HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Thursday 2 March 2023

T9. [903852] **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Will the Secretary of State or one of his Ministers meet me to discuss the increased restrictions on the movement of special types of general orders and abnormal loads, which are having a hugely detrimental effect on companies such as Cadzow Heavy Haulage in Blantyre?

Mr Holden: Yes.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): The Minister and I have spoken almost daily about the Melton bypass. Could he update me on his conversations with the Treasury about that? I also thank the Government for the five upgrades that they have delivered to the A1, where work has now started.

Mr Holden: I am delighted that my hon. Friend is pleased with the work that we are doing. She has been a real champion of it and has never failed to bend my ear at every opportunity. I hope to make a further announcement on this matter shortly.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): I am worried that the Minister did not listen to concerns about the Southeastern timetable from both sides of the House. I travel from St Johns and every single day there are delays and overcrowding. The timetable changes were not consulted on. It is good that Ministers announced some changes, but why not reverse them all and do the right thing? The service was better before.

Huw Merriman: I reiterate that when season tickets are reduced by the figures that we have seen— 32% compared with pre-covid levels—we have to make changes to add more resilience, to ensure that trains do not have to cross lines, to reduce cancellations and to improve punctuality. I am meeting the hon. Member and her rail service groups because I do listen and, as has been reflected today, I will make changes where they make sense.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): My hard-pressed constituents are still suffering a totally unacceptable number of cancelled rail services by TransPennine Express every morning—just yesterday from Huddersfield, the 6.49, the 7.01, the 7.30, and the 7.46. How on earth are my constituents expected to get to work, school, college or university? When will TransPennine Express get a grip and when will we strip them of the franchise?

Huw Merriman: As the Secretary of State made clear, we should all try to fix the systemic problems that exist on the route. Let me give one example: at the moment, when a driver calls in sick—and there are sickness rates of 14%—another driver will cover it only if they are working under rest day working. However, the unions will not agree to rest day working, so the train gets cancelled. If hon. Members are interested in fixing these issues, they should look at the parties responsible and not just at the operator.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Further to Question 4, the Minister will be aware of plans to significantly increase flights in and out of London City airport over my constituency and many others in east and south London. Can he assure the House that a decision on the matter will not be made while the Civil Aviation Authority's survey of noise pollution is still being conducted?

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman): I obviously cannot comment on the situation at the moment, but the hon. Gentleman's point is well made. If he wishes to take the matter up with the aviation Minister, I am sure that she would welcome it.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): What is the Minister doing to ensure there is better information sharing among councils to deliver safer taxi and private hire services across the country?

Mr Holden: My hon. Friend will know that his local council, Bolton, is one of the best at information sharing with respect to taxi driving licences across the country. I hope that councils such as Birmingham, Manchester, Sefton, Newcastle and Liverpool will get on board with the voluntary scheme before the mandatory element kicks in soon, because we should not leave people at risk on our services.

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): When I met the Minister, he gave me assurances that Southeastern timetables would improve in Erith and Thamesmead. He mentioned this morning that all south-east London MPs had received an update. I am one of the MPs who has not. There is an impact on my constituency, so I would like to know why I have not received that update. My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) has kindly shown me the letter, which partially addresses some of the issues with off-peak services on the Bexley line, but does not address over-crowding across the board, most of which occurs during peak times. Will the Minister look into the matter urgently?

Huw Merriman: The email with the letter will have been sent to four hon. Members; the hon. Lady is one of them. If it has not yet got through, I suspect that that is because of a systems issue rather than anything else, but as soon as I leave the Chamber I will make sure that she gets it. I make the point again that I am a user of Southeastern and of London Bridge, and I am aware of the issues. We will continue to reflect, adapt and change where the case is made—I assure the hon. Lady of that.

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): The roads Minister is aware of my campaign to upgrade junctions 28 and 29 of the M1. Will he commit to visiting both junctions and meeting local stakeholders?

Mr Holden: I would be absolutely delighted: I regularly drive on that road and it almost feels as if I have been meeting them, given the slowness of the traffic, particularly at junction 28. I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and other hon. Members in the area to discuss the matter further.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I do not know whether the Minister is aware of the plans being developed at the University of Sheffield's advanced manufacturing research centre, with Boeing, to research and potentially to manufacture ultra-lightweight materials for planes. If not, would he like to visit Sheffield to meet