

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Rd
LONDON
SW1P 4DR

3 November 2016

Dear Secretary of State,

BRIGHTON MAIN LINE – DRIVING THE SOUTHERN ECONOMY

We are writing on behalf of the business community and residents along the Brighton Mainline to set out our thoughts on the long-term development of work on rail infrastructure and services from the South Coast into London.

Knowing that Government continues to work hard with the train operator and other partners to resolve issues around the line, we want to stress the importance of this railway service to our regional economy. We underline the importance of long-term work with Government and Network Rail to ensure that the railway can continue to support economic growth in Brighton and Hove, in Mid Sussex, in Crawley and Gatwick, in Croydon and across West Sussex and East Surrey; and the many businesses and employers across our region who are dependent on reliable and effective railway services to help drive our economy.

With a political debate that has recently been heavily focused on the North of England, we are concerned that Ministers overlook the importance of our region to the national economy. Given your recent announcement on airport capacity, this region is particularly keen to engage Government on the investment we need to support our economic growth. You will be very aware that two bids for devolution of powers in our region are being developed: Three Southern Counties (3SC) focuses on the critical issue of infrastructure investment and offers a unique long term partnership opportunity for Government and a means of addressing the large infrastructure deficit that exists. The Greater Brighton bid also underlines the importance of investment in BML. This letter complements both of these initiatives.

As part of the highly successful South East region, the Coast to Capital area contains 1.9 million residents and contributes £48.5 billion to national GVA. We have exports of £9.1 billion and tourist income of £3.6 billion. 976,000 people are employed in over 84,000 local businesses, as well as making commuter journeys to and from our three main economic areas of London, Gatwick and Brighton and Hove. Recent figures show us to be one of the most successful areas of the country in attracting foreign investment, with 47 separate investments in our region last year.

Maintaining this level of investment will only become more important in a post Brexit world.

Efficient and reliable railway services are a critical part of maintaining our regional competitiveness. We are concerned that the current industrial action and poor performance is eroding business confidence in our region. Our main line rail service ought to be a high quality link which draws people to the region.

Instead, problems on some busy sections of the route mean that the whole Brighton Main Line is all too often seen as unreliable, overcrowded and not fit for purpose. Only 35% of passengers in our region believe that the service represents value for money. Only 36% of commuters are satisfied with the punctuality and reliability of the service. This risks putting our region at a tipping point where it may take considerable time to restore confidence in business investment and economic patterns disrupted by the performance of the railway.

More significantly however the growth planned for the area, particularly in Mid Sussex, means there are very considerable concerns that the BML will simply be incapable of providing the rail service required in the near future and develop into an obstacle to housing and economic growth in the medium term.

We recognise that Government is working hard with the different parties to resolve current performance issues on the line and we welcome the creation of the new Project Board headed by Chris Gibb and the £20m fund that you have put in place to try and do this. We also look forward to the completion of the £6.5bn Thameslink Programme that will deliver some additional capacity and reliability from 2018. Along with other non-railway partners in the region, we would be very pleased to engage with and support this work in any way that we can.

But separately, we would also like to engage Ministers on other issues that are critical to maintain confidence in the railway and support the growth of our region.

First, we look for swift confirmation that Government acknowledges the long-term issue of providing further capacity and resilience to support growth on the route and is prepared to commit to investment to deliver this. We believe that the Brighton Main Line Upgrade project is one of the most important single interventions which can provide a step-change boost to our economy. We note that Network Rail has identified it as their single top priority for investment, underlining its regional importance. We urge you to release the study on alternatives to the Brighton Main Line Upgrade which was commissioned last year and to make clear your future intentions for this critical route.

Second, we encourage you to focus attention and resourcing on developing a cost effective way of increasing capacity on our line through upgrade proposals which Network Rail are developing. The Brighton Main Line Upgrade has a good business case with existing levels of usage and planned growth, and is necessary to support our growing economy including Gatwick Airport. We are engaging and working hard with Network Rail on the development of these ideas and we would welcome confirmation that Government also sees the value in them.

