



West London Line Group



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Rt Hon Ruth Kelly, MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London
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Dear Secretary of State

FUTURE OF THE WEST LONDON LINE INTER-REGIONAL SERVICE

I am writing on behalf of the West London Line Group, following receipt of your Department's letter dated 8 February 2008.

The Group is now seeking your ratification of the minimal additional resources to provide, under the new South Central franchise, an hourly service between Gatwick Airport and Milton Keynes. This would allow a direct link between Gatwick, the West London Line (WLL) and the South Midlands and would be the outcome which between them your officials and six London authorities are seeking. This would also link Gatwick Airport with the two Olympic venues at Earls Court and Wembley. However, this outcome is dependent upon the relatively insignificant expenditure on the conversion of a small number of trains on the South Central network to dual-voltage operation. Ideally, the number of conversions undertaken should also be sufficient to keep the existing service to and from Brighton.

The Group would also like to invite you to the West London Line to review the many developments that will add still further to the rocketing demand for rail services in the WLL corridor.

Incomplete answers to PQs

We note that the Rail Minister has acknowledged the Group's comments on the answers that he gave to Parliament in response to MPs' written questions on the Watford to Brighton West London Line (WLL) service. May we take his acknowledgment to mean that his answers should only be regarded as holding answers pending rectification of these deficient, tangential and thus incomplete responses?

WCML growth on the WLL not yet reflected in DfT support

In the meantime, we are pleased to see that the Department's stance on the issue of this WLL service is not immutable, particularly in the face of the extraordinary growth in the use of the service of 28% in the eighteen months to November 2007.

This growth is on a par with that over the last four years on the West Coast Main Line (WCML), long extolled by the Government as the UK's premier rail network, and into which significant public investment has been poured.

This compares shockingly with your Department's present proposals to DE-INVEST in the WLL, through the summary reallocation of much of the rolling stock for its Watford to Brighton service to the Thameslink network. Moreover, there is no indication of when, if ever, this rolling stock is to be restored to the WLL, even in the latest reports of Go-Ahead's purchase of eleven dual-voltage Class 377 units.

Furthermore, your Department apparently is continuing to ignore the future demand for inter-regional services on the WLL that will be generated by (i) new developments in the WLL corridor, and (ii) interchanges with other tube and rail services, all of which are due to come forward within the timeframe of the forthcoming South Central franchise. I attach an updated schedule of these for your consideration.

We would very much appreciate it if you were able to visit us for only a short time, so that we may show you these nodes of expected massive demand growth on the ground.

Undermining Passenger Safety and the DDA

Recent proposals from your Department for the new South Central franchise would result not just in increased passenger inconvenience, but - of paramount importance to the Government over recent years - in the heightened risk to passengers' personal safety at Clapham Junction. In contrast to other recent rail accident sites, this is probably the best-known railway location in the country.

This would be in addition to the Department's continuing disregard of the ethos of the Disability Discrimination primary legislation, which under the above proposals, will be contravened by yourselves plus the current and future South Central franchise holders well before any effective remedial action can be completed under the Access for All programme for Clapham Junction.

Undermining the London 2012 Olympics

Most topically, pursuit of the present proposals will mean that your Department will have directly undermined the Government's world-wide reported pledges to the international community (and in particular to the International Olympics Committee) to improve public transport in London by removing, in advance of the world's most prestigious cultural event, the direct train service between this country's second international airport and two of the London 2012 Olympic venues.

Thus your Department will also be ensuring that the Government will have completely misled the international community, everyone in the British Olympic movement and the British taxpayer over the UK being a suitable host for the world's premier sporting contest, as well as devaluing all the good efforts of Eurostar, Hitachi, the Mayor of London and others in improving rail services to other Olympic venues.

Furthermore, rather than leave a positive legacy in terms of improved transport facilities following the Games, as the Olympic Delivery Authority has been charged to do (in co-operation with your Department), your Department will have deliberately DISMANTLED this key strategic inter-regional rail-air link at the very moment (i) when this facility is needed by increasing numbers of commuters, UK and international business and leisure travellers, and (ii) IMMEDIATELY BEFORE it can fulfil a key role in bringing many Londoners, UK and international visitors to the Olympic events at Earls Court and Olympia, who would otherwise clog up the already over-congested road system in the South East, and especially in South, South West, West and North West London.

