

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

10 December 2007

Dear Ms Kelly,

Protection of strategic rail route through Woodhead Tunnel

We are writing to ask you to protect the southerly Woodhead Tunnel on the potential rail route between Manchester and Sheffield for future use. We understand that National Grid has decided to put cabling in this tunnel, and ask you to intervene as a matter of urgency to stop this work, until a full appraisal of the route with all the relevant stakeholders has been carried out.

At present National Grid uses the two most northerly tunnels for their electricity cables. The southerly tunnel is the only one suitable for rail use. The rail route going through this tunnel has the potential to cater for passenger and freight services on a severely congested corridor alongside the A628/A616 trunk roads. It would be short sighted if this Government failed to plan for the future of rail in a pro-active manner, by allowing cabling in this tunnel to go ahead without appraisal of how this rail route would contribute to wider transport policy objectives.

The Government's Rail White Paper forecasts rail capacity doubling over 30 years and endorses the strategic rail freight network. Freight on Rail held a seminar last March with 'The Northern Way' which highlighted the need to improve Trans-Pennine rail capacity for both passenger and freight services. We also note that use of the tunnel as part of the potential rail route is safeguarded in statutory plans.¹

Furthermore, the Government's Rail White Paper specifically mentions the need for capacity on the Trans-Pennine corridor, and explains that new lines may be needed to deal with growing demand:

'6.29...any future planning should focus on new line options. The question of whether, where and when new lines might be needed is one that can only be answered in the context of a proper multi-modal assessment of the passenger and freight demand on each inter-urban corridor...long-term rail demand cannot be forecast with any accuracy, and rail provision cannot be planned in isolation. On the inter-urban corridors, rail options will have to be assessed alongside road-widening, road-pricing and traffic management measures. This analysis will have to look at east-west corridors (including the South Wales – London and Trans-Pennine) links, as well as the north-south corridors on which the debate has tended to focus thus far.'

At a time when rail's role in reducing carbon emissions has been recognised, the Government has a responsibility to ensure that future rail routes are safeguarded, not ignored. We ask you to intervene to ensure that the Woodhead tunnel, and corresponding rail route, can play their part in ensuring sustainable transport in the future.

Yours sincerely,

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)

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