



Department
for Transport

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From the Parliamentary
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Dear Mr Wates

Thank you for your letter of 3 November to the Rt. Hon. Chris Grayling MP, about the Brighton Main Line (BML). I am replying as Minister responsible for rail issues.

The Government recognises that the BML is a critical piece of national infrastructure. It is a vitally important link for commuters and leisure travellers alike, and the level of connectivity it provides helps shape decisions by businesses to relocate to, or expand their operations in, the region, driving economic growth and boosting employment.

Train services on the BML are among the busiest in the country, and passenger numbers are expected to continue to grow strongly in the coming decades.

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

As you note, Network Rail is planning significant upgrades to the performance and capacity of the BML, and these proposals are assessed in the London South Coast Rail Corridor Study, the publication of which is forthcoming.

There do appear to be significant and robust improvements that can be made to BML infrastructure which could deliver real benefits to passengers in coming years. It is known and understood by the rail industry and the Government alike that infrastructure constraints around Croydon constrain capacity and performance across the wider BML.

During 2017, the Government will consider its wider national priorities for investment in the national rail network, for 2019 onwards. Announcements will follow on the BML upgrade proposals specifically.

We remain committed to working with the rail industry, Gatwick Airport Ltd and local stakeholders to improve the railway station at Gatwick. However, any improvements must be affordable and represent value for money. We hope to be able to announce detailed plans for improvements in the New Year.

In the short-term, as you are acutely aware, the most pressing need is to restore train service performance to acceptable levels. In part, this requires closer cooperation between GTR and Network Rail. The remit that the Secretary of State has recently given Mr Chris Gibb includes ensuring that adequate management focus is applied at both companies to coordinating the tactical responses to day-to-day performance issues. Mr Gibb will be reporting shortly on a £20m package of 'quick win' proposals that can be deployed to get service performance to a level in line with what passengers rightly expect.

As you note, it will be critical to ensure that the introduction of new Class 700 trains on Thameslink, and any changes to the 2018 timetable currently being consulted on by GTR, are implemented as smoothly as possible. We are working closely with the company to ensure that the major benefits brought about by the Thameslink Programme are delivered as efficiently as possible.

I thank you for your work in seeking to improve rail services in the region and trust this reply is helpful.

I am copying your letter to Jonathan Sharrock, Chief Executive of Coast to Capital LEP.

Yours sincerely

Paul Maynard

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