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Dear Mr Faulkner,

### **Proposed rail service changes in South Cumbria**

Thank you for your letter of 29 May addressed to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State about proposed rail service changes in South Cumbria. Your letter has been forwarded to me for a response. I note that you have copied your letter to Tim Farron MP and to John Woodcock MP. Norman Baker has previously written to Mr Farron on this subject.

As you will be aware, the Department for Transport reached agreement with First Transpennine Express (FTPE) in February for the introduction of ten electric trains on the Manchester Airport to Scotland route from December 2013 once electrification of the railway from Manchester to the West Coast Mainline south of Wigan is completed.

Given limited capacity and rolling stock, the rail industry has to balance the wishes of long distance passengers travelling between major cities with those passengers that use local and branch line services. FTPE advise that the Lakes Line saw passenger demand grow by 11% in 2010-11 which is to be welcomed. In the same year passenger demand on the Manchester to Scotland route rose by over 35%. New four-coach electric trains will provide more seats for passengers on this popular route, increasing capacity by over 80%. This will directly benefit passengers travelling between Manchester, Preston, Lancaster, Oxenholme, Penrith and Carlisle.

I acknowledge that the use of new electric trains on Scottish services does make the delivery of the current through trains to Barrow-in-Furness and Windermere (by running two diesel trains coupled together between Manchester and Lancaster or Oxenholme) challenging. The demand for through travel between Manchester and South Cumbria has to be balanced with the overall increase in the number of seats that will be provided along the route – including to stations in West Cumbria.

With regard to your first two bullet points, during the 2011-12 financial year around 9% of people using rail services at Windermere and Barrow-in-Furness made a journey to or from Manchester. Of passengers arriving at Windermere, 3% started from Manchester Airport. Indeed, around 12% of passengers arriving at Windermere station travelled from

London. The vast majority of these passengers will be tourists who are unlikely to be affected significantly by the proposed changes to the timetable.

FTPE have advised me that 40% of passengers on the Furness line buy tickets to stations in Cumbria as do around 50% of passengers on the Lakes Line. I understand that 30% of tickets sold at Grange-over-Sands station are for journeys to Lancaster or Preston.

I note your comments about people being more inclined to drive to, say, Manchester if they have to change train. A change of trains does not necessarily extend overall journey times. For example, the 1300 train from Manchester Airport to Barrow-in-Furness takes the same time on Fridays (when a change at Lancaster is required) as the direct train takes on other weekdays. The same applies to the 1600 departure from Manchester Airport to Windermere when a change is required at Oxenholme on Fridays. When direct trains are not available, same platform connections are available to northbound passengers at Lancaster. As you will know, Oxenholme station offers northbound passengers a cross-platform connection.

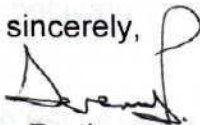
With regard to your final bullet point, it will be for FTPE to best match its rolling stock fleet to the passenger demand across the franchise. It will be for FTPE to determine whether it is appropriate for a four coach electric train to be strengthened to eight carriages at busy times.

As you know, FTPE is currently consulting on the proposed amendment to the timetables for services between Manchester Airport and stations in Cumbria. A number of through services are to be retained. FTPE is working with local stakeholders to find the best practical connections as part of developing this timetable. It will be for the operator to assess any options there may be to amend their original proposals in light of comments submitted to them by the Community Rail Partnerships, local user groups and other stakeholders.

More broadly, the Government has announced significant investment in the Northern Hub scheme and on the electrification of routes in Lancashire to increase capacity on busy routes across Northern England and to reduce journey times. In conjunction with the consideration of plans for the future franchise(s) for the North of England after the end of the current FTPE franchise, options will be assessed regarding future levels of service for both local and through services on the Furness Line and the Lakes Line.

Additionally, the recent announcement of the designation of the Furness Line as a Community Rail service will enable local users and stakeholders to provide more input on how best to develop the train service along the line.

Yours sincerely,



Jeremy Partington