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From the Minister of State
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14th November 2023

Dear Iain,

Thank you for your letter of 20 October about the industry-led ticket office proposals.

As you are aware, during the summer, train companies consulted on reforming railway station ticket offices. The aim was to move staff out from behind ticket office screens so that more help and advice could be provided in customer-focused roles. Since the consultation launched, I made clear that any changes made as a result of the proposals consulted on must deliver the highest quality of service for all users of the railway.

The consultation closed on 1 September and following a period of continued engagement with Train Operating Companies (TOCs), the independent passenger bodies objected to all industry proposals to close ticket offices on 31 October. Following their decision and extensive engagement with a range of stakeholders, it is clear that the proposals that have resulted from the consultation process do not meet the high thresholds set by Ministers. The Government therefore asked Train Operating Companies to withdraw their proposals and for no ticket offices to close as a result of the process.

There was significant public interest in industry consultations, with over 750,000 responses. I am thankful that so many people, including accessibility groups, parliamentarians and rail passengers have been able to voice their opinions on these proposals. It remains clear that reform is vital, but it must be in a way that delivers for passengers. Turning to the points raised by the Transport Committee.

The consultation process

This was an industry led process which followed the process set out in the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement (TSA) which is a long-standing and well-established process that has been used historically and operators were legally required to follow.

I would also like to reaffirm that under the TSA process all operators were required to have taken the necessary steps to provide information to passengers on a station-by-station basis so they could comment on proposals. TOCs took a number of steps including posters at stations, as well as information online on operators websites and the publication of Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA's). Operators also took considerable steps to ensure the availability of consultation materials in a variety of accessible formats, including in large print, audio versions and Web Accessible digital formats.

Transparency of proposals

I note your comments on the lack of information and analysis that was initially made available by operators. Industry listened to the need for greater clarity on their initial proposals and this is why the public consultations were extended. This enabled operators to provide further information, including making available their EQIA's and providing users of the railway with more time to respond to and consider the proposals. While these were industry proposals I will be encouraging TOCs and the Rail Delivery Group to reflect on these issues.

Potential effect of the proposals on disabled travellers

During the consultation process I sought out the views of accessibility groups, holding round tables to hear first-hand the concerns that were being raised.

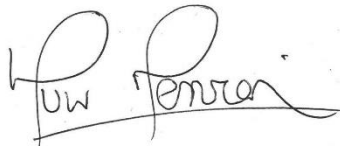
A number of important issues were raised through the consultations including the need for simplification of fares and ticketing, and improving accessibility. We will work with industry on these important issues alongside continuing to invest in Access for All to make stations more accessible, developing a National Rail Accessibility Strategy on which we aim to consult next year, and rolling out simpler fares and ticketing including through pay-as-you-go. The Department has also completed an audit of all of our railway stations and we will now be assessing what

changes can be made to the benefit of all passengers. We will continue to engage with accessibility groups on these areas and make sure their views continue to be taken into account.

Government is committed to improving the passenger experience at stations for all rail users and it is important that we harness and reflect on the feedback provided by the passenger bodies, the public and accessibility stakeholders as part of this process.

Thank you once again for your letter. I hope this response has been helpful.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Huw Merriman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

HUW MERRIMAN MP

MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT