

Email from the Chief Executive, DfT OLR Holdings Ltd, dated 16 December 2022

Dear Sir/Madam,

In response to a couple of questions from Ben Bradshaw MP (see below) relating to the operation of the East Coast mainline under the ownership of DfT OLR Holdings Ltd (DOHL – the Government’s holding company for the operator of last resort (OLR)), the witness Jennifer Williams responded suggesting that DOHL only had a certain amount of available capacity to act as the Operator of Last Resort.

As Chief Executive of DOHL I wanted to write to the Committee to assure them that we take our responsibility, as set out in legislation, to maintain the continuity of passenger rail services if a passenger rail franchise terminates and is not immediately replaced, incredibly seriously and we stand ready to mobilise, irrespective of the circumstances or volume of franchises facing that predicament.

I would point to our track record of success as evidence of this capability in transitioning three franchises over the past five years - Virgin Trains East Coast in June 2018 to create LNER; Arriva Rail North in March 2020 to create Northern Trains; and, London and South Eastern Railway in October 2021 to create Southeastern. This demonstrates DOHL’s ongoing commitment, capacity and capability to carry out our statutory role. Our job at DOHL is to ensure the railways continue to run whatever the circumstances facing a franchise.

I would be delighted if you would share this note with the Members of the Committee and should any Member wish to discuss DOHL’s capacity then I would extend an invitation to do so.

Best wishes,

Robin Gisby

Chief Executive

DOHL

Q35 Mr Bradshaw: Why not just do what was done on the east coast main line and put it back into public ownership? That seems to be working very well.

Jennifer Williams: When I have asked that question, it has been mentioned to me that the OLR only has a certain amount of capacity. That function is only able to run so many services. Other people on the panel may tell me that I am wrong, but that is what I have been told when I have similarly asked why they don’t just bring it in because they already run LNER, and so on.

Q36 Mr Bradshaw: But who is telling you that?

Jennifer Williams: People who I have been talking to in the industry— people who know more about this than I do, in reality—when I have been researching articles.