Dear Secretary of State for Transport,

**Rail Transport Chaos in Greater Manchester and Impact on the Cultural Sector**

Pre-pandemic, tourism and the arts in Greater Manchester had a combined economic impact of £8.4b.  Thanks to national government, local government and funding agency support our cultural infrastructure has come through some of the longest periods of lockdown in the UK and we are working to make a steady recovery.  Like many organisations we are challenged by the cost-of-living crisis and some residual reluctance from audiences and visitors to return post-Covid.  We are writing to you as additionally we are experiencing continuing major impacts on our businesses caused by the appalling services provided by train operators 'serving' our region.

Our audiences, staff and business partners are experiencing significantly reduced timetables on Westcoast Mainline, Trans-Pennine Express and Northern services.  These reduced timetables are unreliable, subject to last minute cancellation, often overcrowded and dirty.  Furthermore, the Westcoast Mainline services are not bookable until the last minute and are significantly more expensive.  The one thing that is consistent across all our rail services is that they are completely unreliable so we are seeing many of our staff and customers returning to road travel which in turn is increasing congestion and negatively impacting on the environment.

Examples of the impacts on our businesses include:

**Events - audience impacts**

·         Higher number of audience no-shows for events causing not only disappointment but lost revenue

·         Conferences changing their plans due to travel disruption (eg moving dates, altering start times)

·         Customers experiencing major problems returning home after shows and concerts due to cancelled trains

**Business Travel**

·         Frequently disrupted plans, having to add additional days onto one day trips or have staff/freelancers/artists/consultants stay over additional nights and so adding costs

·         Cancellations and postponements of recruitment interviews, meetings and events.

**Staff Commuting**

·         Staff journeys to work are regularly disrupted and last-minute cancellations inevitably mean people are late to work or struggle to get home in the evenings (esp. after shows etc).

·         Significantly increased concerns about staff stress and anxiety, staff safety and wellbeing

**Tourism**

·         There is no doubt that the current rail disruption of both local and national operators is having a significant negative impact on tourism businesses in Greater Manchester.

·         At a meeting last week of 25 businesses operating conference and meetings facilities, it was reported that recent conferences had seen a significant reduction in delegate numbers (and consequently revenue) due to uncertain travel arrangements.

·         There is a general loss of confidence in travel particularly from London to Manchester and the cost of trains is making it more prohibitive to travel.

Only part of what we are experiencing can be attributed to industrial action as the travel challenges our customers, staff and business partners face are seven days per week.

Failure to get our rail services functioning properly will have a long-term negative impact on post-pandemic recovery and undermine economic growth.  It is currently reducing tax revenues and undermining our business sustainability.  If we ran our businesses as badly as the rail services in our region we would be closed for good.  We believe that this level of rail service and consequential economic damage would not be tolerated by the government if it was being experienced in London.  The up-coming festive season is absolutely vital to our business models so this situation cannot continue and we therefore urge the government to take immediate action to ensure that we have a rail service that meets the needs of our region.

Yours sincerely

Dave Moutrey, Director & CEO HOME, Manchester & Director of Culture for Manchester City Council

Tamsin Drury, Director, hÅb & Word of Warning

Liz O’Neill, CEO & Artistic Director, Z-arts

Bryony Shanahan, Joint Artistic Director/CEO, Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester

John Hodgson, Associate Director (Curatorial Practices), John Rylands Research Institute and Library, The University of Manchester

Helen Wewiora, Director & Artistic Director, Castlefield Gallery

Chris Wright, Executive Producer, FutureEverything

Stella Barnes, Creative Director, Community Arts NorthWest

Bob Riley, Chief Executive, Manchester Camerata

Julia Fawcett, Chief Executive, The Lowry, Salford

Joseph Houston, Artistic Director, Hope Mill Theatre

Roddy Gauld, Chief Executive, Octagon

Stephen Freeman, Executive Director/ joint Chief Executive, Royal Exchange Theatre

Esme Ward, Director, Manchester Museum, the University of Manchester

Robin Hawkes, Theatre Director, Manchester Palace & Opera House

Lindsay Taylor, Curator, University of Salford Art Collection

Fran Healey, Artistic Planning and General Manager, The Stoller Hall, Manchester

Shaun Hinds, Chief Executive, Manchester Central Convention Centre

Sheena Wrigley, Venue Director, Factory International, Manchester

Keisha Thompson, Artistic Director/CEO, Contact, Oxford Road, Manchester