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Mr John Armitt
Chief Executive, Network Rail
40 Melton Street, London, NW1 2EE

29 March 2006

Dear Mr Armitt

Underspend and Hereford-Ledbury Single Track

In 1982 the double-track between Hereford and Ledbury used by London and Birmingham trains was singled in order to save the wages of one signalman. Since that date Hereford passengers (a city of 65,000 plus 200,000 in the surrounding area) and people changing at Hereford for the north-south Manchester-Cardiff route and beyond have suffered delays, cancellations and overcrowding. Trains are considered completely unreliable by most Herefordians, with justification.

Technical improvements since 1982 mean a signalman is now no longer necessary to operate the line as double-track, and in any case, it is now appreciated that a single track wears out around twice as fast as a double one: So any financial savings were largely hypothetical. It would be an excellent idea if the double-track were re-instated.

For most people small improvements between local towns are much 'better value' than major improvements like high speed train links to Scotland, which they cannot afford. If you have, as we believe, significant underspend, please consider re-instating the double-track on this 13 mile Hereford-Ledbury stretch of line. Twin-tracking would make train travel a very good choice for people commuting between Hereford and stations to Birmingham and London and beyond, and help the city enormously with its sustainable transport policies. This is especially pertinent since the paralympics are to be held here in 2012 alongside the London Olympics and "The Royal National College for the Blind and Herefordshire Riding for the Disabled both plan to build multi-million pound centres of excellence to cater for paralympians." (www.herefordshire.gov.uk/council_gov_democracy/news/24180.asp)

We are, of course, appreciative of Network Rail's investment in signalling changes at Worcester Foregate Street and track renewal at Blockley near Moreton-on-Marsh. However this investment needs enlarging and extending to double-tracking the single track between Hereford and Ledbury, which is currently responsible for so much unnecessary delay.

Yours sincerely

GERALD DAWE
Chair, Rail for Herefordshire¹

cc. Rail Focus
Alison Forster, Managing Director, First Great Western

¹ Rail for Herefordshire is a local train group set up in 1999, now with a membership of about 80. It works to improve train travel in Herefordshire and is consulted on travel and other planning issues in county by the local authority and other bodies.