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Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
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Interim report to the Secretary of State for Transport following the derailment at Carmont, near Stonehaven

Dear Secretary of State,

Nearing three weeks on from the derailment in Carmont near Stonehaven, my thoughts remain with the families and friends of the three people who lost their lives, those who were injured and everyone affected by this tragedy.

Initial findings from the investigation suggest that after a period of heavy rainfall, the train struck a pile of washed out rock and gravel before derailing. This has raised questions about what we are doing, and what more we can and should be doing, to reduce the risk of this happening again. You requested a wider assessment of the impact of extreme weather on the resilience and safe performance of our rail network and I am pleased to attach the report.

We are all aware that Britain is increasingly seeing more incidents of severe weather, and this presents a constant challenge to the safety and reliability of the railway. As the report details, this is particularly apparent in regard to earthworks – some of which are more than 150 years old – and drainage, as our country experiences more heavy rainfall and flooding. Rebuilding thousands of miles of earthworks is simply not practicable, so we must look at how we manage the risk and what measures we must take to keep trains running and passengers safe.

It is a challenge we are acutely aware of and is something we are working hard to address, but the tragedy at Stonehaven has been a stark reminder that further action is needed now. The report looks at how we manage the risk of landslips and sets out next steps. It shows the immediate action we are taking, such as reviewing high risk sites and changing operating rules for reporting adverse rainfall; it details our medium term improvements, including establishing expert-led task forces on weather and earthworks and exploring how to use what we have at our disposal now more efficiently; and it talks about our longer-term strategies, the development of technology, targeted investment, and continually improving the network as we renew and build new assets.

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Our railway is one of the safest in Europe and tragic accidents are incredibly rare, but something went wrong on 12 August near Stonehaven. We owe it to everyone affected – and every railway passenger – to understand what happened and it is important to note that this report does not pre-empt the outcome of ongoing independent investigations. What it does do is look at the effect of weather on our infrastructure, and it explains that while the risk of earthworks failures can never be completely removed, we must do, and will do, everything we can to minimise the impact on both the safety and performance of the railway.

This report will be expanded upon in a follow up report that will give more detail about what can be accelerated and where, and particularly the options around extra technology that could sharpen where we focus and improve warnings. We also wait for the outcomes of both the earthworks management and weather advisory taskforces.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Haines
Chief Executive