

RAIL IN THE FENS

a Wisbech Rail Summit at the House of Commons on 11 March which drew together all those involved in making the case for reopening, including Railfuture and Transport Minister Stephen Hammond. This provided new impetus for the scheme and demonstrated the number of serious players supporting it.

He remains concerned that the cost of transport projects remains too high and subject to too many planning stages, each involving use of expensive consultants.

"There is a need for an honest debate, rather than a sham consultation," he said. He believes people should be offered a choice of what might be achieved, together with an understanding of its costs or requirements. The Wisbech rail link will work only

if new housing can be built for the people who will use the line, and if the costs, particularly on the line's many level crossings, can be kept to reasonable levels.

Other issues remain to be resolved, such as the timing of funding to complete planning by Network Rail, but he is on the case and has already discussed this with Cabinet Office minister Greg Clarke.

Stephen Barclay's thoughtful and strategic approach has built a strong case for Wisbech, and we will see passenger trains there, perhaps as early as control period six (2019-24). This is a textbook case on how to tackle reopenings, but you cannot take anything for granted and we all need to continue to make the case until the trains start running.

AND IN SUSSEX BY THE SEA

Rail Summit Two: Hastings

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Journey times between Hastings and London will be slashed when new trains capable of 140 mph are introduced in little more than five years time.

Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin made the announcement at a Hastings Rail Summit convened by Amber Rudd MP in March.

"We are now firmly on the journey to vastly improved rail travel to and from Hastings" said Ms Rudd, MP for Hastings and Rye, who has spearheaded the campaign to upgrade rail services and revitalise the local economy.

Network Rail's route managing director for the South East, Dave Ward, committed to developing the project during the coming investment period and to building the partnership with stakeholders needed to deliver the project soon after 2019.

High-speed Javelin trains running between London St Pancras and Bexhill via Ashford International will achieve a journey time between London St Pancras and Hastings of 68 minutes, compared to over 100 minutes via Tonbridge in the peak today. The new service for Hastings and Bexhill will also reduce crowding on the line through Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Sevenoaks.

Railfuture director Roger Blake said: "This is a phenomenal success for East Sussex, which will stimulate economic growth in Hastings. With our support, the county council has secured the first of two priorities in its new rail action plan within six months

of publishing it. We will continue to work in partnership with East Sussex, Kent and Brighton and Hove, and the local enterprise partnership, to ensure that this promise is delivered and to achieve East Sussex's second priority of electrifying the Uckfield line and reopening from Uckfield to Lewes, enabling through services from London via the Weald to Brighton and Sussex coast destinations."

Railfuture and the St Leonards and Hastings Rail Improvement Programme, a member of the East Sussex Rail Alliance of local rail user groups, have been campaigning for electrification of the whole Marshlink between Hastings and Ashford International. Currently electrified track from Hastings to Ashford reaches only as far as Ore, the first station.

Network Rail plans to electrify the line between Ore and Ashford, raise the maximum speed, extend the loop at Rye, and remodel the western junctions at Ashford to create a connection between the Marshlink line and High Speed One.

The prolonged closure of the Tonbridge line has highlighted the limitations of that route for much improvement, whereas the planned upgrade of the Marshlink route for a new Javelin service has a strong business case.

This summit is an example of good campaigning practice, exemplified by creating a memorable media image which can be associated with the long-term campaign.

See www.railfuture.org.uk/article1456-High-Speed-Hastings

Local Action: See column right

London and South East

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■ ■ Hastings rail summit



At a rail summit in March, Railfuture presented local MP Amber Rudd with a model Javelin train, donated by Hornby Hobbies of Margate. Ms Rudd is seen in our picture with Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin and Greg Barker, MP for Bexhill. Mr McLoughlin confirmed that the high speed train service from London St Pancras to Ashford will be extended to Hastings and Bexhill soon after 2020. There is a business case for the upgrading of the Marsh Link route via Rye which will clip 10 minutes off the Hastings-Ashford journey, while also giving a service to St Pancras in just over an hour. Ms Rudd presented Mr McLoughlin with a painting of a Javelin train at Hastings. Railfuture commissioned the picture from artist Mike Turner (see back page). The good news for Hastings and Bexhill is a campaign success for local rail groups including Railfuture-affiliated Marsh Link Action Group and St Leonards & Hastings Rail Improvement Programme.

Read more at www.railfuture.org.uk/Marshlink

■ ■ New trains as Overground takes over West Anglia

Transport for London has announced an order for 39 new trains to follow its takeover of 24 stations on West Anglia's routes to Enfield Town/Cheshunt and Chingford from 31 May next year. Eight of the new four-car trains will be for the Gospel Oak-Barking route. This Overground expansion will be a milestone in the devolution of rail services in the capital, advocated by Railfuture campaigners. The former Silverlink Metro network has been transformed since it was taken over by TfL in 2007. We will recommend that the Overground takes over South Eastern Metro services at the next opportunity in 2018. The end of the Greater Thameslink management contract in 2021 will open up similar prospects for inner Great Northern and Southern services.

■ ■ Step at a time for Uckfield-Lewes reopening

One year ago Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin visited Lewes to see local MP Norman Baker and announce a review "to examine if reopening the Lewes-Uckfield railway line will meet the demand for the future growth in rail travel". Network Rail's report has been published and its Sussex Route Study is now expected as a consultation draft this autumn, which will be a step towards identifying schemes for the next control period, 2019-24. Railfuture will continue to advocate the benefits of reopening Uckfield-Lewes, for East Sussex economic activity and connectivity, communities and colleges, and London commuters. More information: www.railfuture.org.uk/Uckfield+Lewes

■ ■ Women will be stars of Railfuture conference

Our branch is organising the 1 November national Railfuture conference in London around the theme "A successful railway: meeting the challenge". We plan to have an all-female platform of speakers. A flier is included with this *Railwatch*. Book now at www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences

■ ■ Stay up to date with our campaign activity at www.railfuture.org.uk/London+and+South+East

LOCAL ACTION

