NORTHERN

Go do your thing

Sir Julian Smith MP

By Email: Julian.Smith.mp@parliament.uk

First Floor 1B
George Stephenson House
Toft Green
York
YO1 6JT

27 October 2025

tricia.williams@northernrailway.co.uk

Dear Julian Smith MP

I am writing to update you on Northern Trains' work to grow rail usage across the North, simplify ticketing, break down barriers, and deliver great customer service. These efforts are central to our mission of delivering a more reliable, modernised railway for the communities we serve.

Driving growth

Driving passenger growth is a key priority for Northern, helping to address the industry subsidy challenge and supporting economic development across the North. We've recently reached our highest customer journey numbers since COVID thanks to stable performance, increased trust, and targeted commercial strategies.

A strong customer experience is essential for growth, and the newly launched Rail Customer Experience Survey will provide national insight into how the industry is performing and where it must improve, complementing Northern's monthly 4,000 post-travel responses. We welcome this insight to help us continuously enhance the journey experience and make every customer interaction count.

Through research we understand the scale of growth opportunity in the North and where we need to tackle customers' perceptions to unlock further demand. Our Summer Leisure Campaign encouraged customers to 'Train it easy this Summer,' focusing on value and overcoming perceptions on price. Recently, our flash sale generated c.130k customer journeys making it our most successful sale ever. Delivering locally has also been a key theme for us. Over the summer our Local Food Festival Campaign encouraged customers to visit new towns and cities across the North and, this autumn, we are promoting more amazing arts and light festivals than ever, with great value £2 fares encouraging customers to travel to destinations including Bradford, Lancaster, Marton and Wakefield. In Cumbria, the car free campaign, showcased the opportunity of rail and bus coming together to drive modal shift.

Breaking down barriers

At Northern our core purpose is to connect people and places across the North. We are more than just a transport provider, we link people to jobs, education and leisure opportunities. In September, I was proud to launch our Breaking Down Barriers to Opportunity impact report in Parliament, which sets out our commitment to support our colleagues, invest in local economies and make a difference to our customers and the communities we serve, every single day. This report is the result of a collaboration with The Purpose Coalition and helps us to align with national goals to tackle inequality and create opportunity. You can read the report on our website here.

Reflecting Northern's commitment to making a meaningful impact both within and beyond the rail network, two special trains have been launched to celebrate legacy, unity, and progress. One is named in honour of Rob Burrow, recognising his achievements in rugby league and advocacy for motor neurone disease, developed with support from his family and the MND Association. The other features artwork marking 200 years of railway history and pays tribute to long-serving Northern colleagues, highlighting the company's rich heritage and dedication to its people.

December timetable changes

Last month, the industry came together to announce the biggest timetable change on the East Coast Main Line in more than a decade, which will provide more trains, thousands of extra seats per day, and quicker journeys. For Northern this means new faster journeys between Leeds and Sheffield, more services in the North East and better onward connections. As we get closer to the timetable going live, it's important that you know what the changes mean for your constituents. Please find more information about changes in your area here.

Pay as you go ticketing trials

In September, the Department for Transport announced plans for four new digital pay-as-you-go (PAYG) ticketing trials, three of which will be on Northern's network and operated by us. Unlike previous PAYG rollouts in other parts of the UK, which use contactless payment at barriers, these nine-month trials will use GPS to track customers' location throughout their train journey and calculate the fare. The trial has started on the Harrogate–Leeds route, and will also include, Sheffield–Doncaster and Sheffield–Barnsley later this year. Read more here.

Gold award for supporting the Armed Forces

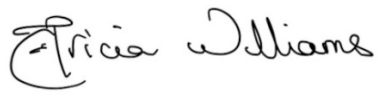
I was delighted to receive the brilliant news that Northern has been awarded the Gold Employer Recognition Scheme Award by the Ministry of Defence. This award recognises our commitment to supporting people who have served in the military and comes just three and half years after we signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant. We have hundreds of colleagues who've previously worked in the military or currently serve as reservists, putting their skills and experience to use in a wide range of roles across the business.

Our team

Earlier this year I updated you on our work to drive ambitious improvements in train performance. To support that we have changed our operational structures so that we are set up in the right way to deliver our ambitious train service performance targets. Northern's operations team under Chief Operating Officer Matt Rice, are now structured into six new Service Delivery Areas, each led by a dedicated Director focused on delivering excellent train services. Station teams now form a standalone function to concentrate on providing outstanding customer experience - led by our Commercial and Customer Director Alex Hornby.

I hope you have found this update useful - please reach out to your Stakeholder Manager if you have any local queries: Darren Allsopp, Stakeholder Manager for Yorkshire, Humberside and East Midlands: darren.allsopp@northernrailway.co.uk / 07921 493129.

Yours sincerely



Tricia Williams
Managing Director