

19 June 2009

Lord Adonis,
Secretary of State for Transport,
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DR

Dear Andrew,

I am writing to request a meeting with you to allow me to raise my concerns about the future of the East Coast Main Line rail services currently operated by National Express. These are both short term and long term.

Regarding the more immediate concerns, I have received complaints from constituents about the level of service provided to passengers. They have reported a number of problems, in particular the frequency with which many of the toilets on the trains are either closed or not kept clean. A number of constituents have also reported problems with the catering service.

Being a regular passenger on this line, I know from personal experience that this type of complaint is well founded. I emphasise that in no way do I blame the staff for these problems who always appear to be hard working and doing their best to cope in sometimes difficult circumstances.

Rather, these problems seem to me to be further evidence of the problems being experienced by the current operator, which leads me on to my wider concerns about the current franchise and the long-term future of services on the line.

I am aware that there has been considerable speculation about the possibility of the franchise being 'handed back' by National Express, and the service being operated thereafter on a contract basis, for a fee, by a team based on the current management.

I am extremely concerned about this proposal. Firstly, it seems to me that it is wrong in principle for an operator to be allowed to 'walk away' from a franchise. In bidding for a franchise operators knowingly take a commercial risk and should be not be able to escape from their liabilities.

If the franchise is, nevertheless, handed back, I would strongly urge that the opportunity should be taken for the franchise to be taken 'in house' and operated by Network Rail rather than responsibility being handed over to a management team to run on a contract basis. The existing management team could obviously be taken on as part of that process; indeed, it would make sense to make use of their skills and experience.

The fact is that the separation of track from service operation under privatisation has not been a success. The current difficulties facing the East Coast Main Line are symptomatic of the failures of the current system. The opportunity should be taken to start the process of reunifying the rail network, rather than perpetuating the current failed system.

I would welcome the opportunity of meeting you to discuss these concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Lazarowicz