As an aside (but an important one), the ODA documentation gives virtually no mention to the potential of this service as a link to the Games, nor to any station or service improvements at West Brompton or Wembley Central to improve access to the events or to enhance the overall legacy for future users of London's transport facilities at these stations. **With its detailed and supportive work in collaboration with rail users, operators and local authorities over the last nine years, the Group stands ready to provide input into the ODA's work on public transport issues relating to the West London Olympic venues.**

While the Group applauds efforts to strengthen the Thameslink network, this should not be at such expense to both passenger safety and the UK's international reputation, especially when NOT ONE OF THE THAMESLINK TRAINS WILL SERVE EVEN A SINGLE OLYMPIC VENUE, unlike the Watford to Brighton service which will serve those at both Wembley and Earls Court.

However, we also note that the letter we have received confirms your Department's confidence in the TOCs' ability to run trains to and from relevant Olympic events. **Could you please confirm what "Olympic-standard" trains will be available for these services and that these, rather than waiting until 2012, will be deployed as soon as possible to the benefit of West London Line users.**

Conflict with Government and GLA Transport, Climate Change and Visitor Policies

Curtailment of the Watford - Brighton service will also continue to contribute adversely to road vehicle use, congestion and pollution. All this will occur on the busiest sections of the nation's road network, both in and outside the Mayor of London's Low Emission Zone and extended Congestion Charge Zone.

It will also result in greater passenger congestion on the Victoria Line at the exact moment when, as you are well aware, this is to be exacerbated considerably by the long-term redevelopment of Victoria underground station. The opening of the Shepherd's Bush WLL/Central Line interchange will, among other benefits, provide a welcome alternative route, avoiding Victoria, to the West End for many commuters, business and leisure travellers south of Clapham Junction, but only if the present WLL service is to continue. (We believe that North Pole Depot could and should be used to terminate trains from south of Clapham Junction diverted to run to and from Shepherd's Bush, thereby easing pressure on Victoria.)

Severing a direct rail link to Gatwick Airport is also contrary to the logical dovetailing of your Department's stated policy aims of (i) wanting to increase air travel and (ii) reducing road traffic congestion and pollution, as well as being in direct opposition to at least one explicit policy on improving access to London's international transport facilities such as Gatwick in the Mayor's London Plan. As an actual outcome, overseas and UK visitors using West London hotels, as well as local residents along the WLL corridor, will in future be denied the direct rail access to and from Gatwick Airport that they have enjoyed over the past decade.

The Minimal Action Needed

All of this unnecessary mayhem will be avoided at the minimal cost of converting just TWO four-car trains from single- to dual-voltage operation, so as to provide an hourly Milton Keynes – Gatwick Airport service, thereby meeting the aims of BOTH your Department and the six London Councils who have previously written to you.

Conversion of a third unit would provide a spare to cover failures. Alternatively, a spare unit would be provided if the other four were given continued use of the fast lines south of Clapham Junction, resulting in faster journey times, at a very small reduction in overall network performance. Fast line use with no cover for failures would only need conversion of ONE extra unit.

A few extra converted units would ensure that the service could continue to serve Brighton.

Whichever option is chosen, the cost involved is minute, when laid beside those for the Thameslink project, the 2012 London Olympics, HSI, the Javelins, the DLR extensions and the WCML upgrade.

This investment, however, while minimal, would be regarded as fair, as it would provide a commensurate investment in this service west of London that would complement the improvements in the other cross-river rail links (i) in East London and (ii) on Thameslink. It would also serve to realise the potential of linking the West Coast and Brighton Main Line corridors, so that both can serve each other and the burgeoning demand between each and the core WLL area.

Restoration to Milton Keynes

At the same time, the Group is anxious (as the Department appears to be) that the momentum behind the Department's own very welcome initiative to restore the service to Milton Keynes is increased.

