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By email: [TransportSecretary@dft.gov.uk](mailto:TransportSecretary@dft.gov.uk)

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Dear Secretary of State

It has been seven months since a passenger train derailed at Carmont near Stonehaven and three people tragically lost their lives. My thoughts remain with the families and friends of Brett McCullough, Donald Dinnie and Christopher Stuchbury and everyone affected by the awful events of 12 August last year. We owe it to them all to learn lessons and I am writing to you today to update you on the progress we have made.

Although formal investigations into the derailment continue, interim findings suggest that the train collided with stone washed out from the land above the tracks, and that heavy rainfall that morning played a significant role in the washout. Our railway remains one of the safest in Europe and accidents are thankfully incredibly rare, however it is clear that we are facing a substantial challenge in managing rail infrastructure in the face of extreme weather. As such, you requested a wide-ranging review of the impact of climate change on the resilience and safe performance of the network, and in particular, how we manage railway earthworks, drainage and weather and how we minimise the risk of such an event happening again.

We were able to provide you with an initial review in the weeks immediately after the accident last summer and I am now in a position to provide a more comprehensive report, along with independent assessments of our current practices and recommendations of further steps we could take. This report is attached. As the report shows, we are working hard to address and manage the effects of climate change but there is more we can do. Commissioning independent guidance from renowned experts Lord Robert Mair and Dame Julia Slingo is invaluable in helping us target available resources and technology to make our network as resilient as possible.

As you are aware, the challenge we face is huge. Most earthworks alongside the railway were built around 150 years ago and were poorly engineered by modern standards – cuttings were excavated at overly-steep angles and embankments formed by tipping uncompacted soil from cuttings. Drainage too, which is inherently linked to the stability of earthworks, is in many places also around 150 years old and was installed to a pre-set

design irrespective of natural catchment or likely rainfall. When this is coupled with the more frequent and more intense rainfall we are experiencing due to a changing climate, it is inevitable we see more earthworks failures.

Heavy rain caused ground slips at many embankments and cuttings across the entire network last year and while disruptive, none other than Carmont, caused derailment. We all appreciate that is little comfort to those left forever affected by that awful morning, but it does show how far-reaching this challenge is. Even with every measure in place, predicting exactly where and when earthworks will fail is currently almost impossible and while that is very unlikely to result in a derailment, it is likely to significantly disrupt train services.

It is simply not practicable to rebuild nearly 200,000 earthworks assets alongside 20,000 miles of track, so we have been upgrading the Victorian infrastructure where we can and working hard to manage risk. Investment in resilience work has almost doubled in the past decade and we've introduced or updated systems, standards, policies, practices and technology. Since last summer this work has accelerated further, including trials of new technology being rolled out more widely across the network. We have also published our Environmental Sustainability Strategy, an ambitious but entirely achievable plan to reduce carbon emissions and help tackle climate change at its root, rather than only dealing with its effects.

The commissioning of the two independent, expert taskforces – one on earthworks and one on weather – is crucial to guiding us as we take this action to the next stage. You will find reviews and recommendations in the full final reports which will be published on 17 March 2021 at 1.30pm on our website [www.networkrail.co.uk/stonehaven](http://www.networkrail.co.uk/stonehaven). There are more than 50 recommendations to consider, and these are being analysed now and some already implemented. They include more focus on drainage initiatives, upskilling our people and looking at organisational design and culture, and reviewing commercial contracts and services. We will continue to work with Lord Mair and Dame Julia to act as mentors and provide us with links to a wider group of peers to provide guidance and challenge in the complex sciences of hydrology, meteorology and earthwork management.

Extreme weather will always challenge the rail network to some degree but there are improvements that can be made. As we move forward, we will continue to work with government and industry to carefully consider every single one of the recommendations made in the taskforce reviews and build them into our planning and future funding. We all know that a sustainable, safe and reliable railway will play a critical role in the country's economic recovery as we emerge from the pandemic, and I would be pleased to give further detail on progress in future reports.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Haines  
Chief Executive