



A statement on behalf of the Portishead Railway Group Committee

To the Chairman and Committee Members:

Following Wednesday's news reports that Department for Transport has agreed to provide circa £15.5m of additional funding, the decision before the Committee regarding an additional share of funding from the West of England Combined Authority, of £10m, seems particularly pivotal.

Portishead Railway Group has been lobbying for the re-introduction of competent railway services along the old Portishead Railway route for around 21 years. In that time, the people of Portishead, Pill and the surrounding villages have seen many 'false dawns' for reopening the railway, yet all the while their communities have grown massively as a result of almost continuous housing development.

It is a statement of the obvious that the existing road infrastructure is inadequate for the increased road traffic volumes that have resulted from this unbridled housing development; this is particularly so at Junction 19 of the M5, where the only major road in and out of Portishead crosses traffic with the general road chaos at one of the country's busiest small motorway junctions.

Junction 19 is plagued by multiple and very busy crossing traffic routes, with the always-busy Gordano Services and Royal Portbury Dock complex contributing majorly to the congestion. Similarly, the people of Pill, Easton in Gordano and Ham Green who travel into Bristol have no option but to use the A369, a road that is incapable of improvement for topological reasons and which is notorious for its congestion, particularly where it meets the A370 at Ashton.

This absolute reliance on a creaking road infrastructure must cease, particularly in view of the health implications of slow-moving road traffic and the undoubted impacts that climate change has already brought, with no doubt worse to come.

It is in this light that Portishead Railway Group urges the West of England Combined Authority Committee to vote in favour of the additional funding of circa £10m, and thereafter to continue to work with the involved partners to secure the granting of the Development Consent Order.

There is one aspect which Portishead Railway Group wishes to bring to your attention: reopening the Portishead line relies on a prediction of passenger numbers. There seems little reason to doubt that, in keeping with other reopenings over recent years, the eventual passenger numbers using a reopened Portishead Line will exceed the predictions.

It therefore seems like false economy to remove the station buildings at Pill and Portishead from the works and to also reduce the platform lengths from 5-car to 3-car capabilities. The former will inevitably reduce passenger numbers in inclement weather, and the latter will force would-be passengers to return to road transport (overwhelmingly by car) if they cannot reliably board a train and get to work because it is already full. This latter point will be particularly relevant at Pill where it is easy to envisage a train arriving from Portishead and would-be passengers at Pill being unable to board.



The Ebbw Vale Line experience showed exactly the issues that stem from insufficient platform lengths; it took years to play catch-up when the passenger numbers were heading for nearly double the prediction.

Over the next few months, please work with the other involved partners to consider how station facilities and the 5-car platforms can be included in the initial works. It will be no good realising a couple of years after reopening that 5-car trains are imperative, and then waiting another two years or so for the platforms to be extended - the reputational and mind-set damage within the travelling public will have been done!

Dave Chillistone

For and on behalf of the Portishead Railway Group Committee