

Chamber welcomes electrification campaign success

After six years of campaigning, Harrogate Chamber of Trade and Commerce has welcomed the announcement that the Harrogate rail line has been prioritised by the Government for electrification.

Chief Executive Brian Dunsby said: "This is absolutely excellent news for everyone concerned, and the result of extensive hard work and campaigning over many years.

"Improving the rail service with electrification will make an enormous difference to Harrogate. As well as modern rolling stock, which is something we have needed for many years, we will benefit from increased frequency, shorter journey times, and services earlier in the morning and later in the evening, seven days a week.

"Obviously, this is very good news for local people, but importantly it is also a significant development for the local economy. As a town reliant on visitors, for both business and leisure, we need to have first class public transport services to encourage as many people to come to Harrogate as possible.

"This announcement is the beginning of the process of bringing Harrogate's rail services into the 21st century. Combined with the new two-hourly direct services to London, which were announced in November by the new East Coast franchisee, Virgin-Stagecoach, it will make travel to and from Harrogate a much easier, more convenient and more enjoyable experience for everyone."

The Chamber began campaigning for rail improvements in 2008, bringing in Mark Leving, the former managing director of Hull Trains, to advise on possible developments. He recommended both increased frequency of direct services from Harrogate to London, and electrification of the local line from Leeds to York via Harrogate.

These two recommendations were taken up by the Chamber which then produced a proposal, "Why Harrogate Trains" which laid out the huge benefits which electrification could bring. In 2011, it was given backing by local authorities along the line, after lobbying by the Chamber supported by Andrew Jones MP.

As the transport authority for the area, North Yorkshire County Council produced the business case for electrification, supported by the Chamber and other local authorities. The project was at the top of the shortlist for rail electrification in January 2014, which the Government put forward for the Electrification Taskforce to consider. Andrew Jones MP was appointed chairman of this taskforce.

Mr Dunsby added: "We are so pleased that the hard work we began six years ago has paid off.

"We must thank Mark Leving for all of his support and enthusiasm for the project, which made it possible for us to put together a solid proposal for electrification. The backing of all the local authorities and the MPs of constituencies along the line was also vital to its success.

"We're grateful to everyone who took up this campaign, recognised its importance to Harrogate, and pushed for the Government to take the project on. Today's announcement is the culmination of many years of hard work and campaigning and we are delighted that it has paid off."

For more information, visit www.harrogatechamber.org.

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