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for Transport

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Thank you for your email of 3 August about rail improvements in the North.

The Government is committed to rebalancing our economy and our commitment to improving rail services across the region is stronger than ever. The North cannot prosper without proper investment in our infrastructure and that is why by 2020 we will have spent over £13bn on improving northern transport. We are committed to investing £55bn in HS2, a high speed rail network that will connect eight out of ten of Britain's biggest cities, six of which are north of Birmingham. We are investing over £1bn in the Great North Rail Project, which has already delivered improvements between Liverpool and Manchester, including faster journey times and more seats. The Northern and TransPennine Express franchises will provide new trains, including more than 500 new carriages, room for 40,000 extra passengers and more than 2,000 extra services a week by 2020.

At a time when we are investing billions in our railway, it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that we are getting the best value for taxpayers and passengers, and that we are using the most appropriate technologies for each part of the network.

Technology is evolving quickly. New bi-mode train technology allows the train to operate on either diesel or electric power so passengers can travel on trains seamlessly across the network. The industry is also developing alternative fuel trains using batteries and hydrogen power. This means we no longer have to electrify every part of every line to significantly improve journeys for rail users. In fact new train technologies mean that in some cases we can achieve journey improvements faster, without the need for disruptive and costly electrification works. We would not want passengers to endure needless disruption whilst unnecessary infrastructure is built.

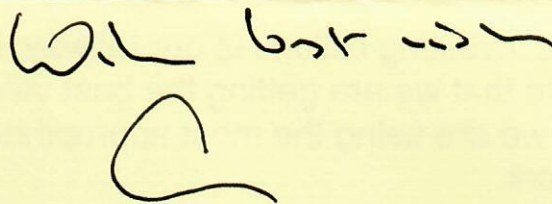
The Government remains committed to improving services on the Transpennine line. We are currently working with Rail North and Network Rail to develop very significant improvements for rail passengers on the route from 2022. These could be the result of investment in new trains, electrification or other infrastructure work. The options will be costed by December, ahead of a decision on approval next year. The upgrade aims to deliver major reductions in journey times (such as a target time of 40 minutes for fast trains from Manchester to Leeds, and 62 minutes from Manchester to York), the ability to run more frequent and longer trains offering more seats on both long distance and local services and improvements to overall performance on the whole route.

Our aim is to provide the very best services for passengers by embracing the opportunities of new technology, while also achieving best value for money.

The Government is not prioritising Crossrail 2 over rail improvement in the North. Our position on Crossrail 2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail is the same. We are committed to investing in the Northern Powerhouse – this includes being fully committed to working with Transport for the North (TfN) on plans for Northern Powerhouse Rail. Over the coming years, we will work with TfN to make the business case as strong as possible to ensure this project delivers on our ambition of dramatically improving connections across the North and boosting the regional economy.

We are working with Transport for London in exactly the same way as we are working with TfN. We will continue to help these projects develop at their respective timescales with the aim of delivering a more reliable railway that delivers for passengers and underpins economic growth across all regions.

I hope this reply explains the position.



Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT