



# Department for Transport

**Peter Wilkinson**

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Dear Keith

5<sup>th</sup> October 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to update the Committee on some of the key issues around rail accessibility and the Department's current priorities. It is extremely important to me personally, as well as to the future success of the industry, that everybody who wants to is able to travel by train with ease, and I welcome the challenge and support provided by DPTAC to drive some much-needed improvements.

I am writing to provide you with a response to the question asked about staff training and awareness. While train operators are required to ensure all staff receive appropriate training, including in how to communicate for staff who deal directly with passengers, as a licence condition by the ORR, I think it is fair to say it is a slightly mixed picture in terms of effectiveness. As part of their review of the Disabled People's Protection Policy, the ORR are therefore considering how they can ensure a consistently high standard applies across the industry, potentially through the introduction of a universal training package.

As well as improving awareness and understanding, I see increasing staff confidence as key to making sure passengers have the support they need regardless of who is providing it. That is why we are including a requirement for train operators to involve disabled people directly in the design and, where appropriate, delivery of training packages in future franchises, so that it reflects their real-life experiences and needs. My team will continue to work with DPTAC to develop those requirements.

I thought it would be helpful to also provide an update and further information on some of the other issues raised by the Committee.

We agreed on the importance of making sure access to the railways features in the recently-announced Rail Review which will be chaired by Keith Williams. A strong focus on the interests of all rail users is at the heart of the Review, encompassing accessibility. We will be setting out more details on the Review shortly, and meanwhile I have asked the Rail Review Secretariat, who are supporting Keith Williams, to follow up directly with you to ensure the Review benefits from your views and expertise.

There was some concern that accessibility was not covered in this Summer's public consultation on the Cross Country franchise and I wanted to provide assurance that that is not the case. Question 18 in the consultation document sought views on what more could be done to improve access and provide facilities for people who are disabled or have additional needs. There is still an opportunity for DPTAC to provide views on that and I would welcome your input. As you'll be aware, the Department will not be awarding

the new franchise in 2019 as previously planned in light of the rail review, but all of the responses received as part of the consultation including DPTAC's will be considered in future plans for the franchise.

A question was asked about changes to Southern Railways' accessibility map, which my team have looked into. Indications on the map that passengers *may* receive assistance, rather than it being guaranteed, relate to whether a station is staffed for part or all of the day. For the period that a station is scheduled to be staffed, assistance will be available. If DPTAC members are aware of any messages about the level of support available being reduced however, I would be keen to hear about it. As both the Secretary of State and I have made clear, we want to see more customer service staff on the railway rather than fewer, and I am grateful for the opportunity to address this issue directly.

You will have seen the recent announcements by the Rail Delivery Group about improvements to the Passenger Assistance scheme, which I am sure you will welcome. I was asked about the funding of future phases of this work; while I expect the industry to show commitment and leadership by investing in this, I can assure you that the Department will continue to support the project in whatever way is needed to ensure it delivers on its exciting potential.

Finally, Will's experiences travelling to the meeting I attended which resulted in him being an hour late were, unfortunately, simply too common for disabled passengers. I have raised the circumstances of his journey with both the Managing Director of Great Western Railway and with Network Rail, but significantly it serves as a perfect illustration of why it is so important that we – the Department and industry together – continue to focus on ensuring the provision of a service that meets the needs of all passengers.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Wilkinson', with a small flourish at the end.

**PETER WILKINSON**