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The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
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Dear Secretary of State

Investment in reliability on the East Coast Main Line

I am writing as Chair of the East Coast Main Line Authorities (ECMA) Consortium. ECMA works for further investment, to improve the passenger experience, improve capacity and reliability and shorten journey times on the East Coast Main Line. ECMA is a cross-party group of Local Authorities, Combined Authorities and Scottish Regional Transport Partnerships along the whole of the East Coast Main Line.

As you are an MP representing a constituency that relies on the East Coast Main Line, I know you are well-aware of how important day-to-day reliability is for users on the route, which stretches from the Highlands to Hertfordshire and serves a whole range of markets from long-distance intercity flows to local commuting to freight.

The East Coast Main Line continues to suffer from poor reliability. This ranges from problems with day-to-day reliability through to major incidents that have a significant impact on services throughout the day. There were 12 such incidents in 2018, which has a particular impact on long-distance users who are forced to abandon trips altogether. The estimated economic impact on the UK economy of these incidents was £46m.

Such is the concern and recognition of this problem that Network Rail costed up options to achieve substantial improvements to reliability of services as part of its Draft Strategic Plan 2019 to 2024 for the London North Eastern & East Midlands Route, called the 'East Coast Supplementary Plan', published in early 2018. This was focused on renewing ageing assets and action to make the route more resilient. Unfortunately, these options failed to attract support, and remain unfunded.

ECMA commissioned research to test the wider economic benefits of improving reliability on the line. Using LNER reliability as a benchmark for the route, our research suggests that halving the frequency of delays of more than 10 minutes



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would have a wider benefit to local economies of over £62 million per year. Over 10 years, this would be worth well over £600m to local economies served by the route.

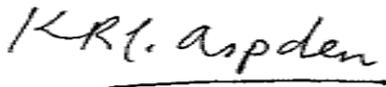
The current welcome capacity enhancement work underway on the line will allow more trains to run, but with even more trains running there's a risk that pressure on the line increases, and reliability problems worsen. Network Rail has stated that it will have the capacity to undertake the works it presented in the Supplementary Plan from 2021, and that the works set out remain valuable investment opportunities. Network Rail's analysis identified positive BCR values for the proposed works.

In light of both the ongoing problems with reliability on the route, the evident opportunity for undertaking the necessary work in the short-term, together with the clear economic benefits for the long-term, there's a strong investment case.

I urge you to seriously consider the opportunity that additional investment in the reliability of the East Coast Main Line presents, the benefit of which would be widely felt up and down the country.

Our officers have separately sent to your officials a copy of the research that underpin our findings, and they will be pleased to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Keith Aspden
Leader of City of York Council
East Coast Main Line Authorities (ECMA) Chair



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