

Cumbria LEP presses case for clarity on Lake District rail line improvements

Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership, the county's strategic economic body, is asking central government for more detail about the extent of plans to make improvements to the Lake District railway line.

Following the announcement from the Department for Transport that plans to invest in electrification of the line from Oxenholme and Windermere have been shelved, the board of Cumbria LEP is requesting more specific information about new trains and services due to be introduced from 2018.

In a letter to the Secretary of State for Transport, The Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP, Cumbria LEP is also asking the government to look at further investment in services and in particular improvements to Windermere station in light of the Lake District's attainment of World Heritage Status.

The LEP has requested an urgent meeting with key officials from the Department for Transport to discuss improved frequency of services between Oxenholme and Windermere, including morning and evening services.

It has also asked for more details about proposals for additional through trains to Manchester, the technology and types of trains to be used, their passenger capacity, line speed and timings.

Other proposals being tabled for consideration include modernisation improvements to Windermere station to accommodate additional capacity, for example, a second platform, passing loop or re-location to open up a rail head gateway to the World Heritage site.

George Beveridge, chair of Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership, explains: "We were clearly disappointed to be informed that the government had decided to shelve its electrification plans for the line.

"Whilst we welcome the potential for additional direct rail services between Windermere and Manchester airport, we need to know the details now about how and when these will be delivered, both in terms of train technology and whether for example there are plans for more morning and evening services.

"The partnership has also been looking at the feasibility for line improvements, station upgrades, and additional services, all of which would benefit the local tourism economy and visitor experiences. Electrification of the line was a key part of this infrastructure planning work.

"The Lake District National Park Authority, as members of the LEP board, are supportive of the electrification of the Lakes Line. They have confirmed that electrification is wholly consistent with the management plan for the National Park and World Heritage Site and would make a significant and positive contribution to supporting the regional economy and enabling low carbon, sustainable transport.

"The electrification upgrades which were promised for this line would have made a huge difference to achieving these goals, so we are seeking a commitment from Government to look into the matter again, together with the partnership, in much more detail."

With Windermere the only public transport rail head for the heart of the Lake District and rises in visitor numbers predicted, Cumbria LEP is asking the Secretary of State for Transport to engage in further discussions as soon as possible and look at further development opportunities.

Whilst seeking to protect the sensitive environment of the latest World Heritage Site, its plans for line improvements are aimed to benefit the local tourism economy and visitor experiences, as well as transport connectivity, long term cost efficiency and environmental sustainability.

“We have some exciting thoughts for the Windermere line as a potential 'World Heritage site gateway',” adds Mr Beveridge. “We want to leave no stone unturned in looking at other ways of improving it for the visitor economy.”

For further details about Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership, go to www.cumbrialep.co.uk

Ends

For media information please contact Karen Gardner at Osprey Communications on 015394 42436 or email karen@ospreycommunications.co.uk

Notes for editors

- Cumbria LEP provides a strategic lead for all activities contributing to the growth and vibrancy of the county’s economy and where appropriate takes positive action, using the skills, capability and networks of LEP partners.
- The LEP is keen to work with all partners and stakeholders (private and public) to undertake actions, secure funding and implement initiatives to support sustainability and growth of Cumbria’s economy.
- A copy of the Cumbria Strategic Economic Plan is available at: www.cumbrialep.co.uk/what-we-do/sep/