

News story: Transport Secretary and Rail Minister meet MPs from across country to tackle rail disruption

- tackling unacceptable rail timetable issues and improving services top priority for Transport Secretary
- passengers to be compensated for disruption
- full independent inquiry into train companies' preparation for timetable change to begin

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling and Rail Minister Jo Johnson met with more than 50 MPs yesterday (5 June 2018) to hear about the serious issues faced by passengers affected by disruption following the introduction of new rail timetables.

Ministers met with every MP who requested a meeting to discuss the difficulties faced by their constituents on routes operated by Northern Rail and Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR).

The Transport Secretary made clear that the rail industry had collectively failed the passengers it serves and that train companies had not raised any warning that they were not properly prepared for the timetable change. Mr Grayling also set out plans for the rail industry to compensate people who have been affected.

Ministers took immediate action on this issue once problems became clear as the timetable came into effect on 20 May 2018. The Transport Secretary announced that Northern were implementing a recovery plan, including extra services and increased driver training, on Wednesday 23 May before leading discussions the following day with northern leaders including Transport for the North, who jointly oversee the Northern franchise through the Rail North Partnership.

The Rail Minister met with Network Rail in Milton Keynes on Monday 4 June to discuss progress on improving services following the introduction of emergency timetables that day. However, it will take time to recover as there are a number of issues to be worked through by train companies and Network Rail.

Transport ministers continue to hold regular discussions with the leaders of Network Rail, Northern and GTR to drive improvements and those organisations will be meeting with MPs this week to discuss the issue.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

My absolute priority is ensuring the unacceptable service levels on Northern and GTR are put right, and that people whose lives are

being seriously impacted see the urgent improvements they deserve.

I have listened to MPs and share their concerns that the industry has badly failed its passengers. As I made clear, I will not hesitate to take serious action if operators are found to be in breach of their franchise agreement.

The experiences and frustrations of passengers will be front and centre of my daily discussions with the industry, and we are committed to ensuring they are rightly compensated for the disruption they have experienced.

Details on compensation for passengers will be set out by the industry soon. Work has also begun to establish an independently chaired inquiry into the handling of the timetable implementation by the train operating companies. The Department for Transport will also assess whether GTR and Northern met their contractual obligations during this process.

The Secretary of State has been clear that should the inquiry find evidence of negligent behaviour he will not hesitate in taking action – which could include stripping operators of the franchise.

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