

Date: 18 December 2023

Rt Hon Mark Harper MP

Secretary of State for Transport
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Sent by email

Lord McLoughlin

Transport for the North Chair

Mayor Andy Burnham

Rail North Committee Chair

Transport for the North
Level 6, Town Hall Extension
Lloyd Street
Manchester
M2 5DB

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Avanti West Coast: Unacceptable Performance

At its meeting held in Manchester on 14 December, the TfN Board was unanimous in condemning the current performance of Avanti West Coast as being totally unacceptable.

Whilst the Board understood that there will be occasions where performance is affected by external factors, it is clear that in the case of Avanti West Coast, there are more fundamental issues at play. The underlying operational resilience of Avanti West Coast appears to be fundamentally flawed in a way that the North has previously observed on the TransPennine Express contract. The growth in reactionary delays on the West Coast is further evidence of this lack of operational resilience.

The deterioration of performance is all the more unacceptable given that it has become the new norm on the West Coast in the period prior to Christmas. Poor performance on this scale is impacting on the economy of the North as well as the well-being of its residents who are dependent upon Avanti West Coast services.

The TfN Board was clear: there is an urgent and pressing need for the Avanti West Coast operation to be subjected to a critical review by the Department as a matter of priority. This review should be required to identify and secure immediate action that restores performance to an acceptable level: in this the Department should actively consider all available options.

The Board was equally clear that because the performance level is so unacceptable, it is essential to ensure that all seats on Avanti West Coast services are available for use at all times. In this context TfN advises that until such time as performance is restored to an acceptable level, all trains should run with First Class accommodation declassified: the cost of this being borne by the operator at no cost to the public purse.

We know that a key driver of the Government's reforms for the railway sector is improving the customer experience. It is clear to all, that the Avanti West Coast



operations is failing to meet a minimum acceptable standard and that this needs to addressed as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick McLoughlin'.

Lord McLoughlin CH
Chairman, Transport for the North

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy Burnham'.

Mayor Andy Burnham
Rail North Committee Chair