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Flying Scotsman Tours to the Borders and Fife, 15 May

As you know, following the events of the weekend of 14/15 May which nearly caused these two historic tours to be cancelled, I initiated a thorough investigation of the events that led up to this unacceptable situation.

This investigation has now been completed, and I would like to share with you the key findings.

On Friday 13 May our gauging engineers were unable to allow safe passage of the Flying Scotsman. This was because they had insufficient information, for some of the key structures on the route, to enable them to be certain that the locomotive could use the route without incident.

I am of course pleased that the safety of passengers was foremost in mind, but I remain deeply disappointed that we got into this position at all.

On the Saturday we were able to clear the route for use by taking some actual measurements on a critical part of the infrastructure, undertaking a manual exercise to compare gauging approvals previously given for other steam locomotives on the Borders railway, and by making some operational changes to the proposed route.

I always believe it is worth getting to the bottom of an issue before leaping to judgement. In this case, the incomplete gauging information was only part of the problem. It is now evident that a number of other key factors contributed, and the most significant of these was that the time available for the gauging engineers was insufficient for them to undertake their work in the normal planned manner

The process for agreeing a charter tour is supposed to start with the charter operator (in this case West Coast Railways) asking Network Rail for a timetabled path at least 12 weeks before the service is due to run. In this case, and despite various informal discussions between the parties over the previous weeks, the formal request to run the service was not received until 10 March (three weeks later than required). This request contained some material errors, which meant that it was rejected by both Network Rail and ScotRail.

It was not until early April, and with the intervention of Steam Dreams (the promoter of the tours), that further activity happened.

These delays were compounded by difficulties in the processing of the request within Network Rail given a lack of both data and necessary resources. There was clearly insufficient prioritisation of this request and insufficient escalation internally once it became clear there was a problem.

I make no excuses for what has happened as Network Rail is accountable for the overall process working. Even with the failures outlined above, Network Rail should have been able to recognise the importance of these tours and have taken steps much earlier to enable them to run smoothly.

As a result of our findings in this case I have asked for a thorough review of the whole charter tour process to be undertaken, and for this to involve all the parties concerned, both within Network Rail and the charter companies. I have also asked for a separate review to be undertaken within Network Rail to ensure that the quality of our structures gauging data is improved and maintained.

I apologise again for the concerns that this incident caused at the time, but please be assured that I am committed to ensuring that we in Network Rail both learn and improve following this.

I will be pleased to meet with you to take you through the investigation findings in more detail if you would like me to.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Mark Carne". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "M".

Mark Carne
Chief Executive