

Rail for Herefordshire P O Box 299 Hereford HR1 2YE
www.RailForHerefordshire.org.uk Email: RailFH@aol.com

Ian Austin
Regional Minister for the West Midlands
House of Commons
Westminster
London SW1A 0AA

February 27 2009

Dear Mr Austin

Visit to Hereford February 2009; Transport Solutions for the City

We were interested to read in the local paper about your visit to Hereford city, apparently among other things, 'to hear about the outer distributor road'.

We are a local campaign group for the railways in Herefordshire and have been meeting monthly and publishing newsletters for over ten years. We have thought much about Hereford's transport situation.

Most people in Hereford would be happy with a traffic situation typical of that of the school holidays. This is about 10% to 20% less than school days. It could be achieved in a variety of ways. The county and city have never had a proper public transport system; it has simply never been tried. There are buses, but no real time information on bus stops, only the initiated know where and when they go. There are few cycle lanes or cycle parks. Much of the walking in the town is horrible, not inspiring for people to get out and walk to work or the shops. Walk ways need to be improved, with tree and other planting schemes; some 20 m.p.h. areas and some specifically designed walking routes. The Conservatives however propose an 'Outer Distributor Road' (ODR). Indeed, following very strong lobbying from the Conservative Council it has been included as a priority project in the transport package for the West Midlands put forward by the Regional Development Agency.

The ODR has recently been costed at £130m; it would cut across lovely countryside and require a 12km detour for most journeys around and through the town. Because of the extra mileage for most journeys it would increase CO₂, in addition it would cost much money, be very damaging to the countryside, and be of little benefit to walkers, cyclists or even car drivers, due to the large detour it would require.

There are so many more imaginative, less expensive and less environmentally damaging projects that could be carried out for transport in Hereford and Herefordshire with this money. Improve the buses and bus information, the cycle and pedestrian routes, and park and ride.

On our particular wish list of transport improvements is the twin tracking of the Hereford-Ledbury railway line. Hereford is a junction. People travelling N/S from Cardiff to Manchester can change at Hereford for a direct service to Birmingham, Reading, Oxford and London and places in between. At the moment we have an

hourly Birmingham service and four London trains each way (i.e. eight trains a day). We are restricted from having more because the west-east line is only single tracked. It means any delay leads to cancellation and the line is currently at capacity, it cannot take more trains. The expansion of Hereford that is planned 2011-2026 (in Hereford City from c. 23,000 houses to c. 32,000 houses, and in Herefordshire county an extra 19,000 houses or 46,000 people overall) will exacerbate the problem of congestion on this single line track. The West Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy has recognised the lack of track capacity as a problem, but funding is unlikely to be forthcoming from Network Rail as there are so many other calls on its money. The Hereford-Ledbury railway line could be twin tracked at less than half the cost of an Outer Distributor Road (at 11.5 miles it would cost around £20m to £25m), and could be combined with some park and ride.

We do wonder why this Conservative administration continues to press for a 1960s road building solution for a 21st century problem. All Herefordians know that all that is required is a 10% drop in the number of cars to bring the city to school holiday situation, for the need for new roads to be unnecessary. We do hope you will take into account the twin tracking of the railway and other public transport improvements, rather than a road building solution.

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Roseff
Secretary
Rail for Herefordshire