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[Tech Thoughts Net News – Friday – July 22, 2016](#)

Opinion

In the House

with Huw Merriman
MP for Bexhill and Battle

Southern Rail and transport under scrutiny

Whilst the TV cameras focus on the House of Commons chamber, the forensic scrutiny of government and industry is being tackled in committee. For me, this means the Transport Select Committee of which I am an elected member. In the last week, we have sat four times holding different inquiries.

First up, we quizzed the Rail Minister, Claire Perry, about rail passenger experience and, specifically, the misery for Southern rail users. I am the only committee member with this issue hence I took the lead. Having previously heard from the unions and management, I pressed the Department of Transport to intervene because it was clear that the unions wanted assurances over conductors' jobs beyond the end of the current franchise. I was pleased when the Rail Minister offered a guarantee for jobs for the next franchise. I then pressed for all three parties to talk and thrash out the detail and believed the seeds to be sown.

Next, we held a session with rail operators from across the UK. We have



been assessing how digital technology could lead to increases in capacity without building more track. This also gave us a chance to discuss flexible and smart ticketing as well as more rolling stock (badly needed in our area).

Our third session, the following day, was an inquiry into why Vauxhall Zafira cars have been going up in flames. These are family cars and, hearing first from

owners, it was clear how terrifying this had been. Vauxhall management were then interviewed and it became shockingly apparent that they had fallen below acceptable standards. Vauxhall admitted that it had been aware since 2009, had only recalled cars last year, had been slow to accept that the recall had not fixed the issue and were still allowing cars to drive on the road with this fault within. When I asked

if Vauxhall had passed on findings to other manufacturers, and was told they had not, I received an assurance that they would do so that day. Worrying stuff albeit we ended up with a host of admissions and assurances which the owners had previously failed to obtain.

Our final session for the week was with the new Rail Minister (proving that a week is indeed a long time in politics). I voiced my disbelief that the Department of Transport were falling back to the line that it was for management and union to sort the dispute out.

I may have been strong with my questioning but, in these inquiries, you do not get answers unless you push and probe.

None of these inquiries count for much if we do not write reports and make recommendations. Our last job, having published a damning report from the VW emissions scandal, was to agree our report in to the Road Haulage Industry. As a lawyer in a previous life, I take a great interest in the content.

I hope this demonstrates that Parliament, in committee, is a champion of constituent, consumer and passenger in the face of big government and business.



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