



Department  
for Transport

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From the Parliamentary  
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Dear Maria

Thank you for attending my tea room surgery on the 27 May to discuss the possibility of the re-opening of the Lewes-Uckfield rail line and more stopping services at Cooksbridge station.

First, it might be helpful if I remind you that the Government is making significant investments in rail services across Sussex. In particular, the £6.5bn Thameslink Programme will transform travel on the Brighton to London route when it completes in 2018. In addition, the new GTR franchise will deliver significant passenger benefits, including new rolling stock and improvements to stations. The industry is also in the processes of preparing advice to Ministers on priorities for the Government's Rail Investment Strategy for Control Period 6 (2019-2024).

In recent years stakeholders have suggested the Lewes-Uckfield line could provide a valuable alternative route between London and the south coast during disruption on the Brighton Main Line (BML). In May 2014, my Department published a Network Rail report<sup>1</sup> on this issue, which found that large scale investment in alternative routes in the outer (southern) area of the BML would likely be of very limited value in the short to medium term. Rather, it proposed a focus on key bottlenecks at the north end of the line. However, the report recognised that Lewes-Uckfield could play a part in a longer term strategy for increasing the capacity of the Sussex Route. As such, it recommended that the alignment should continue to be safeguarded.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/brighton-main-line-emerging-capacity-strategy-for-control-period-6](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/brighton-main-line-emerging-capacity-strategy-for-control-period-6)



The pan industry Sussex Route Study<sup>2</sup> recently reconfirmed the findings of the May 2014 study and made detailed proposals to address key bottlenecks at the north end of the route. Specifically, the study proposes major upgrades to two crucial junctions in south London; provision of additional platforms at East Croydon station and alterations at Victoria station.

However, as you know, the Chancellor committed Government support for a new study into the reopening of the Lewes-Uckfield rail line at the March 2015 Budget. My Department will shortly begin the process for commissioning this work and I wanted to set out the high level aims and processes.

I intend that the “new” study should proceed on the basis of the findings of the recent body of work. As such, it will focus on three key elements:

- The opportunities that the re-opening of the Lewes-Uckfield line could offer in terms of local journeys. This would consist of a market study looking at the demand for local journeys along the immediate Lewes-Uckfield corridor, as well as neighbouring areas
- The strategic contribution that re-opening of the line could make during times of disruption to the BML, both planned and unplanned
- Consideration of the capital funding options, in the event that a case was identified for re-opening the line. Key to this would be an assessment of the split of local and national funding, reflecting on the findings of the first two elements of the study

We will shortly seek tenders for this work from external consultants, and hope to make an appointment during the summer. Depending on the bids we receive, I would hope the findings of the report would be provided to the Department during the autumn.

Turning to the issue of more stopping services at Cooksbridge station, the Department believes that operators are better placed to judge the needs of their customers in terms of train service and timetable provision and has committed to taking a less prescriptive approach to rail franchising.

Southern, the current operator of the franchise, has previously undertaken a review of the services operating from Eastbourne and Lewis, the stations at which they stop and the frequency of the trains. The service levels currently operating are in line with the demand from Cooksbridge. However, I would suggest that you address this issue with Southern directly if you feel that there is sufficient demand.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.networkrail.co.uk/long-term-planning-process/south-east-route-sussex-area-route-study](http://www.networkrail.co.uk/long-term-planning-process/south-east-route-sussex-area-route-study)

I am copying this letter to Councillor Carl Maynard, Lead Member for Transport and Environment on East Sussex County Council.

Yours  
Claire Perry

**CLAIRE PERRY**

I am sure your constituents will be delighted that you are already working on railway improvements for them.