

From

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South Western Consultation Coordinator

4/15 Great Minster House,

33 Horseferry Road,

SW1P 4DR

Dear Sirs,

South Western Franchise: Stakeholder Consultation

I write on behalf of the Isle of Wight Council in response to the Department for Transport's stakeholder consultation exercise in respect of the above.

Of particular and primary concern to the Council is the treatment of the Isle of Wight's rail connection Island Line, which links one of the Island's principal towns and pedestrian gateways with its major tourist and settlement areas.

The Council's formal position in respect of the future of Island Line was agreed following a lengthy debate at its meeting of September 2015 and is as set out below:-

THAT Council:

- (i) Notes that the next South Western rail franchise period will commence in 2017, two years earlier than had been anticipated.
- (ii) Further notes that the proposed "Island Infrastructure Taskforce" (as agreed by Full Council in November 2014) has not secured any funding from government, and therefore has not been established.
- (iii) In light of (i) and (ii) above, reaches a view that Island Line should remain as a fully integral part of the South Western rail franchise for the entire duration of its post-2017 period.
- (iv) Makes representations to the Department of Transport (DfT) stating this unequivocal view, and urges them to ensure that the franchise specification invites bidders to set out how they would invest in, maintain and improve the service throughout this time.

Cont ...

- (v) Calls on the DfT to ensure that, as part of the forthcoming public consultation process about the new franchise, at least one formal consultation session is held on the Isle of Wight.
- (vi) Agrees that a longer-term look at the Island's strategic transport needs - including that of subsequent operational arrangements for rail travel (for beyond the next franchise period) - are looked at when resources allow for, particularly if external funds can be secured to support this work.

Of most relevance to this consultation process are items (iii) and (iv). The Council appreciates that the DfT was able to arrange a public consultation event on the Island (item (v)). I would not however want to overlook the aspirations set out in item (vi) which are consistent with the Council's previous aspirations shared and discussed the DfT and relevant Ministers.

I would also draw your attention to the Council's response of September 2015 to HM Treasury with regard to government's spending review 2015 and which set out at para 33 that:-

"A key part of the discussions on a possible devolution deal has been to enhance the Island's connectivity to the mainland so that our businesses and residents take advantage of the opportunities available there. Of great concern in this regard is in securing the future of the local train service – Island Line which connects a significant proportion of the Island's population to ferry and hovercraft services. Our understanding is that this service requires significant capital investment to secure its ongoing provision and we seek Government's support to ensure Network Rail has sufficient funds to apply to this vital local service"

Since agreeing its formal position in respect of Island Line the Council secured the assistance of transport expert Christopher Garnett who offered to consider how the long term sustainability of Island Line could be achieved given its importance to the Isle of Wight and the local economy.

Mr Garnett has undertaken a considerable amount of work and met with a number of significant stakeholders to examine the issue in more detail. He has prepared a comprehensive paper exploring options for the Island Line, a copy of which is attached for your information.

The Council expects to formally consider Mr Garnett's report in March and therefore it is provided as information only at this stage. The Council's formal position therefore remains as set out above.

I hope this response is helpful in determining how the DfT will ensure the continuance of the Island Line service as part of its franchising process and to ensure that this valuable service is retained for the economic and social benefits it secures for the Isle of Wight.

The Council looks forward to hearing how the DfT would intend to develop its proposals in respect of Island Line and would ask that that it is kept fully informed of progress in this regard.

Yours sincerely



John Metcalfe
Chief Executive

Enclosure: 'The Future of Island Line – Options Report'