



Putting Sussex back on the map

Press release: Immediate on 31 March 2014

Rail groups welcome high speed rail plan

Local rail user groups have welcomed a plan by Network Rail today that could see Hastings, Bexhill and Rye join the High-speed rail network.

The project, unveiled at a Rail Summit chaired by Hastings & Rye MP Amber Rudd, and attended by Secretary of State for Transport Patrick McLoughlin, would slash journey times from London to Rye to 55 minutes; to Hastings to 68 minutes; and to Bexhill to 78 minutes. In order to deliver this, the railway line between Hastings and Ashford requires electrification and upgrading to accommodate high-speed 'Javelin' trains, running to and from London's St Pancras International station.

Further work to develop technical and financial details of the scheme, which has a strong business case and local cross-party support, will be led by Network Rail, with input from Local Authorities, MPs and the South East Local Enterprise partnership. The service could be up and running by 2022.

Supporters of the scheme have also hailed its potential regeneration benefits.

Ray Chapman of the East Sussex Rail Alliance (ESRA) said

"This is a monumental moment, potentially signifying the greatest investment in infrastructure in this area in over 167 years, since the original construction of the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway into St Leonards in 1845.

"The new direct link would attract many more tourists into the area, improve the economy further, and help businesses flourish; and is a clear initiative to work towards reducing deprivation and poverty along this part of the Sussex Coast."

Stuart Harland of the Marshlink Action Group (MLAG) said:

"We believe the improved journey times to London and across the south-east coast would help the economic regeneration of the area. In addition to a High Speed train service, we understand the line would retain the capacity for a local electric train service, replacing the current unreliable diesel stock. This would bring with it a more reliable service stopping at all stations and so increase the value of the line to rural users. It would also make the MarshLink region more accessible for tourist purposes, including from the continent.



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“Having obtained Government recognition of the need for this enhancement, and in view of the long term nature of this project, we trust this will have cross-party support as an election approaches.”

Hugh Sharp of Bexhill Rail Action Group (BRAG) said:

“This is potentially wonderful news for Bexhill. Current average journey times to London are close to 2 hours, and only the hardiest commute the full distance every day. This development would make Bexhill the terminus for a nationally prestigious high-speed rail service, and consequently a more attractive place to live, work and visit, reinvigorating our local economy.”

Martin Woodfine of St Leonards and Hastings Rail Improvement (SHRIMP) said:

“This is very welcome - the result of continuous lobbying over a long period - which would bring a much needed boost both to business and leisure traffic, thus providing a backbone to regeneration, job creation and prosperity in Hastings and St Leonards.

“We will also continue to work with the rail industry to find solutions to the on-going Charing Cross line challenges, and also seek to reduce journey times from Brighton, Gatwick and south/south-west London.”



Secretary of State for Transport Patrick McLoughlin (centre) flanked by Amber Rudd MP and Gregory Barker MP at the Hastings Rail Summit on 31st March 2014.

ENDS

Notes for Editors overleaf...



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East Sussex Rail Alliance is an umbrella group formed to campaign for better rail services throughout the county. Members Bexhill Rail Action Group, East Coastway Commuter Group and St Leonards & Hastings Rail Improvement Programme together with Marshlink Action Group concentrate efforts on coastal services between Brighton and Ashford and into London.

For further details of the East Sussex Rail Alliance, please visit www.eastsussexrail.org.uk