

Minister for Transport
Jenny Gilruth MSP



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

29 April 2022

Dear Grant,

I write regarding the RMT's planned ballot for industrial action, which I understand commenced on Wednesday 27 April. As I understand it, RMT has identified three key areas of dispute: pay, a no compulsory redundancy guarantee, and a commitment that no detrimental changes to working practices or terms and conditions will be imposed on its members.

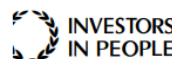
It is hugely disappointing that the UK Government appears not to be doing more to resolve this dispute to avoid industrial action. At a time when both Governments are trying to encourage the public back to rail, industrial action at this time would be extremely detrimental and, of course, would adversely impact on operations in Scotland and Scottish Network Rail employees. This dispute is not of the Scottish Government's making; it is frustrating that, as with other Network Rail matters which are reserved, we have no say, no locus and no influence here, yet rail services and employees here in Scotland will be affected.

Secondly, in the event of industrial action the maintenance of safety must of course be the first priority. Again, this is a matter which is reserved to the UK Government. I therefore will expect, and I seek assurances from you, that Network Rail operational plans are fully compliant with all safety requirements, and that the Office of Rail and Road will maintain appropriate assurance activities throughout any industrial action.

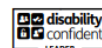
It is understood that Network Rail are advising that possible strike action could cost the industry as much as thirty million pounds per day, thus significantly increasing the amount of efficiencies and productivity they would have to find in order to fund any potential pay increase. If correct, is it not the case that these estimates would also potentially far outweigh the cost of any savings arising from staff reductions through

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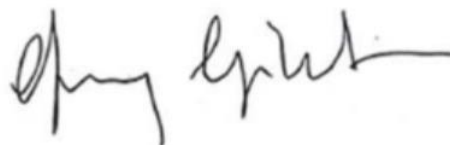
redundancies? It makes no economic sense for Network Rail to allow this dispute to worsen. On that basis, I think we can only conclude that this dispute is being allowed to continue for political or ideological purposes. The Scottish Government will not hesitate to make it known that that is our view.

Any industrial action by Network Rail staff would highly likely have a significant impact on passenger and freight services in Scotland. The level of disruption will of course vary depending on the type of action taken. However, by way of indication, a full strike of operations staff, even after implementing any mitigating actions, would result in a limited amount of timetabled services being able to operate, with the vast majority in west Central Scotland. I am sure you will agree this would be hugely impactful especially at a time when we are all trying to encourage the travelling public back onto our services and provide some indication of a return to normality. I will be very clear in my communications with the public where the responsibility for this industrial action rests; it is not a matter in which the Scottish Government has any locus and I expect you to prioritise an urgent resolution.

The Scottish Government adheres to a policy that no compulsory redundancy agreements should be negotiated for public sector workers wherever possible I have made clear to Network Rail that we will not support any position in Scotland which leads Network Rail to enforce any redundancies of their staff in a manner not consistent with Scottish Government policy.

Industrial action can and should be avoided if you and the UK Government work with Network Rail and the Trade Unions to reach a settlement. As the cost of living crisis continues to harm those with the least, I ask that these talks are urgently prioritised to avoid industrial action and escalation of this dispute, and allow for a timely resolution to be reached, not least for all of Scotland's Network Rail employees. I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely



JENNY GILRUTH