



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Sir Andrew Haines  
Chief Executive, Network Rail

25 April 2025

Dear Andrew,

We are writing to you as Members of Parliament serving the communities that stand to benefit significantly from the proposed re-introduction of a direct rail service to London, operated by WSMR. We are aware of the ongoing dialogue and representations for this application, and we have found WSMR to be proactive both in our local areas, and in their solution-oriented engagement with relevant authorities.

Since Avanti West Coast ceased operating this route in June 2024 due to what was cited as ‘poor passenger numbers’, passenger numbers have only continued to rise. Shrewsbury station hit over 2 million entries and exits in the latest release of figures by the ORR, and Wrexham has returned to its pre-Covid peak levels. Yet these passengers are under-served by the lack of a direct service to London, reliant on connecting services that do not serve our communities effectively and are often beset by delays, complications and cancellations. This latent demand is crying out for services to fulfil our true potential as economically thriving places to work, visit and live.

The WSMR proposal offers five direct trains a day and is a marked improvement on a service that has operated in the past, with far more regular trains. Not only is there incredible untapped economic growth potential that would come from connecting these communities to London, and each other, but we would hope that you are able to honour the previous recommendation in Lord Hendy’s Union Connectivity Review of the UK-wide connectivity that this link would support. The Marches area linking the Midlands to Wales and to the capital city, is an overlooked yet thriving commuter belt of high economic demographics, growing business base and some top-class football teams!

We understand that there is complexity in the allocation of paths into Euston with a number of open access requests. There is considerable regional and political support for this service, which was unduly cut at the end of the pandemic. As Members of Parliament for these communities, we know that the benefits such a service would bring to our constituents are significant in both economic and social terms, and would also assist in relieving capacity constraints on other routes in the area.

Since the first service 175 years ago, there have only been twelve of these years in which no direct service to London has operated. With the growth in rail, and the area’s strategic position as a gateway for the Union, we believe it is essential that you prioritise the reinstatement of this longstanding direct connection with London.

We note the Secretary of State's support for WSMR in the Commons Chamber on 13 February 2025, and is following this case with interest. We share her view that there is a vitally important place for Open Access in Britain's reformed rail network. We believe that open access, especially in light of the franchised operators declining to offer such a service to our communities in the foreseeable future, is the only option on the table to reinstate a service that first operated in the 1850s.

The proposed WSMR service not only reconnects the Marches to London, but creates new train routes in the West Midlands, all of which we understand will have minimal abstraction from existing services, unlike other operators applying to operate on the West Coast Mainline. The WSMR route will directly link Shrewsbury and the Black Country to Coleshill, and provide a direct service to London from Coleshill Parkway, increasing the ability for residents to travel across the Midlands and down to London when needed.

We hope that this letter will open communication between ourselves and Network Rail, on this matter and more widely on cross-border rail services. We look forward to working with you over the next four years of this Parliament to mutually find ways to enhance rail services connecting our constituencies alongside the railway's broader restructuring and objectives.

We would urge you to commit to prioritising a positive response to the ORR's consultation and work proactively to find a way to expand the services to our constituents, as time is of the essence. Given that this route was previously available until two years ago we are hopeful that capacity can be found and seek your urgent confirmation.

We look forward to hearing from you in due course and we would welcome the opportunity to meet you to discuss this matter and your wider objectives.

Yours sincerely,

Julia Buckley, MP for Shrewsbury

Sureena Brackenridge, MP for Wolverhampton North East

Emily Darlington, MP for Milton Keynes Central

Shaun Davies, MP for Telford

Jodie Gosling, MP for Nuneaton

Helen Morgan, MP for North Shropshire

Mark Pritchard, MP for The Wrekin

Andrew Ranger, MP for Wrexham

Rachel Taylor, MP for North Warwickshire and Bedworth

Valerie Vaz, MP for Walsall and Bloxwich

Sir Gavin Williamson, MP for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge

Steve Witherden, MP for Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr

cc: John Larkinson, Chief Executive, Office of Rail and Road