

Paul Hollinghurst  
Secretary, Railfuture East Anglia  
paul.hollinghurst@railfuture.org.uk

13<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Dear Member of Parliament,

## **Getting Britain's Railways Back on Track**

Railfuture campaigns for a better rail network for both passengers and freight whilst being independent of train operators and railway unions. We are writing to MPs in our region because we are very concerned about the way that the Department for Transport and the rail operators in this country seem intent on discouraging rail travel in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis.

The Government is quite rightly emphasising the importance of getting the economy back working and yet there is constant negative messaging from both Government and rail operators about using rail services, both in publicity terms and in the service that is being offered. Passenger volumes have collapsed and show little sign of returning to normal. (The DfT's own figures show rail use has fallen to 13% of 2019 levels since March this year). Rail travel can offer quicker, less polluting journeys, with more social distancing than is possible in a coach or a private car.

It is important to get people back on the trains for the following reasons:

1. Rail travel in overall terms is very safe compared to road use.
2. The climate emergency has not gone away and levels of pollution will return to pre-Covid-19 levels and beyond, unless road use is discouraged. It was so encouraging to see the level of reduction of emissions having such a visible effect on air quality during lockdown, but if car travel is being promoted instead of rail, this will quickly disappear.
3. Cycling and walking is simply not an alternative for most rail journeys, especially in colder weather, for long distances and for anyone with young children or restricted movement.
4. Large cities in Britain only work effectively with efficient public transport, both rail, light rail/tram and bus. If public transport is being discouraged, then on-line shopping will increase that will have a long term negative impact on high streets and local communities.
5. Economic recovery is dependent on people being able to access their employment and leisure pursuits. Rail has always played a key part in this, particularly in large conurbations.
6. Around 20% of the UK population do not have access to a private car. These people are being effectively excluded from many economic and social activities as a result.
7. The contrast with attitudes to train travel in Europe and to air travel both here and in Europe could not be more stark. If it is safe to fly in the UK, or to catch a train in France, or a coach in Germany, why is rail travel in Britain being actively discouraged?
8. The taxpayer is supporting rail services to an alarming degree at present and that can only be reduced when passengers return.



The Government could play an active part in the return to rail by encouraging train operators to use incentives, such as increasing the use of discount cards for a limited period, and linking rail travel to well-known tourist attractions. This would be particularly helpful during the school holidays when families will want to go out and enjoy visiting places of interest. The Government itself could pioneer a National Rail Smartcard across all areas of the UK which would encourage everyone to get out on the railways and help our beleaguered tourist industry.

Can I ask you to make my feelings known to Ministers and Government officials and to the local train operating company.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Hollinghurst

Secretary, Railfuture East Anglia

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