



Eich cyf/Your ref  
Ein cyf/Our ref  
William Graham AM  
Chair  
Enterprise & Business Committee

1 October 2014

Dear William

I am writing to update the Committee regarding issues raised with me about the North South rail journey time/capacity improvements project and Arriva Trains Wales' proposed December 2014 timetable.

Last year I asked my officials to review the North South rail journey times project. I agreed to proceed with the Network Rail recommendation that the scope could be reduced to 5.5 miles of redoubling, reducing estimated costs, and still achieve the outputs as specified at the project's inception. These are journey time reductions for services between Holyhead and Cardiff and additional capacity which could enable an additional train every 2 hours between those points. Some of these could run limited stop and therefore benefit from even further reductions in journey times than those for current services. These additional services are not currently committed, and I await the report of the north Wales Task Force before considering the right shape for the pattern of future services for north Wales.

I should like to set out clearly that the current redoubling project has never been considered in the context of capacity for additional journeys between points other than Holyhead and Cardiff. I recognise the fact that the UK Government is now committed to the future redoubling of Halton Curve and that this will open up new journey opportunities for North Wales. I am sure that the Task Force will include this in its considerations. Again, once I have the Task Force recommendations I shall consider future services.

Network Rail has recently indicated to officials that due to some technical challenges there are now cost and time pressures facing the project. I

understand that these relate to the need to improve Broad Oak level crossing and the resulting additional pressures on Network Rail's signalling resources. I am extremely disappointed at Network Rail's management of this project. I have asked my officials to work with Network Rail to resolve these issues as quickly and effectively as possible.

Concerns have also been expressed with regards to Arriva Trains Wales' (ATW) proposed timetable changes for December 2014. This is the largest timetable change for North Wales since 2008 and, as might be expected, it has generated significant feedback from stakeholders both positive and negative. For example, my officials recently met representatives of Railfuture Cymru to discuss rail issues, and they highlighted a number of benefits for North Wales from the proposals.

The proposed timetable does provide significant benefits to North Wales including: additional capacity on some of its busiest trains including those serving Manchester, Birmingham and the Holyhead ferry terminal; the extension of some services to Manchester Airport (subject to Network Rail approval); and, some new cross-border services.

My officials will continue to work with ATW on the timetable taking into full consideration of all points raised to ensure these benefits are maximised. I am aware that some revisions have already been made to the timetable as a result of the feedback raised to date.

I shall continue to update Members.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'L. J. ...', written in a cursive style.