



**House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA**

Telephone 020 7219 1840
bob.seely.mp@parliament.uk
Robert Seely MBE MP

Sent Via Email

Jo Johnson MP
Minister of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR2

5th November 2018

Dear Jo,

Island Line Priced Option

I write further to our earlier discussions regarding the above, and also my more recent dialogue with the Secretary of State.

I recognise that deliberations on the proposals for Island Line (as submitted by South Western Railway (SWR)) are ongoing; in particular whether the Government will commit to the required expenditure to bring this route up to an acceptable and reliable standard.

As these deliberations continue, I felt it might be helpful to reiterate my position as the local MP - and to highlight the current inequity of my constituency's railway service being overlooked as other parts of the country enjoy the benefits of investment.

Last week's Budget saw announcements of multi-million pound investments in railway routes in the South West, the North of England and in East-West Rail, among others. Whilst I am pleased at this confirmation of the Government's commitment to continue investing in our nation's rail network, such improvements should not be confined to those areas which already enjoy relatively modern rail services.

Other than residual maintenance, there has been no meaningful investment in the route for over 50 years - certainly not in terms of rolling stock. The current trains (London Underground 1938 Stock) have been in place since 1992 and should have been retired years ago. They are beset by problems and it is only thanks to the professionalism of the

maintenance team locally that they just about keep going. In recent weeks alone, there have been repeated signal failures and train breakdowns – because of the current creaking infrastructure – which are having a seriously adverse impact on the ability of my constituents to access the rest of the UK’s rail network in a punctual and reliable manner.

The proposals for Island Line are relatively modest. We are not seeking new, bespoke rail vehicles, but instead reconditioned rolling stock from the 1970s, thereby bringing us forward a few decades (albeit with rolling stock of an age which other parts of the country are now moving away from!). Nevertheless, we are satisfied that this is an appropriate solution for the Island.

I am concerned that the DfT has indicated to SWR that its proposals for Island Line would benefit from some additional funding streams being secured – such as financial input from the local authority (Isle of Wight Council) and possibly LEP funds. Whilst I can appreciate why this approach is being taken, I am concerned at the apparent reluctance of the DfT to fully fund the much-needed and long overdue to Island Line; instead requiring the operator to look elsewhere. This seems to be entirely out of kilter with the approach being taken in other parts of the UK, where the DfT is directly investing Government funds to fully deliver improvements to rail services. Why is Island Line apparently being singled out for having to scramble around to find extra funds to justify a commitment of Government investment, despite its current rolling stock being over 80 years old, and it being over 50 years without meaningful investment in the route?

When the railways were privatised, the then Government made clear that it “fully recognises the social and other benefits of regional and commuter services. It is committed to providing continuing subsidy to support them.” I know that you (and the current Government) share this commitment to a comprehensive rail network, and indeed have set out a noble ambition to see this network extended with new routes and reopening previously closed lines. Whilst Island Line (like many other regional routes) enjoys an operating subsidy as part of the profitable SWR franchise, I have no doubt that the scale of this loss-making will reduce if the proposed investment is made, thereby fulfilling the franchise objective to make it “more sustainable”, as well as enhancing the social and other benefits it delivers (and its interface into the rest of the network as a feeder route).

With a decision on the Island Line Priced Option due by the end of 2018, I am now seeking your reassurance that the Government remains committed to supporting these long overdue improvements, and will fund them in full, to confirm its ongoing commitment to a comprehensive rail network – including routes like that in my constituency which is separated by water.

I am aware that the SWR proposals have been worked up in partnership with the DfT, and it is clear that these plans represent the best prospect of securing improvements in a timely, cost effective and practical manner. These plans – including the new passing loop at Brading to enable half-hourly services and essential repairs and renewals to the track addressing the poor ride quality – are strongly supported by my constituents, local councillors and other key stakeholders.

Finally, I would seek your assurance of the Government's commitment - through Network Rail - to make the necessary investment in Ryde Pier (which does not form part of the Priced Option). This final stretch of the railway (from Ryde Esplanade to Ryde Pier Head) provides the seamless connectivity to the mainland (and the rest of the rail network), for commuters, patients and visitors, among others. I would ask you to ensure that Network Rail allocates the necessary level of capital investment to ensure that the operation of trains on this stretch of the route continues into the long-term.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Seely', with a horizontal line underneath.

Bob Seely MP