Written evidence submitted by Mrs Emma Marie Carter (RTC0062)

Executive summary

- Impact of changes on my daily commute.
- Example of delays and cancellations encountered since the timetable changed.
- Additional compensation package offered.
- Disagreements with Northern Rails response to the committee.
- Recommendations for the committee.

Introduction

1. I submit this evidence to the committee in a personal capacity. I’m employed full-time as an Administration Coordinator for an arm’s length body based in the City centre of Manchester. I’ve worked in Manchester since May 2014, commuting by train from Chorley on average 4 days per week.

2. I’m classed as having a disability, making commuting by train difficult. I suffer from a hip condition that impacts my mobility and I suffer from pain daily despite surgery in July 2017. It’s difficult for me to walk long distances or stand for long periods. My disability is invisible because I don’t use any aids and look reasonably well. I don’t always get a seat on my commute on a journey taking up to an hour as trains are often short formed and full on arrival at Chorley.

May 2018 timetable changes

3. The timetable changes in May 2018 caused a huge impact on my daily commute. The current service offered by Northern is the worse I’ve encountered since 2014. The previous level of service provided by Northern on the Blackpool to Manchester line before the timetable changes was poor. Since the timetable changes in May 2018 my commute is a daily nightmare. There are now less services running with longer waits between services. This means any cancellations or delays mean a longer wait for the next service and a bigger impact on my day.

4. Since the timetable changed I’ve encountered more cancellations - usually at short notice along with delays. The trains I travel on are old, dirty and short formed. Trains are usually dangerously overcrowded due to less services running. The trains usually can’t fit any more passengers on by the time they reach Bolton station. The ongoing conductor strikes occur frequently as well, adding to the stress of my commute.

5. I work for a very understanding employer, have access to flexible working and can work from home. If my employer required me to be in the office on fixed hours, I probably would be on a warning for poor punctuality. If I hadn’t been able to work from home for some of my working week I would have sought alternative employment due to the stress my commute causes me.

6. On a good day, my commute takes an hour each way. On a bad day, it can take anywhere between 1.5-2 hours each way.

7. Here are examples of what I’ve encountered since the timetable changed:

   - **Monday 21 May 2018** – First day of the new timetable. Drove to work to get to Manchester. Every train departing Chorley to Manchester to arrive by 0900 cancelled so I had no alternative.

   - **Tuesday 22 May 2018** – 0740 train to Manchester Airport from Chorley, 3 carriages instead of 6. Severely overcrowded and 20 minutes late on arrival. Returned on the 1701 from Manchester Piccadilly, 20 mins late into Chorley. Additional 40 minutes journey time.
Thursday 24 May 2018 – worked from home today. Conductors on strike. Limited trains today and no guarantee they would turn up. I would’ve needed to leave around 0700 to get to work for 0900. Driving not an option as the roads would be busy due to the strike.

Tuesday 29 May 2018 – 0740 and 0754 from Chorley cancelled. Caught 0802, arrived 20 minutes late into Manchester. Left work early due to train cancellations to catch the 1605 home from Manchester Victoria. Arrived in Chorley 25 minutes late. Journey time an additional 45 minutes today.

Monday 4 June 2018 – 0802 to Manchester Piccadilly, short formed, 2 carriages instead of 4. Severely overcrowded, 22 minutes late on arrival. Shouted at by a member of platform staff at Bolton station to move down an already full train carriage with literally no space to move. I didn’t have a seat and was holding on to the top of a chair for balance. I shouted back it was bad enough I was unable to sit down with a disability and would not be moving anywhere.

Tuesday 19 June 2018 – train strike, drove to work as needed to be in the office for meetings and couldn’t guarantee if trains would turn up.

Wednesday 27 June 2018 – attending a conference in Blackpool. Drove to Blackpool from Chorley due to no trains running directly to Blackpool. Rail replacement bus wouldn’t arrive in time for the 0900 start of the conference.

Monday 2 July 2018 – 1701 from Manchester Piccadilly cancelled. Caught the 1805 from Manchester Victoria. Easier to catch than the 17:34 from Oxford Road. Arrived home an hour late.

Tuesday 3 July 2018 – 0740 to Manchester Airport delayed, caught 0802 to Piccadilly instead. 18:01 from Manchester Piccadilly to Chorley cancelled. Left work early to catch 1734 from Manchester Oxford Road. Lost time in work today due to the delays.

Tuesday 10 July 2018 – 1701 from Manchester Piccadilly to Chorley, delayed 23 minutes on departure and arrived 32 minutes late into Chorley.

