

# What BML2 will do for Kent and Tunbridge Wells



# What is BML2?

The rail project known as Brighton Main Line 2 (BML2) has extensive benefits and far-reaching advantages for Tunbridge Wells and West Kent; indeed, the scheme has, from its very inception in 2009, viewed the **Kent Phase** to be a fundamental component of the whole scheme.

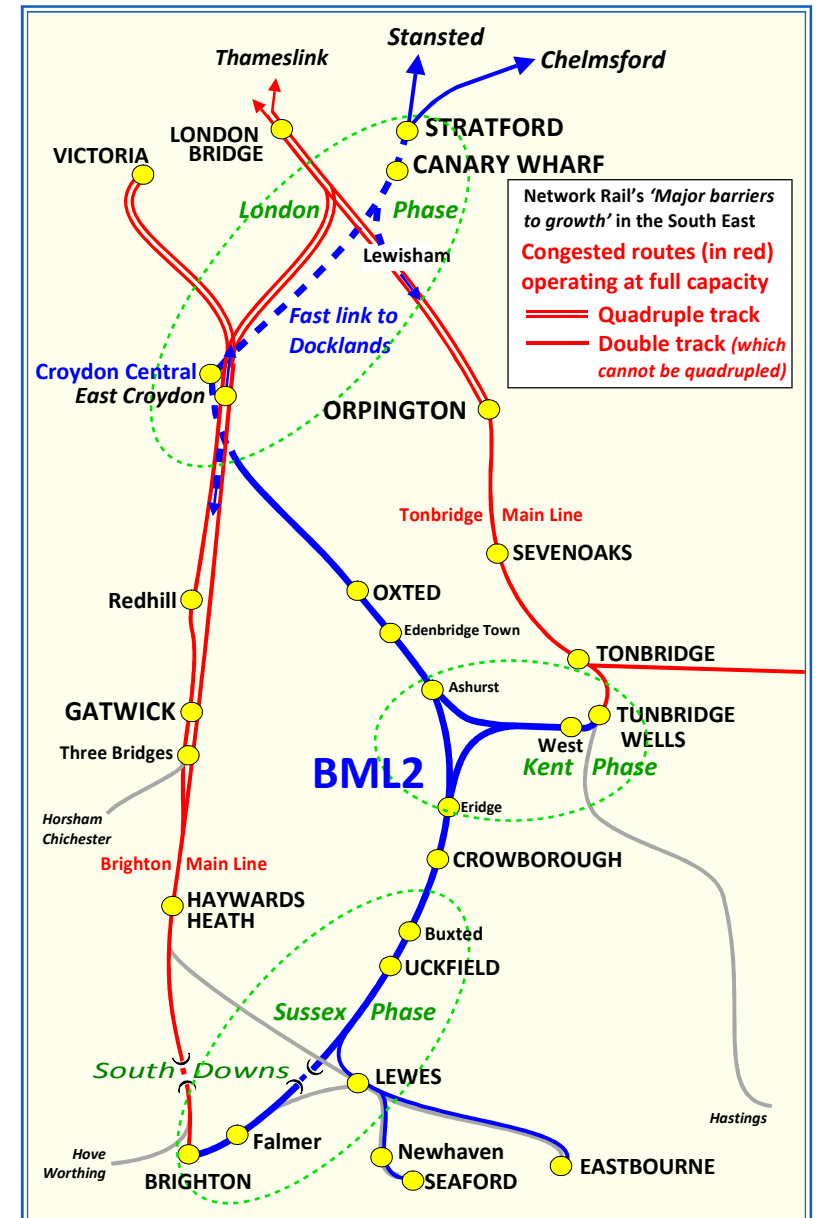
Nevertheless, to enable its realization the predominant focus has, principally through strategic necessity, been concentrated on the **Sussex Phase**. This not only entails restoring the main line status of the Uckfield branch directly into Lewes (and accordingly beyond to Newhaven, Seaford and Eastbourne) but also an **entirely new and direct** link into Brighton. This additional infrastructure is imperative in order to avoid creating a Lewes bottleneck, imposing severe constraints on speed during journeys between London and Brighton, causing heavy congestion, limiting train pathways and, not least, introducing operational conflicts with other important services.

BML2's **London Phase** is firmly at the forefront, because it will deliver immeasurable opportunity for growth and wealth creation in the capital, particularly in the expanding Docklands area of central London around Canary Wharf. Needless to say, it is this phase which has attracted principal interest among investors; not just here in the UK, but notably with overseas interests who have already declared serious intent and provided funding.

There are sections of railway lines in Kent which are critically overloaded and continue to struggle with steadily increasing demand. This is forecast by the Department for Transport and Network Rail to considerably worsen in the coming years as yet more residential development continues apace in established commuter areas. Added to this, London's further expansion as a global workplace and economic hub will exacerbate this situation.

Whereas Kent's High Speed One services transport people swiftly from Ashford to St Pancras, as well as other services on the route via Maidstone East and Medway to Victoria, Kent relies overwhelmingly on the 'classic' main line from Ashford via Tonbridge and Sevenoaks to London Bridge, Charing Cross and Cannon Street etc. These are extremely congested routes through inner London where passenger numbers will continue to rise. In addition, new and intensive Thameslink services through the capital from the South East via Blackfriars and Farringdon are planned to operate every 150 seconds.

Simplified diagram showing the three phases comprising BML2



Whilst all this is most welcome, we very much need to bear in mind that Network Rail's 2017 Kent Route Study predicts a serious shortfall in train paths – that is the means of routing additional services. Unfortunately, this will persist on the Tonbridge Main Line throughout the coming decades. Determining the need for **FIVE** more paths, it forewarns:

*'The capacity for any additional services into London from Kent is extremely limited.'*

*'When train lengthening opportunities have been exhausted, there are no clear or simple options to provide additional capacity into London.'*

This is because there are a number of serious problems affecting this region (embracing West Kent, East Sussex and even East Surrey). The Kent Study further warns that even providing just **ONE** additional service in the next few years will prove troublesome to accommodate:

*'The projected growth on the main line services between Tonbridge and London Bridge cannot be accommodated through train lengthening alone. An additional peak hour train path would be required, which will be challenging to timetable through the congested two-track sections of the route.'*

Accordingly, all in all, we face some truly formidable challenges which have to be properly addressed.

It is of the utmost importance to bear in mind that these are **not exclusively transport decisions**. Railways – and particularly the effective means of transporting people between home and workplace – are closely interconnected in terms of new housing, employment, economic stimulus and protecting the environment. Because transport is so fundamentally important to a thriving economy, it simply cannot be left solely to the rail industry to determine what it deems should be provided.

*An increasingly busy and complicated network which is difficult to operate at the best of times - not to mention when things go wrong....*

## TONBRIDGE - Kent's busiest station

*' - where there is expected to be the highest passenger growth' - Network Rail*





*Lost links - the former mainline on the left once ran from Tunbridge Wells to the Sussex Coast, whilst on the right it ran to London via Croydon*

Across the board, we consider the principal problems and challenges to be:

- ▶ How are we to realistically provide far more additional capacity into London?
- ▶ How shall we manage increasing future demand – which will inevitably result from increasing housing development now being demanded by the Government?
- ▶ How might we significantly improve and transform the London commute?
- ▶ How can we build the rail infrastructure which will (most importantly) boost and sustain the regional economy?
- ▶ How might we improve the quality of life for residents with badly-needed regional connections?
- ▶ How shall we do all of the above, whilst **at the same time** protect and conserve the surrounding countryside; the High and Low Weald AONBs; The South Downs National Park; the Seven Sisters Country Park and other important areas which are so prevalent across the south?

It is because we are faced with such dilemmas as these – which have been steadily growing over many years – that the BML2 Project was conceived and developed in the first place.

Let us be perfectly clear from the outset, BML2 is not attempting to be an ‘HS2’ – but it *will* be a modern railway and built to current Network Rail standards capable of fast running wherever permissible and in common with other routes in the south.

So precisely what is the role of Tunbridge Wells and the Kent Phase in all of this? In November 2017 the Transport Secretary Chris Grayling published *Connecting People: A Strategic vision for Rail* which suggests reopening some lines closed in the 1960s as a means of stimulating economic growth and boosting local economies.

In this region we are outstandingly and exceptionally fortunate that the integrity of the once-busy main line which operated between Tunbridge Wells (West) and London via Croydon remains predominantly intact. Across the UK there are countless examples of once-important through routes (not branch lines) having been irretrievably destroyed through subsequent redevelopment.

Thankfully, wisely-implemented local authority planning policies enforced by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Wealden District Council, Lewes District Council and East Sussex County Council, have protected all the trackbeds required for BML2. This has ensured the South East is in a tremendously enviable position today (variously 30 and 50 years on) whereby these immensely valuable strategic routes may relatively easily be returned to our national rail network.



## WHERE IT ALL WENT WRONG .....

Although all main line services between Tunbridge Wells' premier (West) station and London were withdrawn in 1969, this eventuality had certainly not been the anticipated outcome only a decade earlier. In 1960 British Railways began planning the route's electrification whereby fast, regular interval services, could operate between Tunbridge Wells West (via Oxted) and London Victoria. This programme was scheduled to immediately follow the completion of Kent Coast Phase 2 electrification (Sevenoaks-Tonbridge-Ashford-Folkestone-Dover) which commenced operation in June 1961.

Probably most people today, even if they are aware of Tunbridge Wells' once-superior station and its railway, likely imagine it was merely at the end of an insignificant branch line to Brighton which was closed by Dr Beeching because nobody used it. It is almost certain that very few realize that a hugely-contentious road scheme in Lewes (stages 2 and 3 of which were later shelved) was responsible not only for the railway closure south of Uckfield, but the abandonment of the modernisation and electrification into Tunbridge Wells (West) and to Lewes by 1966. This demonstrates how – in the case of railways – ***one ill-considered local decision can result in utterly disastrous and far-reaching consequences very many miles away.***

## SO HOW DID WE END UP HERE?

To fully understand why we are in such an invidious position today, we need to look very briefly at the historical record.

Tunbridge Wells was first served in 1845 by the South Eastern Railway (SER) with a station on a branch line, eventually extended to Hastings. Improvements followed, especially when a shorter but heavily-engineered direct line to London via Sevenoaks opened in 1868 which avoided the original lengthy circuitous journey via Redhill. However, the SER did not have Tunbridge Wells all to itself.

The rival London, Brighton & South Coast Railway (LB&SCR) approached from the west (1866) with its expanding system and it was this enterprising company which bestowed the growing and fashionable town direct access to the West End of London as well as London Bridge. Distances to London were virtually the same, but whereas the SER station was dingy, cramped and confined between two tunnels, in sharp contrast the LB&SCR's station was distinctly airy, spacious and grand in the extreme. This handsome terminus ably reflected the town's status and even today, despite being bereft of its railway function, its magnificent listed building is unquestionably of enduring credit to the borough.



***The SER 2-platform Tunbridge Wells station on the Hastings branch remains cramped and operationally difficult***

***Despite years of dilapidation under British Rail (this was taken in 1986 a year after closure) the LB&SCR Tunbridge Wells terminus was spacious and vastly superior - and could be once again***



The SER's route through Tunbridge Wells also created persistent problems for the subsequent Southern Railway (formed in 1923 with an amalgamation of the old SER and LB&SCR companies) which had to build narrower rolling stock and specifically-designed express locomotives for the restricted Tonbridge – Hastings route. This was because the SER's Victorian contractors had skimped on lining the tunnels, necessitating additional rings of brickwork which consequently narrowed and thereby constricted the bore.

In 1957 new narrow-sided diesel trains were introduced by British Railways to replace steam traction which was being phased out. These 'Hastings Units' had characteristically flat sides and continued to exclusively operate the route until the mid-1980s when electrification was being planned by British Rail. The problem of the narrower tunnels remained whereby, in order to avoid building yet more special rolling stock, or completely re-boring the tunnels, BR opted to reduce the railway to a single track through the tunnels at Somer Hill in Tonbridge; Strawberry Hill in Tunbridge Wells; and at Wadhurst and Mountfield in East Sussex.



***BR's 'Hastings' Units. These narrower trains were specifically built with flat sides to enable them to pass through the restricted tunnels south of Tonbridge***



***Two tracks become one. Somer Hill tunnel in Tonbridge, one of four single-line tunnels on the Hastings branch***



Out of necessity, the tunnels at both ends of Tunbridge Wells station (Mount Pleasant and Grove Hill) had rigid 'concrete-slab track' installed. Despite clearances being very tight, speeds are sufficiently slow within the station's environs to retain two tracks to provide the necessary operational flexibility.

