

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

15th December 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

**RE: Heathrow Express & MTR Dispute**

I'm writing on behalf of the Heathrow Area Transport Forum (HATF) to request that the DfT should step in to help rail passengers travelling to Heathrow by resolving the unsatisfactory situation, whereby the arrangement which allows 2 MTR trains per hour to access the station at Terminal 5 Heathrow, is being brought to an end by the reinstatement of 4 Heathrow Express trains (HEX) per hour to T5.

It's currently Heathrow Express' intention to reinstate its 4 trains per hour service between Paddington and Heathrow Terminal 5 once the new Class 387 fleet enters into service (expected to be January 2021). This means that there is no capacity at Terminal 5 for MTR to run their desired 2 trains per hour due to single platform operation at Paddington. MTR will then need to run to the Central Terminal Area (CTA) station and then empty to Terminal 4 to turn around. Single platform operation was introduced in December 19 at the request of the DfT to accommodate the introduction of the enhanced GWR timetable and delays to the Crossrail programme. In addition to this, there are the commercial factors facing both HEX and MTR.

HATF members are concerned about the impact of the removal of the MTR services from T5 recognising that both passengers and airport employees would benefit from a direct stopping service to Terminal 5 rather than having to interchange at the CTA. This could be up to 1,000 rail passengers a day who could be disadvantaged.

Network Rail System Operator, in an attempt to resolve the issue, recommended that HEX should drop to 2 trains per hour. However, under its Track Access Agreement with Network Rail, HEX pays fixed costs that are based on a 4 trains per hour service. There is no contractual mechanism to reduce these payments if only 2 trains per hour are run and no associated cost reduction in track access charges was offered so HEX by network Rail.

Similarly, the overarching agreement that HAL and HEX entered into at the request of the Department for Transport to facilitate HS2 has led to the operation of the HEX service by GWR. Charges under this contract are fixed and does not allow a reduction if train services are reduced. I believe that HEX is willing to discuss a compromise that could result in 2 fast

and 2 stopping services between Paddington and Terminal 5, however, they argue strongly that it is not financially viable to run 2 services per hour and yet pay for 4.

An alternative solution exists to alter the timetable in light of reduced passenger demand to restore HEX platform capacity.

The platform constraints placed on the HEX service are driven by DfT's request that HEX and HAL should facilitate the delays to Crossrail and help with the introduction of planned major timetable change on the great western route. It's not within Network Rail's powers to unilaterally waive access charges or to reassign the GWR platforms and all of these solutions require the DfT to step in and coordinate an equitable solution to all parties.

It is in the passenger interest that both HEX and TfL both run two services per hour each to Terminal 5 while Terminal 4 remains closed. It would also provide a possible solution if the capacity at T5 could be restored to 6 tph, allowing two MTR trains to access T5.

The DfT could I believe, direct either of these possible actions and I urge you to do this to assist hard pressed airport staff and passengers during 2021/2022.

Yours sincerely,



**Val Shawcross CBE**  
Independent Chair  
Heathrow Area Transport Forum