This will create possibly the most cost-efficient railway in the UK, as it will not only carry TWO-way commuter flows in each peak, but will also ensure that the key business and leisure locations in the most economically prosperous corridor in Western Europe (whose seven football stadia, four exhibition venues and

many international-standard hotels are about to be complemented with other major developments such as Westfield London) are linked directly into the country's extensive and successful WCML network.

These improved connections will also increase the return on investment on the Pendolino trains and the WCML in general, including such infrastructure as the new terminal arrangements at Milton Keynes, plus that already expended by Southern on training their crews for operating the extension.

Restoration of this service to Milton Keynes with improved connections with the WCML network will also provide some compensation for the Arriva Cross-Country service between Brighton and Manchester via the WLL which is proposed to be withdrawn in December 2008.

On a detailed point concerning the Department's comments to London TravelWatch on rolling stock, we note that all the trains specified could, on the face of it, be worked by single-voltage units. We trust that rigorous efforts are still being made to reduce the number of dual-voltage units required for the Thameslink network, so that the most robust service as possible can be provided to meet the rising demand for - and to spare your Department's potentially severe embarrassment over - the Milton Keynes/Watford - Brighton service.

In Conclusion

Looking at all the costs and benefits in the round, we would urge you now to sanction the minimal changes in resources needed to provide an hourly Milton Keynes - Brighton daily service, with additional trains in both peaks each weekday and for major events. Such a service should be provided on as much of this corridor as possible and at least as far south as East Croydon and Gatwick Airport from December 2008, and the full service between Brighton and Milton Keynes should be included as part of the new South Central franchise from September 2009 and re-instated in the December 2009 timetable.

This Group remains convinced that, with the WLL's continuing extraordinary passenger growth, development of major traffic generators and interchanges (e.g., between the WLL and Central Line at Shepherd's Bush) and the raising of the WLL's profile by the London 2012 Olympics, such investment will result in very inexpensive yet immediate and cost-effective improvements to provide a popular and travel-efficient rail-air link to meet the increasing demands from commuters, domestic and overseas business and leisure travellers alike.

The Group, in working on behalf of all West London Line users and in close co-operation with rail industry players, London TravelWatch and Passenger Focus, Local Authorities, businesses and key residents' groups in the West London Line corridor, welcomes the contacts it continues to enjoy with your Department and looks forward to further mutually beneficial working in the future.

In view of the myriad opportunities presented by the multi-purpose West London Line, plus the many issues the WLL now faces arising from a set of forthcoming major developments outside your Department's control (together with its relative proximity to your offices) we would be delighted to welcome you to the WLL to learn of these issues and to view its potential for traffic development at first-hand.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Mark Balaam
Chairman

cc: Rt Hon James Purnell, MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Anne McGuire, MP, Minister for Disabled People
Rt Hon Tessa Jowell, MP, Minister for the Olympics and London
Rt Hon Andy Burnham, MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
Rt Hon Edward Leigh, MP, Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee

