
The West of England Partnership

Lord Adonis
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DR

Our Ref: fgw new trains bid
Your Ref:
Date: 19 November 2008

Dear Minister

Support for First Great Western's Business Case for New Trains

I am writing to you as the Chair of the West of England Partnership in support of First Great Western's business case for a new fleet of 11 four carriage trains for the Cardiff to Portsmouth via Bristol and Bath service. I also write on behalf of the Vice Chair of the Partnership, the four Executive Members for Transport from Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol City, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Councils and the West of England Joint Scrutiny Committee.

These new trains will add significant capacity, improve the quality and performance of services and be a major step towards delivering a 'Bristol Metro' style network of half hourly cross Bristol train services. Furthermore the new trains will allow existing Class 158 units to cascade down for use on other local services.

We were disappointed when the Department for Transport's Rolling Stock Plan was published in January 2008 to see that under Appendix B only 52 of the 1,300 new carriages to be built were allocated to the Great Western Mainline. Even more disappointing is the indication they would be for London Thames Valley services only.

Yet the West of England area has witnessed substantial growth in rail travel, doubling over the last ten years.

The Office of Rail Regulation's 2006/07 figures indicate continued growth in rail use in our area as the following examples for stations along the Cardiff to Portsmouth route show:

Bristol Parkway 9.59%
Patchway +25.05%
Filton Abbey Wood +2.32%
Lawrence Hill +22.39%
Stapleton Road +13.16%
Bristol Temple Meads +7.96%
Keynsham +11.67%
Oldfield Park +13.09%
Bath Spa +8.70%

Existing services have suffered from short formed trains leading to overcrowding and even passengers left behind on stations.

Looking ahead there is more growth to come. The Secretary of State's proposed modifications for the draft revised Regional Spatial Strategy (July, 2008) increases the West of England Housing Market Area allocation from 110,200 new households in the draft Regional Spatial Strategy to 137,950. Job numbers have increased to 137,200. Key towns on the rail network will see substantial growth with 3,000 at Keynsham, 3,300 around Bristol Parkway and 8,000 at Bath. Meanwhile the Ministry of Defence is set to expand its site at Filton Abbey Wood from 8,000 to 10,000 jobs by 2012 further increasing future demand for rail services.

The draft Revised Regional Spatial Strategy also includes policy RTS1 Corridor Management with London to South Wales via Bristol as a corridor of national importance with the need to target new infrastructure to unlock pinch points, increase capacity and services. A new fleet of trains for the Cardiff to Portsmouth route will be a major step towards this.

Based on current and future growth we believe there is a strong case for more trains in the West of England area. We are deeply concerned that without this new fleet of trains First Great Western will be left with insufficient rolling stock to meet demand.

We give our full support to First Great Western in their business case for new trains and we urge the Minister to accept their proposals.

We would also welcome the opportunity to come and visit you and your officers to discuss the bid and other West of England rail issues in more detail.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Helen Holland
Chair of the West of England Partnership

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