



Minehead Rail Link Group

Avondale, Martlet Road, Minehead TA24 5QD

Cllr John Woodman, SCC
Somerset County Council
County Hall
Taunton
TA1 4DY

28 January 2020

Dear Councillor Woodman,

MINEHEAD TO TAUNTON RAIL SERVICE

I am writing as Secretary of the Minehead Rail Link Group, to seek a face to face meeting to explore ways of progressing our goals, for the benefit of the whole of West Somerset, in the light of the government's initiative to 'undo Beeching' and allocate funding for rail re-opening.

Minehead Rail Link Group (MRLG) are campaigning for the introduction of a community rail service between Minehead and Taunton, to run alongside the existing West Somerset Railway steam train service that runs between Minehead and Bishops Lydeard.

We envisage a service operated under a revised franchise agreement, to be provided by the current franchise holder (or its successor) using two or three car diesel multiple units. This service could be delivered by extending some of the current Cardiff - Taunton services through to Minehead, providing a roughly two-hourly service from Cardiff/Bristol/Taunton to Minehead and return.

You will no doubt be familiar with the many benefits that will result from such a community rail service:-

- 1.) A desperately needed revival of the economy of West Somerset, by attracting more visitors and holiday makers to the area.
- 2.) The provision of a safe, comfortable and reliable train service to the 'outside world' that would benefit all residents of West Somerset, but of especial value to children, job seekers, the elderly, the disabled and to low income families.
- 3.) A reduction in congestion on the A39 and A358 main routes into West Somerset, which can be particularly acute in summer months, especially on the approaches to Minehead, Taunton and Bridgwater.
- 4.) A reduction in levels of West Somerset's contribution to our carbon footprint in these very precarious times environmentally
- 5.) A viable and stress-free way of reaching Butlins in Minehead, especially for visitors from South Wales who make up around one third of the holiday camp's clientele.

6.) The West Somerset Railway is currently in a desperate financial situation and is suffering from declining volunteer and passenger numbers. The community rail service we seek could be the lifeline it needs to secure its very survival.

With the hundreds of new homes being built or planned for the district, will come hundreds of additional cars on our roads. It is unthinkable that such a large urban block and holiday destination has no proper rail service.

Even more noteworthy, however, is the realisation that we are now living in an age, where – whether we like it or not – the very future of the planet is being questioned. People, including Government, are scrutinising our carbon footprint and with the West Somerset Railway's steam trains arguably being the largest carbon contributor of any organisation in West Somerset, we need to act quickly.

There are those in government who are already suggesting that heritage railways should reduce or abandon the use of steam engines and I suspect that legislation could be introduced, if not in the immediate future, within the intermediate future to enforce that. Such legislation would shunt steam engines into scrapyards or museums, with perhaps just the occasional trip being allowed on special occasions.

The important point here is that a community rail service, in addition to all the points previously discussed, could offset the environmental damage of the WSR steam trains by getting cars off the roads and in consequence have the WSR including the steam trains, viewed in a more favourable light and thus dramatically increase the railway's chances of survival in an increasingly 'carbon conscious' world.

With these points in mind, we are convinced that what we propose will not only invigorate West Somerset, but also could also guarantee the West Somerset Railway's very existence.

We have already had meetings with both GWR and WSR to present our proposals. We have support from almost all the parish councils along the railway's route as well as from Minehead Town Council.

With this in mind, we are approaching Somerset County Council in the hope with can get together with you, to present our case formally, to answer any questions and to see if we can work together towards provision of the rail service we seek.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Benet Allen'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'B' being particularly large and stylized.

Cllr Benet Allen
Secretary

cc
Rebecca Pow MP
Ian Liddell-Grainger MP
Grant Shapps MP, Secretary of State for Transport
Cllr Mike Rigby, SCC
(hard copies to follow)