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Ian McAllister
Chair, Network Rail
40 Melton Street, London, NW1 2EE

27 November 2006

Dear Mr McAllister

Underspend and Hereford-Ledbury Single Track

We wrote to John Armit in March this year about the problems of congestion due to the single line track between Hereford and Ledbury, and the underspend at Network Rail. We received a reply that the single track had not been identified for doubling in the Route Utilisation Strategy, which was no surprise, the RUS proposed very few structural improvements at all, throughout the region. In view of the continued under spend and money made/saved at Network Rail (for which well done), we wondered if you would consider the single track problem at Hereford again.

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 signaller. 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 unreliable by most Herefordians, with justification and improvements to the service not possible. With new timetables more and more trains terminate at Malvern, making it worse for Hereford passengers. Yet Hereford has recently been identified as a growth area by Government with a proposed 10k to 20k more houses. Rail infrastructure will have to be upgraded, if road traffic is to be kept under control.

Technical improvements since 1982 mean a signaller 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.

We totally agree with your statement that Network Rail is not going for grand schemes. For most people small improvements between local towns are much better value than major improvements like high speed trains to Scotland, which they cannot afford in any case. 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, in association with the National College for the Blind, are to be held here in 2012.

Yours sincerely

GERALD DAWE
Chair, Rail for Herefordshire

cc. Rail Focus
Alison Forster, Managing Director, First Great Western
Nigel Pennington, Central Trains
Cllr Wilcox, Cabinet Member for Transport, Herefordshire Council