Rt Hon Gwynneth Dunwoody, MP, Chair of the Transport Committee
Dr Phyllis Starkey, MP for Milton Keynes South West
Mark Lancaster, MP for North East Milton Keynes
Mike Penning, MP for Hemel Hempstead
Claire Ward, MP for Watford
Rt Hon Tony McNulty, MP for Harrow East
Gareth Thomas, MP for Harrow West
Sarah Teather, MP for Brent East
Barry Gardiner, MP for Brent North
Dawn Butler, MP for Brent South
Andrew Slaughter, MP for Ealing, Acton & Shepherd's Bush
Karen Buck, MP for Regent's Park & Kensington North
Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Rifkind, MP for Kensington & Chelsea
Greg Hands, MP for Hammersmith & Fulham
Mark Field, MP for Cities of London & Westminster
Martin Linton, MP for Battersea
Sadiq Khan, MP for Tooting
Rt Hon Keith Hill, MP for Streatham
Andrew Pelling, MP for Croydon Central and GLA Member for Croydon and Sutton
Malcolm Wicks, MP for Croydon North
Richard Ottaway, MP for Croydon South
Peter Ainsworth, MP for East Surrey
Crispin Blunt, MP for Reigate
Laura Moffat, MP for Crawley
Hon Nicholas Soames, MP for Mid Sussex
Charles Hendry, MP for Wealden
Norman Baker, MP for Lewes
Nigel Waterson, MP for Eastbourne
Dr Desmond Turner, MP for Brighton, Kemptown
David Lepper, MP for Brighton, Pavilion
Stephen Aldridge, Director, Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office
Neil Betteridge, Chair, DpTAC
Trevor Phillips, Chair, Equality and Human Rights Commission
Baroness Jane Campbell, Disability Ctte, Equality and Human Rights Commission
Keith Ludeman, Chairman, GoVia
Chris Burchell, MD, Southern
Sir Nigel Rudd, Chairman, BAA
Lord Coe, Chair, LOCOG
John Armitt, Chair, ODA
Gary Yardley, Earls Court Olympia Group
Michael Jeffries, Chairman, Wembley National Stadium Ltd
Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London
Roger Evans, Chairman, GLA Transport Committee
Geoff Pope, Deputy Chair, GLA Transport Committee
Len Duvall, Chair, Metropolitan Police Authority
Robert Blackman, GLA Member for Harrow and Brent
Angie Bray, GLA Member for London Central West
Elizabeth Howlett, GLA Member for Merton and Wandsworth
Valerie Shawcross, GLA Member for Lambeth and Southwark
Tim O'Toole, Managing Director, London Underground Limited
Christopher Rodrigues, Chairman, VisitBritain
Tamara Ingram, Chairwoman, Visit London

Bob Cotton, Chief Executive, British Hospitality Association
Iain Johnstone, Development Director, Westfield London
Brian Cooke, Chairman, London TravelWatch
Anthony Smith, Chairman, Passenger Focus
Cllr Isobel McCall, Leader of the Council, Milton Keynes Council
Cllr Robert Ellis, Leader of the Council, Hertfordshire County Council
Mayor Dorothy Thornhill, Watford Borough Council
Cllr Chris Mote, Leader of the Council, London Borough of Harrow
Cllr Paul Lorber, Leader of the Council, London Borough of Brent
Cllr Stephen Greenhalgh, Leader of the Council, London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
Cllr Merrick Cockell, Leader of the Council, Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea
Cllr Edward Lister, Leader of the Council, London Borough of Wandsworth
Cllr Steve Reed, Leader of the Council, London Borough of Lambeth
Cllr Mike Fisher, Leader of the Council, London Borough of Croydon
Cllr Nick Skellet, Leader of the Council, Surrey County Council
Cllr Dr Lynne Hack, Leader of the Council, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council
Cllr Peter Jones, Leader of the Council, East Sussex County Council
Cllr Henry Smith, Leader of the Council, West Sussex County Council
Cllr Brian Oxley, Leader of the Council, Brighton & Hove City Council

New Traffic Generators on West London Line corridor – March 2008

Location	Station Proposals	Other Proposals to be served by station
Gatwick Airport	None known	Potential Airport expansion
East Croydon	Possible expansion, which may include a seventh platform	Redevelopment of Croydon Gateway site adjoining station Redevelopment of Park Place and other Central Croydon sites
Clapham Junction	Proposed redevelopment of the St John's Hill arcade and adjoining land including additional station access Proposed ELL Phase 2 interchange	This station will be the primary interchange between stations on the West London Line, which are shortly to include Imperial Wharf and Shepherd's Bush (see below), and other Network Rail destinations
Imperial Wharf	Construction of station in the middle of the inner London area worst served by public transport, especially by heavy rail or tube	SE Fulham low-rise residential areas SW Chelsea residential areas, including World's End Estate Chelsea Harbour residential development Imperial Wharf residential development – still underway Lots Road twin towers major residential development – approval given Existing and new business units in area Jurys Inn (172-room hotel) Chelsea Conrad (160-suite hotel) New Chelsea Academy (1,050 pupils – 50% to come from outside local area) New Hathaway School of Art Chelsea Harbour Pier
West Brompton (for Earl's Court)	None as yet, although more shelter for the increasing numbers of WLL and District Line passengers should be provided as a matter of urgency on all platforms (especially 3 and 4), with regard to Listed Building status of station Fears re transfer of management of whole station to LUL in November 2007 have regrettably been proved well-founded so far LUL does not appear yet to serve National Rail passengers as well as it could and should	Earls Court 1 & 2 as existing, then London 2012 Olympics Volleyball venue, then (with Lillie Bridge Depot) to form 43-acre site – mixed-use proposals masterplan underway Empress State Building (4,000 workers) Ibis Hotel (500 rooms) Express by Holiday Inn (100 rooms) Hotel Lily (c100 rooms) Hotel stock in Earl's Court Ward (50+ hotels – c2000 beds) Seagrave Road site – proposed high-density mixed-use with hotel published March 2008 EDF site – residential plans on hold This station will also be the primary Underground interchange for passengers to and from Imperial Wharf (see above) Chelsea FC (42,000 cap'y)

