



Department
for Transport

From the Parliamentary
Under Secretary of State
Paul Maynard MP

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Dear Louise,

2 March 2017

The Government today published the London and South Coast Rail Corridor Study, which investigated the case for improvements to rail links between London and the Sussex Coast. The Study was commissioned by the former Chancellor in the July 2015 Budget, and completed by independent expert consultants WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff in April 2016.

The rail corridor between London and the Sussex Coast is a critical piece of national infrastructure, centred on the Brighton Mainline (BML). It is a vitally important link for commuters and leisure travellers alike. Train services in the region are among the busiest in the country, and passenger numbers are expected to continue to grow strongly in the coming decades. The Study forecasts that passenger numbers between 8-9am, typically the busiest time of day, will increase by as much as 46-60% by 2043.

This growth will take place on a part of the rail network that faces significant current performance and capacity challenges. While performance has been particularly compromised in recent months, as a result of industrial action on Southern services and infrastructure faults, levels of on-time performance have been among the lowest nationally for a number of years.

We have moved to tackle the immediate problems on the network. In September 2016, Transport Secretary Chris Grayling confirmed a package of measures including a £20 million fund and the appointment of Chris Gibb, one of Britain's most experienced rail industry figures to help get the service back running as it should.

In January, the Government announced an extra £300m funding for Network Rail to boost the resilience of the infrastructure along the Brighton mainline and associated routes.

The London and South Coast Rail Corridor Study takes a longer-term view of passenger needs, and makes a number of conclusions about where funders – including Government – should invest in the network, in order to best respond to where and how often passengers will want to travel in future. The study is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/london-and-south-coast-rail-corridor-study>.

The central finding of the Study is that Network Rail's proposed upgrade of the BML, which would include unblocking known infrastructure bottlenecks around Croydon, could release capacity across the BML to meet passenger demand for at least the next 30 years. The Network Rail proposals would see the BML able to accommodate 44 trains per hour at peak times, up from 36 today. This would allow passengers boarding at East Croydon station to have access to a train to Central London every 85 seconds, in peak times.

Importantly, the Study also examines the case for re-instating formerly closed rail lines (such as the line between Lewes and Uckfield, closed in 1969) and building new links (including the 'BML2' concept, which would see a largely new line between the Sussex Coast, central London via Canary Wharf and on to Stansted).

At present, the Study concludes there is no case for the government to take forward development of either of these schemes. It does acknowledge, however, that other interested parties, including local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships, may wish to progress work to improve the viability of such schemes. One way that this could be achieved is through local communities accepting significant additional local housing and commercial development. In addition, the Transport Secretary has met with promoters of the BML2 concept and encouraged them to continue to develop their proposals for it to be delivered and funded privately.

We accept the Study's recommendations. In the immediate future, we are acting on them by working with Network Rail on its proposals for upgrades to the BML. We can today confirm the Department for Transport has agreed further work should be undertaken in making the case for the upgrade. £11.85m has been invested to date in developing Network Rail's proposals and will we continue to support them in further developing and refining the proposals.

We will ask Network Rail to confirm the Study's finding that the BML upgrade could be delivered for £1.2-£1.5bn (April 2016 prices) and that sufficient passenger benefits would be delivered to justify public investment. During 2017, the government will consider its wider national priorities for investment in the national rail network from 2019 onwards.

Announcements will follow on the BML upgrade proposals, including any decisions the government takes to progress the scheme.

I am placing a copy of this letter and the study in the libraries of both Houses.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul Maynard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial 'P' and a long, sweeping underline.

PAUL MAYNARD