



## Department for Transport

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Rail Forum Midlands

From the Minister of State  
**Chris Heaton-Harris MP**

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31 March 2020

Dear Darren, Elaine,

I wanted to write to update you on the measures we are taking to address the concerns that you and your members have raised with me in recent days. Firstly, I wanted to thank you for your co-operation during this unprecedented time. I know my officials have been in almost daily contact with you and others in your organisations, and have valued the excellent communication that they have had so far.

You will have seen the extensive package of measures that the Chancellor has set out including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme. I hope these measures reassure you that the Government is doing its best to stand behind industry sectors including yours. I trust that you will provide your frank and honest feedback to government on the effectiveness of these policies for your members.

I am aware that there are several specific issues facing the rail supply chain. I have highlighted these issues to Network Rail who will continue to work with my officials on issues such as cash flow and client-supplier contracts. We are also working with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to ensure that all businesses are supported through this pandemic. Where individual OEMs face difficulties that could affect their own supply chains, we are working closely with BEIS and UK Government Investments to monitor these businesses and to minimise any knock-on impacts.

We know that the definition of key workers remains an area of confusion for your members, who have asked for greater clarity. The Department for Education defines key workers as those whose work is critical to the coronavirus response. For transport, this includes those who will keep air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport operating during the COVID-19 response, including those working on transport systems through the supply chain.


We cannot prescribe for all situations and it is rightly up to individual businesses to decide which of their workers meet the requirements of being a critical worker. However, the Government will keep this under review, and issue further guidance and clarification if necessary. I'd like to thank your members for continuing their vital work on our railways during this time.

We are working with Network Rail to ensure that all key workers who need to go into work can do so safely and are protected with the right Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). As you know, Network Rail are also facilitating conversations on hotel availability with their suppliers and have agreed to joint hotel planning.

Network Rail are taking a risk assessment-based approach to Easter works. They have so far only had to cancel seven of 800 planned possessions for Easter works, due to difficulty in agreeing methods of work compliant with social distancing guidance. I know Network Rail are working with you on forward planning, looking at the CP6 pipeline and identifying "shovel ready" projects that could potentially be brought forward to help your members continue work.

Finally, I'd like to encourage you to continue engaging closely with the Department on matters of importance to your members.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

**Chris Heaton-Harris MP**

**Minister of State for Transport**