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| The Lord ScrivenHouse of LordsLondonSW1A 0PW |
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 29 July 2024

Dear Lord Scriven,

Thank you for your contribution during the Oral Question debate held on Tuesday 23 July. As promised, I am writing to you regarding the reinstatement of direct services from Sheffield to Manchester Airport.

I recognise the desire of passengers and leaders in Sheffield for greater connectivity, including to Manchester Airport. I share your aspirations for more direct services to encourage rail use and grow the Northern economy.

You will be aware that this service was withdrawn in December 2022 as part of the timetable developed by the Manchester Task Force, which was set up after the May 2018 timetable failure to address reliability issues through Manchester.

The reliability and capacity constraints in Manchester’s rail system are the result of the development of our railway and the city over many years. Particularly since May 2018, increases in train frequency and through connectivity led to an unsustainable over-use of track capacity, both in central Manchester and on the routes leading into it.

These constraints had effects far beyond Manchester. Due to the interconnectivity of the network, services right across the North, from Liverpool to Hull, York and Newcastle, as well as from towns like Blackpool and Southport to the airport, were affected.

The Manchester Task Force, which includes operators, Network Rail, Transport for Greater Manchester and Transport for the North, was set up to develop a long-term blueprint to deliver the high performing railway the North needs and deserves.

The Task Force concentrated on those routes and services with the poorest performance and proposed a new timetable to address these issues. Stakeholders and line users were consulted on these proposals, which were amended to address their concerns, where that was possible without risking the performance improvements that underpin the whole task force concept.

The new timetable has delivered improvements in reliability of around 30 per cent, and the task force concept is now being used to resolve issues on the East Coast main line.

The improved reliability through Manchester complements the TransPennine Route Upgrade, which will deliver faster and more reliable services along a wholly electrified line between Manchester Victoria, Leeds and York.

For Sheffield to Manchester Airport services, the challenges of Manchester’s constrained capacity are exacerbated by capacity constraints through Stockport. Along with the capacity of the airport station itself, this limits the number of direct services to/from Manchester Airport, making changing at Manchester Piccadilly essential for services from the south and east.

Business cases are in development for improvements at Manchester Oxford Road, Manchester Airport and Manchester Piccadilly, and I expect the Manchester Task Force to make more detailed recommendations on the extra services that could operate as a result of this investment.

At the same time, this Government is committed to transforming infrastructure delivery and putting in place the most radical overhaul of public transport in a generation.

The new Government is currently considering options on future rail infrastructure, including how we best support economic growth in the North and Midlands and address delivery and capacity challenges following the decisions of the previous Government whilst maintaining financial discipline.

I see improved connectivity as an important factor in growing the northern and wider economy and would hope that new infrastructure would allow more direct services from Sheffield to the Airport.

I have copied all Noble Lords who spoke in this discussion, and will place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Yours sincerely,



**Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill**

**MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT**