



**Councillor Keith Aspden**  
**Leader, City of York Council**  
West Offices  
Station Rise  
York YO1 6GA

Mr Michael Matheson MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for Transport,  
Infrastructure and Connectivity  
Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

Date: 19 November 2020  
Email: [cllr.kaspden@york.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.kaspden@york.gov.uk)

[www.investineastcoast.co.uk](http://www.investineastcoast.co.uk)

via e-mail:  
[Michael.Matheson.msp@parliament.scot](mailto:Michael.Matheson.msp@parliament.scot)

Dear Cabinet Secretary

### **Invest East Coast Rail**

We are writing to underline the case for the development of a clear plan for investment in the East Coast Main Line railway as part of a coherent strategy for the whole rail network. The Line has a fundamental role to play in the future success of Scotland and the UK and is central to the success of key associated major rail proposals.

As you know, we are a cross-party group of local councils, combined authorities, and Scottish Regional Transport Partnerships from across the area served by the Line, formally known as the Consortium of East Coast Main Line Authorities (ECMA).

The East Coast Main Line is a vital link for Scotland, providing connectivity from and between Inverness, Aberdeen, Dundee, Stirling and Edinburgh and across the border linking towns and cities down the eastern side of England to London, stretching well over 500 miles.

The Line carried 90 million passengers and 58 million tonnes of freight in 2019. It is crucial not only to the communities it serves, but the whole of the UK, including international gateways and ports. One third of the UK population lives within 20 minutes of an East Coast Main Line station, serving economies accounting for half the total value of both the UK and Scotland's economic output.

However, there is no clear plan or investment strategy for the whole line beyond the short term. We have published research that demonstrates that in combination with realising the East Coast Main Line timetable proposals for 2022, investing in the existing line can deliver over £11 billion of wider economic benefits in the long-term, including the impacts of High Speed 2, Northern Powerhouse Rail, and your Government's ambitions set out in the Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan.

But this relies on the development and delivery of a clear plan for the East Coast Main Line to ensure it is ready for and then maximises the wider potential of these projects. The short-term and incremental approach to investment of recent decades is no longer sufficient to deliver the wider benefits on offer. We need a comprehensive plan.

The route is vulnerable to disruption which impacts on its performance in the short term. Current investment to address reliability is therefore welcome, and we strongly support the case to continue to address the resilience of the Line.

Our research shows that if the number of delays on the line over 10 minutes were halved, this would deliver an additional £62.8 million a year to the wider economy – over £600m over the next 10 years. When major disruption occurs (as it did 12 times in 2018) it has a big impact on long-distance passengers who are forced to abandon trips altogether. The estimated economic impact on the UK economy of these incidents is £46m per year.

Further improving resilience and speed of long-distance passenger services on the line will ensure it remains an attractive choice for journeys between the capitals of England and Scotland, reducing reliance on domestic air travel.

Ahead of a series of forthcoming decisions, initiatives, and reviews, including the recently announced Union Connectivity Review and the Comprehensive Spending Review, political leaders, business and industry are now coming together to speak with one, powerful and united voice to ensure there is no doubt about the continued importance of the East Coast Main Line as part of the COVID-19 recovery and beyond.

We are calling for:

1. **A clear long-term investment plan for the East Coast Main Line** to ensure the route is ready to maximise the benefit of future projects such as HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail.
2. **Development of a pipeline of schemes** to deliver against this plan, which looks beyond short-term planning, recognising the national strategic importance of the route.
3. **A timely and firm commitment to funding and delivery** of these schemes for the short, medium and long term, to provide confidence and improve resilience of the route.

At a time of uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, commitment to the East Coast Main Line is a genuine opportunity to build back better, not only realising our shared wider economic objectives, but also objectives on modal shift and transferring more freight to rail as part of a low carbon future.

We commend our research to you, and the overriding need to a strategy that recognises the central and binding importance of the East Coast Main Line to the railway's overall potential contribution to the UK's economy and our shared wider policy objectives. It is our staunch belief in this case that unites us down the length of the UK from the Highlands to Hertfordshire.

We look forward to continuing to work with you and your officials in making this case.

Yours sincerely

**Councillor Keith Aspden**  
Leader of City of York Council  
**Invest East Coast Rail Chair**

**Councillor Gordon Edgar**  
Chair, South East of Scotland Transport Partnership (SEStran)  
**Invest East Coast Rail Vice Chair, Scotland**

**Councillor Kim Groves**  
Transport Chair, West Yorkshire Combined Authority  
**Invest East Coast Rail Vice Chair, North**

**Councillor Bill Mordue**  
Transport Portfolio holder, Doncaster Council  
**Invest East Coast Rail Vice Chair, Central**

**Councillor Derrick Ashley**  
Transport Portfolio holder, Hertfordshire County Council  
**Invest East Coast Rail Vice Chair, South**