

Mark Chestney
Heathrow Airport Limited

Graham Stockbridge
Department for Transport

Andrew McIntosh
Transport for London

By email

29 October 2020

**Heathrow Airport Rail Service Provision
December 2020 and May 2021 Timetable Changes**

Dear Mark, Graham and Andrew,

I write to you as the Director of the Industry Timetable Change Programme Management Office (PMO) which was formed following the issues experienced across the rail industry regarding the implementation of the May 2018 timetable change. The Industry PMO has now been permanently established to provide assurance to industry stakeholders for future timetable changes.

On Tuesday 27th October 2020, I chaired a meeting with Heathrow Airport Ltd (HAL), Network Rail, Transport for London (TfL) and the Department for Transport (DfT) to discuss the proposed rail service provision to Heathrow Airport from December 2020 and May 2021.

Summary

- Heathrow Airport is currently served by four trains per hour to Heathrow Terminal 5, comprising two services each operated by Heathrow Express Operating Company (HEOC) and MTR Elizabeth Line (MTREL). There are no services to Terminal 4, which is expected to be closed to air passenger traffic until June 2021. This service provision is comfortably meeting current passenger demand.
- As part of the December 2020 timetable change, HEOC plan to increase services to four trains per hour, all terminating at Terminal 5. With the current agreed operation of Heathrow Express services at Paddington from one platform, the timetable requires the use of both platforms at Terminal 5 for HEOC. As a result, MTREL services are unable to be accommodated at Terminal 5 for the majority of the operating day and are thus to be operated to Terminal 4. The timetable for these services has now been published.
- The agreement for Heathrow Express to operate from one platform at Paddington has been extended until the Crossrail project is commissioned and MTR services commence services from the west into the Central Operating Section. Timetable

development work has demonstrated that to accommodate MTR services at Heathrow Terminal 5, Heathrow Express would need to operate from two platforms at Paddington for part of the operating day, which in turn would have implications for other services at Paddington, both in terms of network performance and the ability to accommodate all planned services.

- There is a risk that HEOC will be unable to operate the full four trains per hour service from the commencement of the December 2020 timetable, due to the availability of Class 387 rolling stock and having sufficient numbers of driver trained to operate them.
- There was agreement at the meeting that it was in the best interests of passengers using services to Heathrow and the Great Western Main Line (GWML) corridor to retain the current level of service from the December 2020 timetable. The relatively low passenger demand for rail services to the airport is not expected to increase significantly in the short term, and it seems unhelpful for passengers on MTREL services, many of whom are Airport workers, to be unable to use direct services to Terminal 5. Furthermore the risk that HEOC may be unable to operate the proposed four trains per hour service, as described above, adds to the wider risk to network performance through intensifying services on the busy GWML.
- Network Rail Capacity Planning have confirmed that the current service plan can be progressed through the timetable planning process prior to the December 2020 timetable change date, but it does require a quick decision.
- The position for May 2021 is similar. HEOC are planning to operate four trains per hour to Terminal 5, whilst MTREL have also proposed to operate four trains per hour to the same destination. I understand that this is subject to a formal dispute, to be heard at the Access Disputes Resolution Committee on 12 November. I urge the relevant parties to reach quick agreement on a service proposal that best meets the interests of passengers from May 2021. I expect this would include the provision of some level of MTREL service to Terminal 5 throughout the operating day.

Recommendations

- The current service provision of four trains per hour to Heathrow Terminal 5, comprising two HEOC and two MTREL services, is maintained for the December 2020 timetable change.
- The current dispute for the May 2021 timetable change is brought to a rapid conclusion, through assessment of what will be in the best interests of passengers in terms of service provision.

With a little over six weeks until the commencement of the December 2020 timetable, a quick resolution is necessary. Please could you confirm your intentions by Friday 6 November. If there is no agreement to revise services as recommended, the timetable will remain as published, with most MTREL services operating to Terminal 4, which would seem to be a poor result for passengers.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

I am copying this letter to Sophie Chapman at HEOC, Mike Bagshaw at MTREL, Rebecca Holding at First Group (for GWR), and Mike Gallop at Network Rail.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Curtis". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Chris Curtis
Industry Timetable Change Assurance Director