

STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 0001HRS 16 JULY 2014

Cross-Party delegation urges PM sign 3-point plan for a great South West Peninsula railway

A CROSS-PARTY delegation of MPs and local authority leaders are meeting in Westminster today to urge the Prime Minister to back a new 3-Point Plan for a great South West Peninsula Railway.

The delegation includes MPs from across the South West Peninsula, from Cornwall, Plymouth, Devon, Torbay and Somerset.

They're backing the 3-Point Plan drawn up by the Peninsula Rail Task Force, a campaign group comprising Cornwall Council, Devon and Somerset County Councils, Plymouth City Council, Torbay Council, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP and the Heart of the South West LEP.

Councillor Andrew Leadbetter, Chair of the Peninsula Rail Task Force, said: "The railway across the South West Peninsula is the UK's Cinderella network. It is long overdue for a big, decisive investment by Government to match the huge growth in passenger numbers, the opportunity for economic growth and the need for greater resilience.

"The Prime Minister's recent announcement of increased investment in the sleeper service and signalling is welcome news, as is First Great Western's new timetable. We also welcome the terrific work that was done to restore the vital coastal mainline at Dawlish.

"These are steps in the right direction, but there's a mighty long way to go yet before the people and businesses of the South West Peninsula have a railway that is truly fit for the 21st century.

"Retaining the iconic Great Western mainline coastal route to a standard that is both resilient and sustainable is a clear priority for Dawlish, Teignmouth and many local communities in South Devon. It is also vital for Torbay whose success is essential for the wider economy, vital for those who travel to work in Exeter and vital for the Peninsula as a whole.

"Plymouth, the heart of our Peninsula City Deal and central to the Peninsula's future economic growth, needs a faster, reliable three hour service from London. Cornwall needs continued improvement in connectivity and in Somerset we need much greater resilience to protect the main lines because without that the whole network is compromised.

"Government spend per head on transport in the Peninsula is £151 less than the UK average and it's fallen in real terms. But all the evidence cries out for increased investment not less.

"The South West Peninsula is a bigger economy than South Wales, Merseyside, Leeds and Sheffield. The South West Peninsula population is bigger than Tyne and Wear, bigger than Glasgow City Region.

"But the South West Peninsula is increasingly the UK's extreme weather front-line and every rail closure costs our economy at least £8 million a day, undermining business confidence. Productivity is low and we have some of the lowest wages in the UK. Our economy needs strong, fast connectivity to flourish and provide people with good jobs and opportunities.

"That's why the Peninsula Rail Task Force is launching its 3-Point Plan for a great South West Peninsula railway, one that is resilient and reliable, that provides faster services with sufficient seats and comfort for all.

“This plan will inform Network Rail’s wider Western Route Study due to be published later this year and we will continue to work with Network Rail to research the wider economic benefits of the inland route options.

“We are grateful for the fantastic support from MPs from all parties across the South West Peninsula. It shows a strong commitment from our MPs and we hope that will be matched by strong backing from the Prime Minister. It would be a great way for him to underline his pledge that HS2 would not be built at the expense of people in the South West Peninsula.”

“I know from first hand experience how vital the South West Peninsula’s rail network is to communities and businesses. The closure of the coastal mainline at Dawlish had a huge impact not only in South Devon, but on people throughout the Peninsula.

“There’s been a great response from Government since then, led personally by the Prime Minister, and we’re going in the right direction. I’m delighted we’ve secured the future of the Dawlish line but we’re going to keep our sleeves rolled up because there’s a lot more that still needs to be done right across the Peninsula to improve journey times, increase resilience, enhance connectivity and meet growth. To achieve those priorities demands a whole network approach backed by a strong Government commitment to invest.

“Rail passenger growth across the Peninsula is already out-stripping the UK average and Network Rail forecasts a further 41% growth up to 2019. The Peninsula population is set to grow by 20% by 2026, again out-stripping the UK average.

“We hope the Prime Minister will give his personal backing to the 3-Point Plan because the people and businesses of the Peninsula deserve faster, reliable services matched by improvements in connectivity so that every area will benefit from improved journey times, extra capacity, future electrification, high resilience and new train services.”

NOTES TO NEWS EDITORS:

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY: 1500 Westminster Hall. MPs and leaders will gather to back the Peninsula Rail Task Force 3 point plan that will be submitted to the Department of Transport.

For information please contact Liz Waugh 07966388921

The Peninsula Rail Task Force is a rail improvement campaign group comprising Cornwall Council, Cornwall and Scillies LEP, Devon County Council, Heart of the South West LEP, Plymouth City Council, Somerset County Council and Torbay Council. Copies of the Task Force’s summary 3-Point Plan and detailed programme for improvement accompany this release. You can also find more information at: www.resiliencesouthwest.co.uk or by contacting Coast Communications on 01579 352 600 / info@resiliencesouthwest.co.uk