

Jan Chaudhry-van der Velde  
Managing director  
West Midlands Trains Ltd  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
134 Edmund Street  
Birmingham  
B3 2ES

Transport Focus, Fleetbank House  
2-6 Salisbury Square, London EC4Y 8JX

0300 123 0850  
anthony.smith@transportfocus.org.uk  
www.transportfocus.org.uk

8 November 2019

AS/2019/071

Dear Jan

### **Poor performance on West Midlands Trains**

I am writing to you with regards to the recent and significant disruption to service experienced by passengers on West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern Railway services.

With the prospect of planned industrial action commencing on 16<sup>th</sup> November and running for seven consecutive Saturdays through the festive period I am seriously concerned about the current and future impact this is having on passengers, and their confidence in the service being delivered.

Specifically, I would like to raise the following points:

- Week commencing 28<sup>th</sup> October passengers experienced a significant degradation of services. West Midlands Trains (WMT) has sited staff shortage along with continued impact of the timetable changes as the key causes. Were WMT not prepared for possible staff shortages during the half-term holiday?
- With Christmas holidays soon approaching what assurance can you give that there will not be a repeat of these staff shortages?
- The 29<sup>th</sup> October saw significant service disruption, which originated around Wolverhampton but served to effectively bottleneck services both into and out of Birmingham New Street. On the surface, a straightforward operational issue appears to have had a disproportionate impact on service availability, and reliability with passengers paying the price for this. How and why did this happen?
- Last Saturday saw no direct service being offered to London Euston. It would be good to know the reason why this key service was not operated on a busy Saturday

In all cases, the disruption caused was serious and extensive, with passenger information not being as readily and widely available as it could and should have been.

These incidents are symptomatic of deeper, underlying problems. I am aware that the root causes are being worked on through the Grand Rail Collaboration in the West Midlands. Some of the problems coming out of the recent timetable changes will be dealt with through changes in both December 2019 and May 2020 timetable changes.

There is a need however for confidence to be restored through better overall performance in the interim.

I would be grateful if you could provide a response that addresses the following concerns:

- How and why the recent service deterioration has happened, and the root causes that underpin this?
- The plans in place to address this in the short, medium and long term – and to prevent a recurrence of what has been described as “the worst week of train performance in West Midlands history”
- In particular, what plans are in place to ensure that there is not the same level of staff shortages during the Christmas holiday period?
- What WMT is doing to try and prevent the proposed industrial action?
- If it goes ahead, what steps are being taken to maintain service levels, and to communicate with passengers so they have the information they need as easily and accessibly as possible?
- The over-arching plans being put into place to restore confidence in the service – and to ensure there can be no repeat of recent levels of disruption

While we acknowledge steps being taken to improve communications, and to raise visibility and assistance at major stations such as Birmingham New Street these are short-term measures. What is needed is a cohesive plan that will restore and improve passenger confidence and give them the service they deserve and rightly expect.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



**Anthony Smith**  
Chief executive

CC: Malcolm Holmes, Director West Midlands Rail Executive  
Tim Shoveller, Managing director, North West/Central Region, NR