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Rt. Hon. Chris Grayling MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
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8 February 2018

Dear Chris

East Coast rail franchise

I have noted your statement (5 February) to Parliament in respect of the future of the East Coast franchise. As you are aware, this is a key cross-border railway service for Scotland and accordingly, I would have welcomed notification shortly before your statement. Whilst I fully appreciate that you hold the contract, it was disappointing, because of our shared interest in the service, to hear about it through the media.

Following our phone call, you reiterated that you are taking steps to protect the interests of passengers and reaffirmed that day-to-day operations will be unaffected which should offer a degree of reassurance to passengers and staff. I note that you are considering a range of management options in the short-term to ensure continuity of service. It is important for Scotland that whatever is determined must deliver the much needed service enhancements and increased frequency that formed part of the original contract. The latest Office for Road and Rail figures show a 7.5% annual growth in cross-border patronage and, accordingly I would not wish the issue with the current franchisee to cause any reduction in investment in the route.

It is apparent that there are lessons to be learnt about the franchising process and particularly how the operator was allowed to make what was clearly an unsustainable bid. Whilst the immediate impacts of overbidding for the franchise are on the operator of the services, we should not underplay the effect on passengers, staff or public confidence in the rail industry. I note your intention to undertake 'a transparent appraisal of the options available' to ensure the continuing provision of quality services on the East Coast. That is welcome and will no doubt assist with public acceptance of the chosen outcome.

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I appreciate the personal assurances you gave me on ensuring the stability of other cross-border services, during our phone call on 7 February 2018. I would be grateful if your office could keep my officials apprised of any developments, both in respect of East Coast and the other cross-border franchises and I note your assurance that we will receive advance notice of your decision on the selected option for managing the interim arrangements through to 2020.



HUMZA YOUSAF

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