



Transport Committee

Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill CBE

Minister of State for Rail
Department for Transport

By email

3 September 2026

Dear Peter,

Position on pre-appointment hearings for the Passenger Watchdog Chair

Thank you for your letter of 20 July 2026 on the Government's position regarding pre-appointment hearings for the Passenger Watchdog Chair.

I note the Government's decision not to pursue the recommendation of the Transport Committee in its [report on the Railways Bill \(Session 2024-26, HC 1472\)](#) to add the Chair of the Passenger Watchdog to the list of posts subject to a pre-appointment hearing by my Committee. The Committee, however, remains of the view that there is a strong case for doing so.

You have argued that "the Watchdog is not a sector regulator and has no enforcement powers". However, I note that the Passenger Watchdog will have statutory duties to investigate passenger complaints, set up and run a dispute resolution scheme, set and monitor standards and order those providing railway and station services to develop improvement plans where, in the judgement of the Passenger Watchdog, they have fallen short of those standards. These are all tasks carried out by regulators in other sectors. In addition, the Cabinet Office's guidance on the criteria for roles to be subject to pre-appointment scrutiny also includes "posts which play a key role in protecting and safeguarding the public's rights and interests". Comparable bodies which are subject to pre-appointment scrutiny by other parliamentary committees include the Patient Safety Commissioner, the Housing Ombudsman and the Children's Commissioner for England.

Making this post subject to a pre-appointment hearing would correct an anomaly whereby appointment of the Chair of London TravelWatch is appointed through a process involving scrutiny by the London Assembly's Transport Committee (under Section 247 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999). This would be an opportunity to introduce similar democratic oversight for the equivalent national role.

The Secretary of State has made clear her ambition for the Passenger Watchdog to be "a strong, independent voice for the customer", with a responsibility to set "tough standards, independently monitor the experience of passengers, investigate persistent issues, and relentlessly push for a more accessible railway". It is vital that the Passenger Watchdog is seen to be independent from both the Secretary of State and Great British Railways. Having pre-appointment scrutiny by my Committee would support public confidence in that independence.

On the issue of timeliness, my Committee will of course be engaging with the current chair of Transport Focus, Nigel Stevens, as he oversees Transport Focus' transformation into the Passenger Watchdog (acknowledging that he will remain in post until June 2029). The purpose of our recommendation is, however, to enhance and safeguard the independence of the Passenger Watchdog for the long term. As such, I remain concerned that the decision not to provide for pre-appointment scrutiny for future appointments represents a missed opportunity to realise the Department's aspirations for the role's strength and status.

Finally, I note that the Cabinet Office's guidance concludes that in cases "where there is disagreement about whether an appointment should be added to the list, the relevant select committee may consult the Liaison Committee and the Cabinet Office". I would be grateful for a further response on this matter. If our views continue to diverge, noting the provision in the Cabinet Office guidance, I will consider taking this matter up with the Chair of the Liaison Committee.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ruth', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ruth Cadbury MP
Chair, Transport Committee

cc Dame Meg Hillier, Chair, Liaison Committee