

Transport Secretary outlines measures to address “unacceptable” rail services in the north

December 14, 2022



Transport Secretary Mark Harper says current rail services in the north have been unacceptable and following a meeting with northern mayors has agreed that the rail industry is “not set up to deliver a modern reliable service”.

In a written statement to parliament published today on Avanti West Coast, TransPennine Express and Northern rail services, he outlines some of the steps that need to be taken to improve services.

He said: “As a short-term measure, Avanti West Coast and TransPennine Express have both been rapidly increasing the number of drivers they employ. This is helping Avanti restore the services that they were forced to withdraw. Services increased in September, and have now increased to seven trains per hour, restoring the full Manchester-London service.

“It is therefore disappointing that passengers will not see the full benefit of these changes until the current wave of industrial action is over. I was pleased to see the RMT call off the strike action scheduled for Avanti

West Coast on 11 and 12 December 2022, as sustaining this level of service will require the support of the trade unions.

“I have also given TransPennine Express and Northern the scope they need to put a meaningful and generous rest day working offer to ASLEF. However, giving operators a mandate is only the first step. ASLEF need to enter negotiations, and put any new deal to its members and, if accepted, do all it can to make that deal work. TransPennine has made a generous revised offer to ASLEF and it was almost immediately rejected without being put to members.

It is up to the unions to decide if they want to improve services, for the good of passengers and the wider economy in the north.

“Today (13 December 2022), the RMT are on strike across the country again, disrupting services and driving passengers away from the railway. In my meeting with the mayors, we all agreed on the need for a reliable railway seven days a week. That means not having fragile rest day working agreements and breaking the railway’s dependence on rest day working altogether.

“No modern and successful business relies on the goodwill of its staff to deliver for its customers in the evening and at the weekend. I want a railway with rewarding jobs, contracted to deliver every service promised to the public. I want to encourage passengers back to a financially sustainable railway.”