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cc N.O



Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

Michael Scholar Esq  
Private Secretary  
10 Downing Street  
Whitehall  
London SW1

31 March 1983

Dear Michael,

HASTINGS-TONBRIDGE RAIL SERVICE

The Chief Secretary has seen Richard Bird's letter (undated) in response to your letter of 14 March about the renewal of the Hastings-Tonbridge railway.

+ / He is not convinced that an early decision has to be taken on this proposal and would prefer more time to allow the alternative to be evaluated more thoroughly. It may be true that the alternative options already considered would not produce any worthwhile savings but there are more radical options that could be considered.

It would be unfortunate if the first major investment proposal put forward following Serpell could not be used as a test case for some experiments in innovation and diversity. He recognises that there are political difficulties in allowing the present service to deteriorate and that it may not be possible to pursue some of the more radical options until we are further ahead with our consideration of the longer term issues of railway policy.

He believes that it will be important to ensure that the steps being taken by the Secretary of State to remedy the weaknesses in the Board's investment procedures are followed through and that the Department is consulted at the earliest possible stage about all major projects to ensure that alternatives are properly considered and evaluated in good time.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Richard Bird.

yours sincerely

MISS J M SWIFT

Assistant Private Secretary

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Treasury Chamber, Parliament Street, W.C.2

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT  
2 MARSHAM STREET LONDON SW1P 3EB

Miss J M Swift  
PS/Chief Secretary  
Treasury Chambers  
Parliament Street  
LONDON SW1

7 April 1983

*Dear Miss Swift*

Thank you for sending Richard Bird a copy of your letter of 31 March to Michael Scholar about the renewal of the Hastings-Tonbridge rail service.

The Secretary of State has studied the Chief Secretary's comments. He had, of course, considered all the points raised by the Chief Secretary and his views on them were set out fully in Richard Bird's letter of 28 March to Michael Scholar.

The Secretary of State welcomes the Chief Secretary's agreement that there should be a demonstration as soon as possible of the benefits of innovation and diversity. But Hastings-Tonbridge is not the right test case for mounting a successful demonstration and, in any event, as the Chief Secretary recognises, it is not possible to pursue the more radical options until the Government is further ahead with its consideration of the longer-term issues. This point is dealt with in paragraphs 7-10 of the letter of 28 March.

As you know from paragraphs 2 and 3 of Richard Bird's letter, the Secretary of State has considered whether he should delay a decision but has concluded that this would not be justified. The attached copy of a letter from a local travellers' association illustrates clearly the need to settle the form of replacement now. Even so, the modernised service would not be in full operation before 1986.

As to remedying the weaknesses in the Board's investment procedures, the Secretary of State is grateful for the Chief Secretary's support for the action he is taking, as recorded in the penultimate paragraph of the letter of 28 March.

Finally, the Secretary of State is very conscious of the timetable for the local government elections. The political pressure for an announcement about Hastings-Tonbridge before the local elections is intense, and is likely to be reflected, for example on 20 April when the Secretary of State will next be First Order for Questions.



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I am sending a copy of this letter to Michael Scholar.

*Yours sincerely*

*Andrew Melville*

ANDREW MELVILLE  
Private Secretary

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TUNBRIDGE WELLS & DISTRICT RAILWAY  
TRAVELLERS ASSOCIATION

TO: Patrick Mayhew, QC, MP  
for Tunbridge Wells,  
House of Commons,  
London, SW1A 0AA.

Prof. Sir Chairman:

H. T. Jones,  
11, Church Road,  
Tunbridge Wells,  
Kent, TN1 1SW.

Tun. Wells (0895) 35639  
office: 04-606-4433 x 632

27 March 1983

Dear Patrick,

Thank you for your letter of 18 January agreeing with me about the urgency of a decision to modernise the Tunbridge Wells - Hastings line (although it is of course in fact the whole route from Tonbridge to Hastings via Tun. Wells that is in question). I write again now, two months later, because there has as yet been no further visible progress, meanwhile the condition of the existing rolling stock is continuing to deteriorate. In particular word has come to me that one of the existing 6-coach train units is now having to be reduced to five carriages because one coach has deteriorated to the extent that it cannot remain in service without a major overhaul, which is obviously not economically sensible to carry out considering that the whole thing ought to be withdrawn from service in about three years. If it transpires that there will, as a result, no longer remain sufficient 6-coach train-sets to make up (in pairs) the principal commuter trains into 12 coaches, there is bound to be serious overcrowding with many passengers standing regularly for 45 minutes each way in the peaks, which hardly makes a good start and finish to a hard day's work in London. Already I am aware of some overcrowding on one of the tail-end commuter trains, that is only 10 coaches (2x5) because there are no spare 6-coach sets. (This is the 08.17 from Tun. Wells Central.)

If one carriage has, without much forewarning, to be taken out of service this week, who can say how long it will be till it happens to another? Then suppose it happens in a diesel-multiple-unit that has already been reduced to only 5 coaches. It will not be very popular, but it will be no use blaming BR; they cannot properly or responsibly spend any money beyond minor patching until a decision on the funding of the line's modernisation has been made by the Secretary of State. So can you please convey our increasing anxieties to the Secretary of State and elicit from him ~~xxxx~~ by what date we can expect to hear something positive.

I must stress that there is no longer time to wait for a politically most expedient timing of an announcement, such as just before an election or in conjunction with some bad news such as closure of the line to Eridge. Indeed I must emphasise that if electrification is authorised, it would be a sad loss to Tun. Wells to lose the line to Eridge, but if not then it would be a disaster in view of the effect on the Tonbridge to Tun. Wells service. (Either way closure would be a disaster for Groombridge and East Sussex.) Hence the Hastings line must be decided on at once, and then an Eridge decision can take a few months longer so as to take account of the Hastings decision which must be made independently. I believe we are already just past the cut-off point for a Hastings decision to be in time to get the job done in time before the existing diesels are scheduled to commence withdrawal from service, even without allowing for the unexpected as has now happened to one unit. Serpell with all its unanswered questions must not distract from an urgent decision.

Yours sincerely



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*Yours sincerely*

*Andrew Melville*

ANDREW MELVILLE  
Private Secretary

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TUNBRIDGE WELLS & DISTRICT RAILWAY  
TRAVELLERS ASSOCIATION

TO: Patrick Mayhew, QC, MP  
for Tunbridge Wells,  
House of Commons,  
London, SW1A 0AA.

From the Chairman:

H.M. Jones,  
11 Gillingford Road,  
Tunbridge Wells,  
Kent, TN11 1SN.

Tun.Wells (0892) 35639  
office: 01-606-4433 x 632

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