



PENINSULA RAIL TASK FORCE

Peninsula Rail Task Force statement

A year after the rail line was severed at Dawlish, another weekend of disruption has happened across the South West rail network due to signalling problems. However, the situation may be about to change as the Peninsula Rail Task Force has had its inaugural meeting with Department of Transport and Network Rail officials before meeting with the Secretary of State, Patrick McLoughlin.

The Task Force met to discuss its proposals to make the rail network more resilient and reliable, ensuring that the Dawlish line remains the main line and is amply protected, along with measures to achieve faster journey times and sufficient capacity.

Chair of the Task Force, Councillor Andrew Leadbetter said: " This weekend has seen further disruption and chaos for travellers - and has underlined our case perfectly. We need a far better rail service with resilience that can deal with these sorts of incidents.

"Our meeting last week was a good start. Initial discussions show that our plans align to those emerging from Network Rail in the Western Route Study, and it is clear there is shared ambition to see structured and long term investment into the South West.

"Our priorities are for a resilient railway that can get travellers to their destination with speed and in relative comfort which is far from the case at the moment. Resilience - protecting the main line through the Somerset Levels, Cowley Bridge and along the coast via Dawlish -- is the corner-stone of our plans, so it has been reassuring to hear that the Prime Minister backs this principle, as well as greater investment into all our strategic connectivity.

"It was also helpful to hear that the Secretary of State supports a key priority to achieve faster journey times with a goal of 2 hrs 15 minutes to Plymouth and 3 hours 15 minutes to Truro. It is obviously an incremental process, but we are keen to work with Network Rail and the Government to work out the best ways to invest to achieve these aims as soon as possible. We intend that we should have a joint draft plan by mid summer. "

Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin said: "I am absolutely committed to ensuring that passengers in the South West benefit from a world-class rail network. That is why we are working with the rail industry and the South West Peninsula Rail Task Force to look at potential long-term improvements for the region's railways, including options for additional routes around Dawlish. "We are also investing £30 million to improve the resilience of the Great Western Mainline route, in order to ensure there is no repeat of the disruption we saw a year ago."

The Task Force is a partnership including five local authorities and both LEPS for Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Plymouth and Torbay. The South West Chamber of Commerce is also a partner, along with the University of Plymouth and Exeter.

The signal failure over the weekend is being investigated by Network Rail and a statement detailing the reasons behind this is expected shortly.

Ends