Location	Station Proposals	Other Proposals to be served by station
Kensington Olympia	<p>Nothing substantial known, but gating of the station (planned for later in 2008) needs to allow for continued right of way across the tracks</p> <p>This station will lose the Arriva Cross-Country Birmingham/Manchester – Brighton service in Dec 2008 with no replacement</p> <p>Additional London Overground trains to provide 4tph to/from Willesden Junction of which 2tph will run to/from Stratford calling at all North London Line stations from 2010</p>	<p><u>Warwick Road</u> Tesco Tower – plans being re-submitted</p> <p>Filling Station site – aparthotel approved</p> <p>Homebase site – to be redeveloped as superstore and residential</p> <p>Telephone Exchange site – to be redeveloped as residential</p> <p>TA Centre site – to be redeveloped as residential</p> <p>Charles House site - to be redeveloped as residential with primary school</p> <p>Above sites to raise population by c.4,000</p> <p><u>Hammersmith Road</u> New hotel – plans thought to be approved</p> <p>Businesses and leisure venues as far away as Hammersmith King Street and Riverside</p>
Shepherd's Bush	<p>Station (and possibly access road to new retail centre) awaiting reconstruction following problems arising from insufficient northbound platform depth - completion scheduled October 2008</p> <p>WLL station will form major strategic multi-way interchange with Central Line station (to be expanded when re-opened later in 2008) and with local bus services</p> <p>Potential use of North Pole Depot by trains south of Clapham Jn sent to WLL to ease pressure at Victoria while tube station is rebuilt</p>	<p>Existing retail and business (e.g., BBC, other media) centre with dense residential hinterlands adjoining</p> <p>Westfield London – new regional shopping and leisure centre and event venue to open late 2008</p> <p>3 existing hotels</p> <p>QPR FC</p> <p>Regeneration initiatives by LBHF (White City) and RBKC (North Kensington)</p>
North Pole	Station proposed by RBKC	Regeneration initiatives as entry above
Wembley Central	WLLG believes some reconstruction to allow termination and/or greater use by WLL services should be undertaken here	<p>Shopping Centre redevelopment above/adjoining station</p> <p>Wembley Stadium - London 2012 Olympics venue for Football</p> <p>Planned Wembley City mixed-use development</p>
Harrow & Wealdstone	None known	Planned mixed-use redevelopment of Kodak site
Watford Junction	Large-scale redevelopment	<p>Proposed redevelopment of station and adjoining sites to provide 2400 homes, offices, retail and hotel</p> <p>Watford FC</p>
Milton Keynes	<p>Station re-modelling underway including new bay platform – completion early 2009</p> <p>Major ticket purchasing point for Virgin WCML services – indicates good opportunity to fill VWCML seats north of MK with WLL passengers and thus to strengthen WCML/WLL/BML links</p>	<p>Planned Urban Expansion to provide 34,600 new homes by 2031</p> <p>Planned 65,000 square metre expansion of MK Shopping Centre</p> <p>Stadium MK opened 2007</p>