



**The Bishop of Chichester**  
*The Rt Revd Dr Martin Warner*

05 December 2016

*Dear Sirs,*

**LETTER TO THE RMT, ASLEF, GOVIA THAMESLINK  
RAILWAY AND THE DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT**

Disruption for Southern Rail passengers in the lead-up to Christmas and New Year deepens the misery of people across the whole of Sussex who are dependent upon this public transport service.

We understand the complexity of the issues for those jointly responsible for this dispute. But we believe they have a pressing moral duty to alleviate the damage that the disruption is causing to our communities.

The weight of responsibility in this dispute was summed up by someone who wrote to us, as bishops in Sussex, and put this simple question: "Who will break the circle of blame?"

Someone has to lead the way. We urge Paul Maynard, RMT and Govia to renew efforts to bring this dispute to an end.

Season ticket refunds, and the new Delay Repay 15 are a welcome recognition that something is badly amiss in the provision of rail services. But refunds are no substitute for a reliable public service.

In terms of public opinion, RMT's case against Driver Controlled Operation is persuasive, especially when set in the context of unstaffed stations and the massive increase in numbers using the railways. Let the case for DCO and a better service to passengers be clearly heard.

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None of us can ignore the trajectory towards greater automatization that is evident across all industry. But in making that move, the assurances of safety and public benefit need to be amply demonstrated.

Govia bears responsibility for a massively complex operation that determines the lives of workers, students and the elderly population across Sussex and this region. Having bought into this industry, it must ensure that the Unions are part of the solution to the challenges it faces.

Part of our task as Christian leaders is to promote those processes that contribute to human flourishing in a just and free society. In the context of this rail dispute, we assert the moral obligation of all parties in this dispute to consider first and foremost their duty to provide reliable public transport.

Those who are suffering most as a result of this dispute are working people and their families and those who do not have their own means of transport. The ongoing dispute affects us all. It threatens the economic health and development of our communities.

The winners in this dispute will be whoever has the moral courage and magnanimity to break the circle of blame. Christmas and a new year mark a good moment to seize that prize.

Yours sincerely,

t/Martin Clarke