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NEWS RELEASE - Immediate

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West Coast Rail Franchise Debacle

TravelWatch North West, (TWNW), the independent passenger champion in North West England, is surprised at the recent announcement by the government that the awarding of the West Coast rail franchise contract to First Group has been cancelled.

Chris Dale, Chair TWNW, said “when First Group won the bid in August we stressed the importance of retaining and indeed improving existing passenger benefits against any scenario of looking for cost savings to meet the high premium payments promised to the government. We are deeply worried that against this background it has now been revealed that the Department for Transport got its sums wrong. Aside from the colossal waste of taxpayers money this decision has implications for the whole franchising process including franchise renewals and investment plans that are imminent in the North West. “

“Accordingly we welcome the proposed review of franchising which should be comprehensive and include the key question – what are the aims of franchising?”

“It is crucially important that passengers do not suffer from this shambles with services continuing to run normally, especially in the run up to Christmas, and that any handover to an interim operator is undertaken seamlessly. Indeed from a passengers viewpoint it would probably be simplest for Virgin to carry on until the process is finalised.”

ENDS

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