

**Report of the Cabinet Member for Economy, Growth and Cabinet Liaison for Exeter**

I have been asked to report by Councillor Westlake on *flood prevention on Devon railway network; also the announcement of £10 Million towards Dawlish sea wall defence.*

The Peninsula Rail Task Force (PRTF) launched its 'Closing the Gap' 20 year plan to Government on 22nd November, which seeks greater resilience, faster journey times and more capacity and connectivity.

The report was finalised following consultation feedback from members of the public, MPs and key stakeholders, as well as from suggestions put forward by members at Place Scrutiny in June this year. Appended to this response is an executive summary of the plan and the key priorities for the peninsula. For a full copy of 'Closing the Gap' – The South West Peninsula strategic rail blueprint click - [here](#). Members have recently received email notification of the report and I have made hard copies available in the Members' Room.

Addressing the questions raised by Councillor Westlake, having a resilient and reliable railway remains our number one priority. The recent severe weather events where the South West was again cut off from the rest of the country was a further reminder to Government of its economic importance for Devon and the peninsula.

We are aware that Network Rail has sufficient funding to undertake works at Cowley Bridge to increase the water capacity of one culvert and build an additional culvert. This work is planned to be completed in two phases: phase one in 2017 and phase two in June 2018. The scheme will provide 1 in 20 years level of protection, significantly lower than the standard 1 in 100 years as the current River Exe Flood Scheme. In addition, there is a need for NR to work with the EA develop a scheme for protection of the railway when extreme flooding occurs. This potentially requires an automated barrier system across the railway.

With regard to the Dawlish/Teignmouth section the immediate ask of Government is for £284m to secure the critical seawall and cliffs sections of the main line between Dawlish Warren and Teignmouth. We received positive news earlier this month when Government announced £10m to add to the £5m already committed to allow work to continue in developing further these plans for future delivery. This gives us the greatest opportunity to secure improvements during Control Period 6 (2019-2024). Network Rail is currently consulting on these proposals (<http://www.networkrail.co.uk/Devon-and-Cornwall/>).

**Councillor Andrew Leadbetter  
Cabinet Member for Economy, Growth and Cabinet Liaison for Exeter**

**Appendix:** Executive Summary of PRTF 'Closing the Gap': The South West Peninsula strategic rail blueprint (November 2016)

For the South West, investment into the rail network will unlock a host of benefits, generating an additional £7.2bn of GVA and £1.8bn of transport benefits in the coming years, transforming the economy and our communities. With passenger growth at 128%, we consistently outstrip industry forecasts and our potential is growing. 75% of SW businesses stated that rail is vital to their business and that reducing the journey time to London by 45 minutes would have a significant positive impact on their productivity.

Since the severe weather incidents of 2014 when the line was severed at Dawlish, and floods engulfed the Somerset Levels, the South West has been working hard to develop a strategic plan for our rail network. Starting with the formation of the Peninsula Rail Task Force – a partnership of local authorities, LEPs and stakeholders, it has gone on to work with South West MPs to respond to a commission by Government for a plan. This is the result: 'Closing the gap', our blueprint for rail.

Our plan is not a quick fix, a long term view is required. The South West has lost out because of poor transport investment for over 20 years, averaging £35/head compared to a national average of £98/head – leaving our region some £2bn behind other areas. Our regional rolling stock is the oldest, dating back to the late 1970s. The Met Office says climate change incidents will become more frequent, and with Network Rail warning that the line at Dawlish will suffer closure every four years by 2065, the South West remains more vulnerable than many parts of the UK. Our economy depends on good connectivity, but unlike other areas, we do not have a good network to start with.

Our initial priorities of greater resilience, faster journey times and more capacity and connectivity remain. Our last report, 'On Track', set out the importance of maintaining the iconic mainline through Dawlish, creating real journey time savings and greater capacity, as well as increasing the opportunities for communities to interconnect with other areas. Links to Bristol, Birmingham and London, as well as other travel hubs such as Heathrow, Gatwick and Southampton are vital, as are our interregional provision. The report clearly calls for reliable and high quality services, accessible to all, enabling passengers to work and travel in comfort.

Since the initial report, we have undertaken extensive studies with partners Network Rail, the Department for Transport, Great Western Railway and the University of Plymouth to look at ways to achieve our aims.

Our immediate priorities to 2019 are:

- Invest £284m in resilience, including commencing the securing of the main rail line through Dawlish and Teignmouth
- Completion of committed flood relief schemes
- Introduce trains capable of operating along the seawall in all weathers
- Invest £2.5m in GRIP 3 options for the diversionary route East of Exeter

- Invest £22m in GRIP 3 options for reducing journey times
- Increase frequency to 2 direct trains an hour from Plymouth to London in the new franchise, reducing journey times by up to 10 minutes, whilst at least maintaining existing services
- Work with the rail industry to maximise the benefits of the new trains from Dec 2018 and invest £25m to make our journeys more productive through on board travelling office, media and mobile/Wi-Fi connectivity.

Over the medium term to 2029, we are focused on continuing investment:

- Invest £301m to complete Dawlish seawall and cliffs resilience, the diversionary route between Exeter and Castle Cary and estuary flood protection
- Invest £1.5bn to reduce journey times by up to 14 minutes to Penzance, through infrastructure improvements, partial electrification and franchise renewals
- Invest £150m reducing journey times and increasing core capacity on the Exeter –Waterloo line
- Invest £358m to improve capacity and comfort through new rolling stock, infrastructure enhancements and phased opening of the Northern Route
- Increase frequency to 2 trains an hour west of Exeter to Bristol and the Midlands

We want to realise our true economic potential and contribute to UK PLC. With exceptional opportunities such as Hinkley, world-class aerospace, nuclear and marine industries, outstanding natural assets such as the North Cornwall and Jurassic Coasts, UNESCO Global Geopark and national parks, we have significant prospects to exploit. As investments into other areas are realised, such as Crossrail and HS2, the gap between the South West and the rest of the UK will become more pronounced. But we strongly believe that new infrastructure can, and will, redress this imbalance.

The UK's record of investment into infrastructure is mixed; in the South West we strongly believe a new approach is needed. Other countries are using different ways to invest and deliver their infrastructure, successfully: on time and on budget. We want to work with Government, Network Rail, train operating companies and private sector partners to explore new avenues and bring benefits to the South West as soon as possible.

Our message to Government is plain: there must be real enhancements to our rail network, improving existing provision. Reduced services, loss of connections and slower trains are unacceptable. Whilst our rail network cannot be transformed overnight, we must tackle the decades of underinvestment, we must start now and we must hold true to that course in the years to come.