8. From 4 June 2018, Northern implemented an emergency timetable. During the emergency timetable, the 34 minutes past the hour train departed from Manchester Oxford Road instead of Manchester Piccadilly. This was even more difficult for me because Manchester Oxford Road is 15 minutes' walk from my office and isn’t accessible by Metrolink like Manchester Piccadilly and Manchester Victoria. Oxford Road has several steps to negotiate between the platforms and these can be especially difficult when it’s crowded. During this time, effectively my options to get home from work was the one train per hour departing from Manchester Piccadilly, if it wasn’t cancelled. Northern should have maintained two trains per hour from Piccadilly during the temporary timetable. I don’t feel the needs of less mobile customers were considered when implementing the emergency timetable.

9. The May 2018 timetable changes mean less services run between Manchester Piccadilly and Chorley. Prior to the timetable changes, there were 4 trains per hour, every 15 minutes from Manchester Piccadilly. There are now two trains per hour from Manchester Piccadilly at 1 minute past the hour and 34 minutes past the hour. Should a train be cancelled, it means a 30-minute wait for the next service. This has impacted my working day because I must leave work earlier to get home.

10. The 22 minutes past the hour service from Chorley travels to Manchester Victoria, instead of Manchester Piccadilly. Anyone wishing to get to Manchester Piccadilly for 0900 now needs to catch the 0802 from Chorley, meaning leaving earlier for work. I often catch the 08:02 because
even if the Manchester Victoria train arrives into Manchester on time at 0900, it takes me 15 minutes to get the Metrolink across to Piccadilly Gardens.

11. Since the timetable changed, the Manchester Victoria to Chorley train departs at 5 minutes past the hour instead of 24 mins past the hour as it did previously, meaning if anyone wanting to travel around half past the hour is restricted to the one train departing from Manchester Piccadilly. This train now only runs to Buckshaw Parkway instead of Preston, again reducing the options of trains people can catch. Should the train departing 1 minute past the hour from Manchester Piccadilly be cancelled or delayed there is no time to get across to Manchester Victoria to access another service.

12. Previously, if train delays or cancellations occurred in Chorley, I had the option of driving to Wigan to catch the 0756 train from Wigan to arrive into Manchester for work at 0900. TransPennine services no longer call in Wigan since the May 2018 timetable change. I now no longer have this option. The current train times from Wigan are incompatible with my working hours and take far too long as they stop at all intermediate stations.

13. Engineering works are taking place on the line between Blackpool North and Manchester until November 2018. There are no trains after 9pm in the evening and none at weekend. Socialising or shopping in the evenings and weekends is impossible, there is no means of getting home and no direct bus service between Manchester and Chorley. Getting the rail replacement bus would result in a journey twice as long.

14. Northern and the Department for Transport agreed to provide additional compensation to passengers affected by timetable changes. This compensation was only offered to passengers holding season tickets. I am unable to claim additional compensation. I hold a disabled persons railcard and am unable to use my railcard discount to purchase season tickets, I must buy my tickets daily. Part-time workers may buy their tickets daily rather than buying a season ticket. I feel this makes the compensation package unfair. I’ve suffered the same disruption as other passengers but not entitled to any further compensation. The timetable changes had a big impact on me. I would recommend any additional compensation package is offered to all passengers, not just those with season tickets.

**Disagreements with Northern’s Response to the Committee (RTC0028)**

14. Paragraph 1.3 Northern state passengers come first. The customer service I receive often leaves a lot to be desired. There are times when trains were cancelled and I’ve been given confusing or unhelpful advice from Northern staff. It is as if being stranded when there are no trains is my fault.

15. In paragraph 2.6 they state cancellations are a last resort. I disagree. The number of cancellations on the Chorley to Manchester line since the May 2018 timetable change has been unacceptable. On May 21st, 2018, the first day of the new timetable, 22 services from Chorley to Manchester were cancelled and I had to drive to work. In July 2018, the number of cancellations reduced but the 07:40 train I catch from Chorley was cancelled 3 times in the space of 1 week from 02/07/18 – 09/07/18 and the 18:01 for my return home cancelled twice within the same week.

16. In paragraph 6.4 they state cancellations discourages passengers travelling by train, so they are clearly incentivised not to cancel services. Northern frequently cancel services and this does discourage me from travelling by train, but I often have no other option. Northern are the sole operator on the Chorley to Manchester line so I’ve got to travel with them, as do lots of other people. If there were another operator on the line it may make Northern more competitive.
Recommendations

17. In paragraph 7 of my submission I stated the needs of less able passengers were not considered when moving the 34 minutes past the hour service to Manchester Oxford Road from Manchester Piccadilly. Northern should have considered the implications of this move and consulted passengers.

18. Provide compensation to all passengers for the disruption caused during timetable changes, not just to those with a season ticket. Passengers buying tickets on daily basis due to railcards or part time employment are excluded and encountered the same disruption.

19. If a train companies’ performance is consistently poor, fine them heavily or strip them of the franchise. Northern’s service is consistently poor and, yet we as passengers see no sanctions imposed. We, the paying passenger continue to see fares increase yet receive a consistently poor service.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

September 2018