on the line through Bolton the industry should give real consideration to temporarily reducing ticket prices on affected routes. Passengers do not think it is fair to pay for a train ticket and then have to travel by bus.

Viewed together, poor recent day to day performance, ongoing disruption due to late notice engineering work and strike action mean the service on the line through Bolton has been inadequate. The industry as a whole should take responsibility for improving the day to day passenger experience and for managing the disruption caused by ongoing engineering work. Below are recent examples the industry should look to when considering how to do the right thing for passengers:

- In late 2016 Southern season ticket holders were refunded the equivalent cost of one month's travel following severe disruption.
- Last year poor punctuality and reliability resulted in ScotRail offering all monthly and annual season ticket holders one week's free travel.
- In August monthly and annual season ticket holders travelling to and from London Waterloo were able to claim compensation equivalent to the cost of 10 days travel due to the disruption caused by the station upgrade work.

Many passengers spend a significant amount to travel by train, with season ticket holders paying large sums in advance, they should be able to expect a consistent service in return. It is only fair that when passengers travelling in and around Manchester experience similar disruption they should be entitled to similar compensation.

We know from our own passenger research¹ that consistent delivery of the basic service is most important for passengers. That means trains arriving on time, being able to get a seat, value for money tickets and avoiding disruption. It is an important principle that when passengers experience delays and disruption that they should be entitled to appropriate compensation.

Since the current franchise began in April 2016 Northern's passengers have been able to claim 'Delay Repay' compensation. This was a welcome improvement and something we had pressed for. However, Northern's scheme only entitles passengers to compensation for delays of 30 minutes or more. This is not sufficient for commuters who may experience frequent delays of 29 minutes or less with no entitlement to compensation. We have recently seen some train companies introduce improved Delay Repay compensation schemes where passengers are entitled to compensation after a 15 minute delay (known as 'Delay Repay 15'). Northern passengers deserve 'Delay Repay 15' too. This scheme should be extended to Northern passengers as soon as possible.

In the shorter term and in the absence of 'Delay Repay 15', passengers on the line through Bolton should be compensated when, as Northern has publicly acknowledged, the service isn't good enough. Their 'Customer Promise' states *'If there is an ongoing period of poor performance at peak travel times (this is sometimes referred to as sustained poor peak performance), we will consider giving season ticket holders more compensation...'* We have raised this with Northern, but they contend performance has not been sufficiently poor to warrant enhanced compensation. Given this position we believe Northern should provide evidence of peak performance and be clear with passengers to explain the threshold that would trigger additional compensation.

We know that passengers using the line through Bolton are not the only Northern passengers to experience poor service in recent months. However, passengers' concerns on this route are not limited to delays and overcrowding, they also have to put up with the disruption caused by electrification of the line between Manchester and Preston. This investment to improve services is welcome, but the work has now overrun well beyond the intended December 2017 completion date. Passengers understand that improvement work can mean disruption, but they expect clear communication and sufficient warning to plan their journeys. In this case the very short notice given to passengers means they are unable rely on the accuracy of the published timetable and have been prevented from making informed choices about their future travel.

We would like to discuss this further with you, particularly as the pressure on passengers will intensify with further engineering works on the line through Bolton.

Yours sincerely



David Sidebottom
Director

¹ Rail passengers' priorities for improvement