

Ray Chapman
Kent Sussex Connect
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90 Liberty Street
London
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By email: ray@raychapman.co.uk

Dear Ray,

Ref: Support for the Kent Sussex Connect Project

I am writing on behalf of Transport for the South East (TfSE), to lend our support to the Kent Sussex Connect project and highlight its alignment with our own objectives. This is a draft officer response that will be presented to our Partnership Board on 21 July 2025 for their approval. A further iteration may therefore follow.

TfSE is a sub-national transport body (STB) for the South East of England. Our principal decision-making body, the [Partnership Board](#), brings together representatives from our 16 constituent local transport authorities, district and borough authorities, protected landscapes, business representatives, Highways England, Network Rail and Transport for London.

TfSE provides a mechanism for its constituent authorities and other partners to speak with one voice on the transport interventions needed to support sustainable economic growth across its geography. High-quality transport infrastructure is critical to making the South East more competitive, contributing to national prosperity and improving the lives of our residents.

TfSE have published a [Strategic Investment Plan \(SIP\)](#) to help both government and LTAs prioritise investment in our region. The packages detailed in the SIP address eight investment priorities aligned with the vision and strategic goals of the TfSE Transport Strategy and the wider regional and national policy context. The SIP provides a framework for investment in strategic transport infrastructure, services, and regulatory interventions in the coming three decades.

The current SIP represents the culmination of five years of technical work, stakeholder engagement, and institutional development. It is underpinned by a credible, evidence-based technical programme that has enabled TfSE and our partners to:

- Understand the current and future challenges and opportunities in the south east.
- Identify stakeholder priorities for their respective areas of interest.
- Evaluate the impacts of a wide range of plausible scenarios on the south east's economy, society, and environment.
- Develop multi-modal, cross-boundary interventions.

- Assess the impact of proposed interventions on transport and socio-economic outcomes; and
- Prioritise the interventions that best address the south east's most pressing challenges and unlock the south east's most promising opportunities.

As we identified in our [Outer Orbital Area Study Options Assessment Report](#) which forms part of the evidence base for the SIP. The Marshlink railway is inadequate to meet future aspirations for stakeholders in East Sussex and Kent and is a key element supporting our vision.

The Marshlink railway currently faces constraints including limited capacity, lack of electrification, and relatively slow journey times. Operating services on this “island” of diesel operation is expensive and inefficient. The railway offers poor east-west connectivity for the communities it serves. It also contributes to the relative “isolation” of Bexhill and Hastings. Stakeholders believe this connectivity gap makes it harder to attract investment to these towns. There are aspirations to use this railway to run high speed services from London St Pancras to Hastings, Bexhill, and Eastbourne via Hastings. This would help develop Ashford as an international transport hub (and strengthen the case for the long-term sustainability of international rail services at this station). However, the quality (and traction) of this railway presents a significant barrier to this project.

In our SIP we have identified as part of our High Speed Rail East package for Kent, Medway, and East Sussex, proposal T2 - High Speed 1 / Marsh Link - Hastings, Bexhill and Eastbourne Upgrade which identifies the need for new high speed services to Hastings, Bexhill and Eastbourne via High Speed 1 / the Marshlink Line to markedly reduce journey times between these locations and London.

TfSE is committed to supporting strategic interventions that align with our long-term transport vision and investment priorities. While we acknowledge the current constraints around delivering high-speed services via the Marshlink Line, we welcome innovative approaches that could address these barriers. TfSE remains open to collaboration with Kent Sussex Connect and other partners to explore opportunities for accelerating the development and delivery of strategic solutions in this corridor, consistent with the objectives set out in our Strategic Investment Plan.

Your sincerely

Cllr Keith Glazier
Chair Transport for the South East