

Rt Hon Ruth Kelly MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DR

13 February 2008

Dear Ms Kelly,

Re: Cost-benefit analysis of Woodhead Tunnel options

I am writing to ask the Department for Transport to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of possible options for the Woodhead tunnel, which would ensure that the rail route from Manchester to Sheffield can be used in the future if needed. This analysis needs to be done as a matter of urgency, so that the department can decide whether to act now to protect the tunnel rather than waiting until later.

As you will know, National Grid has already started preparatory work to enable their electricity cables to be moved to the new Woodhead tunnel, and this action will preclude use of the tunnel for rail, as National Grid has admitted. This work is going ahead without any detailed evaluation by Government of the long term capacity needs of the rail network in the region, or any assessment of the different costs involved if and when the railway line is reopened.

A cost-benefit analysis would enable the department to assess whether it would be cheaper for the taxpayer, and less disruptive for everyone involved, to act now to protect the rail route for the future. We suggest the analysis should consider the following options:

- The department could allow National Grid to move the cables to the new tunnel, and then pay it to renovate the old tunnel, and move the cables back, leaving the new tunnel free for any future rail route.
- The department could pay National Grid to maintain the older tunnels in a viable condition, so that the cables can be transferred back if the newer tunnel is needed as part of a rail route.
- The department could allow National Grid to continue its work in moving the cables from the old tunnel to the newer one, could allow the old tunnels to disintegrate, and if the line needs to be reopened at a later date the Government could pay for restoration of the old tunnel(s) so that the cables can be moved back.

In Oral Questions on 22 January, you said that 'it is important that we keep as many options open as possible' and that you are committed to working with National Grid 'to keep all options on the table'. A cost-benefit analysis would ensure that flexibility was maintained for the future, at the lowest cost for the taxpayer.

Such an analysis would be appropriate, given that the rail route and tunnel are safeguarded in several statutory regional and local plans.¹

The line was not mentioned specifically in the rail White Paper because that document talked in general terms without considering the need to safeguard any key rail corridors for the future. However, the White Paper mentions the need for capacity on the Trans-Pennine corridor, and explains that new lines may be needed to deal with growing demand. We believe that capacity challenges facing the railway mean that the potential rail route through this tunnel from Manchester to Sheffield may need to be reopened in the future. We understand that the Northern Way is also keen to assess how future capacity on this corridor will be managed.

In general terms, we understand that your position is that line reopenings can be considered at a later time, and that investment will be forthcoming when it is needed. However, it is important to be clear that doubling the capacity of the rail network is likely to require reopenings of lines and stations. It therefore makes sense to consider the case for safeguarding key routes, to avoid greater cost and inconvenience in the future.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Cat Hobbs
Public Transport Campaigner

Copies to: Tom Harris (Transport Minister), David Leam (Special Advisor, DfT), Brian Welch (DfT rail), David Begg (Northern Way), John Jarvis (Northern Way), Jim Steer (Greengauge 21), Iain Coucher (Network Rail), Jonathan Atkinson (Save the Woodhead Tunnel), Dr Andy Tickle (Friends of the Peak District), Philippa Edmunds (Freight on Rail), Jonathan Bray (PTEG), Roger Jones (Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive), Roy Wicks (South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive), Graham Stringer MP, Norman Baker MP, Michael Clapham MP, Nick Clegg MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Janet Dean MP, Tom Levitt MP, Eric Martlew MP, Angela Smith MP (Sheffield Hillsborough), Gwyneth Dunwoody MP

¹ Peak National Park Structure Plan (1994), South Pennines Integrated Transport Strategy Business Plan (2005-2015), Peak District National Park Authority Local Plan (2001), Regional Spatial Strategy 8 East Midlands (2005), Derby & Derbyshire Joint Structure Plan Transport (2001), High Peak Borough Council Local Plan