Third, we would strongly welcome a positive announcement on the delivery of the Upgrade scheme at the earliest possible opportunity. This would provide welcome encouragement for transport in our area and it would show that Government is committed to keeping our area open for business and is committed to maximising capacity on the line. We are also keen to engage with the Department on issues around station capacity. This includes maintaining your commitment to expanding

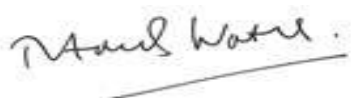
the station at Gatwick by 2020, in spite of cost overruns from Network Rail. This is a project of major importance for the region, not just to provide much needed capacity at the line's busiest station and make track improvements but also to ensure it is able to fulfil its role as a key interchange. This will be crucial following service changes proposed in the 2018 timetable and to provide an alternative to East Croydon during future works. We urge the Department to continue investment in this project and addressing capacity issues at other stations including Norwood Junction, East Croydon and Brighton.

Fourth, we would like commitment from Government, Network Rail and the train operator that proper measures will be put in place to ensure the smooth introduction of the new rolling stock, and moves to support the new timetable on the Southern, Thameslink and Gatwick Express network in 2018. Especially because of disruption over recent months, our region cannot afford to be the victim of further poor introduction of new services as this new fleet is rolled out.

As always, we are willing to do our part to help with this scheme and to coordinate local support for an ambitious package for investment in transport in our region, in order to support the continued development of the economy of the Coast to Capital region. There is a very pressing immediate need and a more significant medium term need to ensure the BML can support the level of economic growth planned our region.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that this region can receive the railway investment necessary to maintain and enhance our contribution to the national economy.

Yours sincerely



Timothy Wates, Chairman, Coast to Capital LEP



Jonathan Sharrock,
Chief Executive
Coast to Capital LEP



Cllr Victor Broad, Leader,
Reigate & Banstead Borough Council



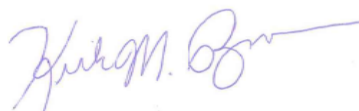
Cllr Louise Goldsmith, Leader,
West Sussex County Council



Jeremy Taylor, Chief Executive,
Gatwick Diamond Business




Cllr Peter Lamb, Leader, Crawley
Borough Council



Kirk Brown, Chairman,
Coastal West Sussex



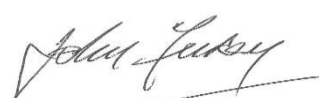
Stewart Wingate, Chief Executive
Officer, Gatwick Airport Ltd



Phil Jones, Managing Director,
Wired Sussex



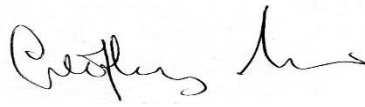
Henry Powell, successor to
Kirk Brown, Chairman,
Coastal West Sussex



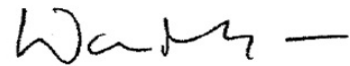
John Furey, Cabinet Member for
Highways, Transport & Flooding,
Surrey County Council



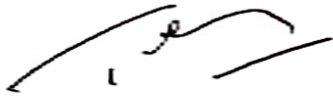
Clr Garry Wall, Leader,
Mid Sussex District Council



Geoff Raw, Chief Executive,
Brighton & Hove City Council



Warren Morgan, Leader, Brighton
& Hove City Council



Clr Tony Newman, Leader,
Croydon Council



Head of Intl Facilities, Property,
Security & EHS, Bodyshop &
L'Oreal



Debra Humphris
Vice Chancellor
University of Brighton



John Burton OBE
Head of Development
Westfield Europe Ltd



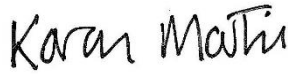
James Stevens
Head of UK Development
Standard Life Investments Ltd



Martin Perry
Executive Director
Brighton & Hove Albion Football
Club Ltd



Adam Tickell
Vice Chancellor
Sussex University



Karan Martin
Customer Service Director
Insurance and Hove Location
Director
Legal & General



Gavin Stewart
Executive Director
Brighton & Hove Economic
Partnership