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North to get modern Southern diesels from Electrification infills

Hard-pressed commuters across northern England would get 44 modern diesel carriages to relieve crowding as soon as two short routes in Kent and East Sussex are electrified, according to national campaign group Railfuture.

The 25-mile MarshLink route will be electrified within the next five years or so as part of Network Rail's comprehensive upgrade so that Southeastern Highspeed services can be extended off HS1 from Ashford International to Bexhill via Rye and Hastings. That will release 12 diesel Turbostar carriages, of the same type as taken recently by Chiltern Railways from already-crowded TransPennine Express services.

Before that, 32 Turbostar carriages could be released to congested northern routes IF the government announces funding in this year's Autumn Statement to electrify the 24-mile Uckfield branch. However at their presentation to stakeholders yesterday, Govia Thameslink were only able to say that "additional capacity will be provided as soon as possible to relieve crowding on the busy Uckfield route. Timing will depend on when suitable diesel rolling stock becomes available (likely to be after electrification elsewhere in the UK)."

Railfuture Vice-Chairman Chris Page said "The new franchise requires longer Uckfield line trains to operate from December 2016 to provide sorely-needed extra capacity on this fast-growing route leading into East Croydon and London Bridge. This would require 14 extra diesel carriages to come from northern routes after their electrification, from regions which need to keep those trains for growth elsewhere on their own networks. But the new Govia Thameslink franchise is unable to say when it might get any for the Uckfield line and cannot commit to that December 2016 date. Yet everyone knows that electrification of the Uckfield line is a higher-value long-term infrastructure investment than the mere platform-lengthening currently planned for longer diesel trains."

London & South East Vice-Chair Roger Blake added "If Network Rail and the DfT can only argue about the type of electrification to Uckfield while no-one knows when or from where any extra diesel carriages will come, then southern commuters will continue to lose out waiting and northern commuters also face losing out yet again with a repeat of the anger when 18 of their TransPennine carriages were transferred to Chiltern. Third-rail electrification of the Uckfield line, like the rest of the Southern network, will be cheaper and quicker than waiting for overhead wires, and compatible electric trains continue to roll off Derby production lines every week."

Railfuture is therefore calling on the the Chancellor and the Transport Secretary, still fresh from his March commitment to electrify MarshLink for 'Highspeed Hastings', to commit funding this autumn to electrify the Uckfield line and send the modern and recently-refurbished diesels north. That way commuting constituents benefit whether they're in the Home or provincial counties and cities.

Note to editors:

Railfuture is an independent national voluntary organisation campaigning for better rail services and expansion of the rail network. More details can be found at www.railfuture.org.uk.

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