

ESRA response to CP5 funding proposals - South Coast Main Line Concept

Mr Price

We at the East Sussex Rail Alliance (ESRA) are responding to the proposed spending plans as published relating to CP5. Our concerns are that there is virtually no development nor priority placed on improvements to the South Coast rail system, currently a series of sidings that provide a nightmare of planning of passenger services and a denial of access to through freight operations.

We therefore submit the following proposal for your consideration.

South Coast Main Line

Regeneration of South Coast conurbations

We consider that there is a much higher justification to progress the upgrading of the South Coast railway to a main line, ultimately connecting Exeter through Eastleigh and Brighton, to Hastings and Ashford Kent as a through route to London and the Channel Tunnel. It is effectively a series of long sidings at this time. This effectively curtails through running, denies reasonable freight operations, causes delays and frustrations in planning and delivering passenger services - and also an opportunity to develop within the existing corridor an AC overhead line route that matches Network Rail's aspirations to replace the relatively inefficient and tired third rail DC equipment in a major development of the rail infrastructure.

In the Network Rail scheme of planned developments we now seek your support to bring about change and rebalance the investment policy to the benefit of a large but substantially neglected population on the South Coast.

Amber Rudd MP for Hastings and Rye is very keen to move this concept forward and will be meeting very soon with Stephen Hammond, Minister for Rail, to lobby for its inclusion in rail funding plans. The point is that we are promoting a through rail route from Ashford (Kent) and HS1 through Brighton to Southampton/Eastleigh to Exeter.

You will be only too aware that the South Coast to London passenger service has suffered badly especially since before Christmas with rail services so poor that regeneration plans for the whole coastal strip is being jeopardised, impacting on the route to Portsmouth and Southampton as well as Bexhill, Hastings and Rye. As Network Rail's newly announced Spending plan for Control Period 5 fails to address these fundamental shortcomings, we as stakeholders and rail users seek your support, help and guidance.

East Sussex Rail Alliance is pressing East Sussex County Council to lead the drive for funding by South East Local Enterprise Partnership of the core development of a regenerating Business Plan for the South Coast. This would require some £100,000 to construct the Business Case for the South Coast Main Line, for funding of Module 1 at £140 million to connect Ashford and HS1 with a substantially updated line into Brighton, via Hastings and Newhaven. If this fails then the whole proposition is dead - as the line from Ashford to Hastings is not electrified throughout and is substantially single track. You will empathise with that deficiency.

After lengthy investigation work by one of our primary rail stakeholder groups, we wish to introduce you to this regenerating rail scheme which is intended to attract new business and thus to assist in tackling some areas of the worst cases of deprivation and under employment in the country by a fundamental improvement of the regional transport provision. This is highlighted in the **attached leaflet**, prepared by East Sussex Rail Alliance. One essential contention is that far more of the population would exchange an overcrowded and often heavily delayed journey into the Capital if more major employers were attracted to the coastal strip and thereby reveal increased local employment prospects.

ESRA detects that substantial numbers of the local electorate are reacting against the fact that all rail investment, especially in improving rail services, is occurring everywhere else except the South Coast, and travelling costs continue to rise without obvious benefit. The recent major shortcomings on such as the Brighton lines into London is a case in point but two further years of disruption with London Bridge rebuilding for ThamesLink and CrossRail add to the burden and demand alternatives.

Such a modest scheme as proposed for the South Coast Main Line which supports the Network Rail aspiration for an AC overhead line and connecting HS1 with the Electrified Freight Spine at Eastleigh - in fact probably only £2 billion to rework the whole Exeter-Ashford route - would provide a massive incentive to the private sector to invest where quality employment is resident but not attracted in numbers to use the South Coast as their place of work, as well as opening up new opportunities for coastal communities with substantial voting influence.

We will be very pleased to explain the benefits further and feel sure that you will be instantly in tune. Should we have early conversation?

Yours sincerely

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for

Ray Chapman

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East Sussex Rail Alliance