



Department
for Transport

Ruth Cadbury MP,
Chair,
Transport Select Committee,
Sent via email

From the Minister for Rail
**Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill
CBE**

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0300 330 3000
E-Mail:
lord.hendy_mos@dft.gov.uk

Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

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Dear Ruth,

Thank you for your letter of 12 March regarding Great British Railways' licence conditions and the duration of the Railways Bill consultation. May I also thank both you, and the Committee, for your continued engagement with the Department as we deliver this once in a generation change to the railways.

I fully agree with your assessment that it is vital we get a change this significant right. That is why the consultation, and the responses received, are so important. Only once we have these views can we deliver a system that truly serves its customers, provides better value for hardworking taxpayers, and acts as an engine for growth and opportunity for the whole country.

I can assure the Committee that any suggestion we are downgrading our existing commitments to accessibility, freight, and the environment is incorrect. These remain key priorities for the government and we have consistently reinforced our commitment to these important areas, whether in our manifesto, as part of 'Getting Britain Moving', or at the despatch box. We have also been clear in the consultation that accessibility is one of our six priorities for the railway.

I want to be clear that nothing has been ruled out. We are consulting openly on the new regulatory framework, including the duties, functions, and requirements that will be applied to GBR. As we have set out, the details of GBR's licence will also be subject to a separate, specific

consultation as usual. The issues you raise are all absolutely critical to the proper functioning of GBR, and we welcome responses from stakeholders so that we can get the detail right.

The consultation is already clear that accessibility will be central to GBR. GBR will therefore be subject to requirements – either licence conditions or statutory duties – to ensure this happens. That includes requirements relating to accessibility and engaging accessibility stakeholders. Similarly, the consultation sets out that GBR will run the network in the public interest. Again, it will of course be subject to the necessary requirements to ensure this happens.

On freight, the consultation confirms our commitment that there will be a statutory duty on GBR to promote the use of rail freight, recognising the sector's growth potential and helping to deliver on the government's commitment to net zero. We are also conscious that the railway is critical in improving wider environmental outcomes, and we want GBR's future role to reflect that. We are keen to get the mechanisms right for achieving these aims and will set out our plans more fully once the consultation has closed. In the meantime, I hope this is reassuring.

Regarding the duration of the consultation period, we recognise the desire for an extension and that the 8-week consultation period will be unwelcome for some. Passengers, especially those with disabilities, have waited far too long to see the improvements in the railway that they rightly expect and deserve. Given the need to strike the right balance between getting the views of interested stakeholders and delivering improvements at pace, we feel that 8 weeks is the appropriate length of time for this consultation.

Accessible versions of the consultation have been published in line with requirements to make it easier for those with disabilities to respond. This includes large print copies and accessible formats for users of assistive technologies. We will continue to make further accessible versions available upon request, wherever possible, to address specific needs and we have responded to several of these requests already, for example by producing an Easy Read version of the document. Officials are engaging closely with accessibility panels and stakeholders to help clarify points in the document and assist where adjustments may be needed.

Finally, I would like to reassure you that this consultation is very much the beginning of an ongoing process of engagement with passengers

and industry experts that will continue throughout the policy development and legislative process.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'The Lord Hendy', followed by a long, wavy horizontal line.

The Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill CBE

MINISTER OF STATE FOR RAIL