

Rail Minister letter to Rail Delivery Group on maintaining accessibility

April 8, 2020



The Minister of State for Transport has written an open letter to the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) asking the rail industry to continue to ensure that rail travel is accessible during the coronavirus outbreak.

Chris Heaton-Harris has praised everyone for working hard to keep the railways running and has called on the industry to continue to ensure the needs of disabled people are met during this time.

His letter in full is below:

Thank you for your regular updates on the rail industry's response to the coronavirus outbreak. I want to share my thanks to everyone working hard to keep our railways running, so all those who need to get to work can do so, including NHS staff on the frontline of tackling the virus.

It is critical that people who need to do so are able to travel to work in a safe and reliable manner during this challenging time for the country. I am writing to ask specifically that the industry continues to ensure the needs of disabled people are met during this time. Rail must, irrespective of the circumstances, always be accessible for all.

Working with operators, we have strengthened our commitment to a more accessible railway in recent months, including announcing 124 stations to benefit from a share of £20 million for mid-tier improvements, part of our £300 million Access for All programme, and the launch of It's Everyone's Journey, ensuring those with non-visible disabilities have a safe, accessible network.

Since the government issued advice for people to avoid travel unless necessary, I have been concerned to hear from disability campaigners about a few incidents at rail stations where individual passengers were apparently refused assistance. I feel strongly that social distancing measures should not limit access in this way and would request that staff have access to clear guidance to ensure they can support all passengers using our railways. I would like to thank you for your assurances that RDG has updated its guidance for operators, so rail workers can remain safe without building barriers to travel for disabled key workers.

We will be working closely with the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to investigate any reports of failure to provide assistance to disabled people during the COVID-19 outbreak. Our position on accessibility remains the same, even in these extraordinary times – delivering an accessible service for every passenger is essential to creating an inclusive railway.

Yours sincerely

Chris Heaton-Harris MP

Minister of State for Transport

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