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Dear Mr Sullivan

Thank you for your further letter dated 21st July. I am sorry that you felt my letter did not go far enough in explaining our response to the twisted rail at Ledbury earlier in the month.

As with any incident of this nature we must ensure that our contingency plans are both clear and consistent and our route managers work hard to identify robust response policies that can be implemented quickly should major incidents such as this arise.

We do in fact have a policy of not terminating trains at Ledbury unless the train has gone past the cut-off point of Great Malvern. Even in these circumstances we recommend that trains are only terminated there if there is another train not far behind or if buses can be quickly arranged. In all other instances, we will terminate the train at Great Malvern where there are refreshment facilities, toilets and shade from the sun in hot weather.

Whilst some of our services did terminate at Great Malvern that day (with buses provided), your account clearly demonstrates that things did not run as smoothly as we would have liked that day. I am of course very sorry for this. As with all incidents that have such a large impact on what can be a very busy part of the day, we must rely on all parts of the chain working well. If not, this can have its own implications on increasing the potential for further problems.

Concerning the specific points you raised in your initial letter, my answers might perhaps demonstrate this.

2) In the past we have sent staff to stations where many passengers are waiting. The benefits of this are plain, they provide a direct contact with our central control room who will be co-ordinating the incident and it provides customers with a decision-maker who can assess the current situation. It is of course good customer service too.

On the day in question, our Route Manager was on annual leave and his deputy was dealing with other incidents elsewhere on our network. Concerning other staff, we do not have the resources to mobilise incident response staff whilst also maintaining the level of service required at our busier stations along the route. However, a good contact at times like this is our Customer Relations department who can also liaise with our central control room. They can be contacted on (0121) 634 2040 (option 4).

3) I acknowledge your comments about allowing customers to remain on the train. However, the train needed to clear the line and it was part of an operational strategy to take it over to the other side of the station to prepare for its return journey back to Worcester and the Midlands.

I do however fully appreciate your concerns for those waiting in such warm temperatures, especially the elderly. I think the key element here was ensuring that the buses we had ordered arrived as quickly as possible. As I said in my previous letter there was unfortunately an additional delay when the buses we arranged got caught in traffic congestion. I do think that this highlights the importance of all parts of the chain working effectively and we have regular contract meetings with our approved suppliers, National Express and Fraser Eagle to ensure that we can procure good quality buses at very short notice.

4) There is an option of terminating trains at Worcester and recommending alternative routes. Concerning your train, the incident was only in the early stages of being investigated when you were approaching Worcester. As with a lot of infrastructure incidents, they can be quickly resolved and as such they are a fluid situation for the early stages. Had this been a minor fault, we would have then been premature in terminating our service at Worcester.

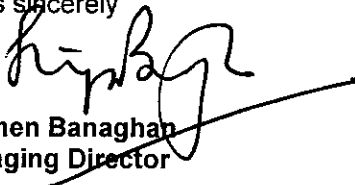
You are correct in stating that there are alternative routes via Newport and Shrewsbury (from Birmingham). In order to do this, we need to inform an enormous amount of people ranging from Senior Conductors, platform staff, National Rail Enquiries, other train companies and customers themselves. This is a huge and complicated task, especially as passengers can be asked to pay an excess fare on journeys not recommended on their ticket. In terms of Birmingham New Street, this task is equally complicated and whilst I can certainly see the benefits of this recommendation, I don't think the industry is yet ready to accommodate such a departure from the normal, agreed practice.

Concerning Smiths of Ledbury, the company will not be contacted unless they are a recommended supplier for either of our own providers, Fraser Eagle and National Express. We maintain these contracts to ultimately ensure the safety and comfort of our passengers. I will certainly mention Smiths to the manager who liaises with our coach suppliers just in case we are in a position where need to terminate services at Ledbury again in the future.

Overall, I hope I have been able to clarify the additional points you have made. Once again, please accept my apologies for the problems you experienced on 3rd July.

Thank you for writing to me again.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Banaghan
Managing Director