Despite this, the Hastings line continues to suffer a number of operational constraints which are impossible to overcome and these will inevitably worsen as demand grows and traffic increases. The single-line sections themselves impose restrictions, whilst turn-back sidings, such as the one installed in 2009 just south of Tunbridge Wells (for services terminating here) are themselves determined to be a 'capacity constraint' by Network Rail. Commuters will be all too familiar with trains coming to a standstill outside Tunbridge Wells while platforms are cleared, or another train has to pass by.

Compounding these problems, the tunnels at either end of Tunbridge Wells also impose short platforms at this busy station which means that 12-car trains are too long and cannot be fully accommodated. As rail passengers will know, SDO (Selective Door Opening) has to be deployed to prevent the doors of the rear 2 carriages from opening inside the tunnel.

***'Do not alight here. Please pass along the train'***  
***Notices on Grove Hill tunnel's walls at Tunbridge Wells station where today's 12-car trains are too long to fit within its short platforms***



**No extra platforms can be provided on the Hastings line station at Tunbridge Wells**

**Whereas East Kent continues to benefit tremendously from HS1, West Kent will be left far behind without BML2**



## **Tunbridge Wells - a cramped and restricted station which nowadays is poorly-suited to the borough's needs**

Added to this, there can be no enlargement of the station whatsoever, such as additional platforms, to permit the running of more trains, let alone enabling greater operational flexibility for increased service reliability.

We also understand that the station is considered too restrictive and nowadays falls short in its ability to properly serve the town. This criticism refers to long-established problems in terms of commuter parking, traffic congestion, obstructions caused by taxis and buses and other issues directly related to the actual location of the station within the town's environs today. We are also informed the current situation has negative implications for a variety of important proposals such as new pedestrian areas in the town centre.

If these problems were not enough, constraints also apply **well beyond Tunbridge Wells**. Quite apart from the single-line bottleneck through Somer Hill tunnel, Tonbridge in itself is a capacity constraint with conflicting services operating to other places but principally from the Kent Coast. Further on, the route through Sevenoaks (increasingly busy in itself) is restricted to dual track until Orpington is reached where there is quadruple track onwards into London. This problem is fully recognized by Network Rail in its latest study:

*'There are specific capacity issues with the route from Tonbridge, **where there is expected to be the highest passenger growth:** [our emphasis]*

- 1) Conflicting moves from the various routes that converge at Tonbridge.*
- 2) Two-track route between Tonbridge & Orpington with a mix of fast and stopping services.*

Matters will not improve, despite the introduction of new Thameslink rolling stock which is proving to be very unpopular, having been specifically designed with less seating and more standing room. Increasingly, long distance commuters travelling outside London suburbs are strongly objecting to standing in cramped conditions or having to sit on narrower, so-called "ironing board" seats for lengthy periods.

Whilst East Kent has benefited enormously by having HS1's premium-fare 140mph services to St Pancras and Stratford, West Kent derives no benefit and deserves both significant investment and serious political attention directed towards its worsening situation. Tonbridge is currently the busiest station in Kent (4,337,310 passengers), followed by Sevenoaks (4,138,586) and Tunbridge Wells close behind (3,810,546) – remarkably even busier than Ashford International (3,764,590). Even High Brooms station deals with over a million passengers a year – surprisingly more than Folkestone or Dover.

A solution is neither straightforward nor easy, despite simplistic pleas frequently being made in the media, such as: “Journeys take so long – it’s quicker to get to Leeds or Bristol from London!” – “Why can’t they just put on more carriages?” – “They should run more trains to avoid overcrowding”

But, as Network Rail quite correctly says:

*‘The railway network into London from Kent does not have the capability to operate additional services due to major issues such as the terminal capacity at Charing Cross and Cannon Street stations, the number of flat junctions on the approaches to London and the mix of fast and stopping services on two-track railways. Once the opportunities to lengthen existing services have been exhausted, there are no obvious or clear infrastructure solutions to meet the capacity conditional outputs.’*

The current system is a finite resource upon which to operate the maximum number of services as Network Rail recently (April 2018) concluded:

*‘There is little capacity for any additional services into London and when train lengthening options have been exhausted, there are no straightforward solutions.’*

Everyone needs to appreciate that the south has an extremely busy railway network with intensive services having to stop and serve many stations along the way. However, with BML2 we **are** in a position to significantly increase the number of services operating between Tunbridge Wells and London because the project will bring about the long-overdue enlargement of the network, as well as creating **entirely new journey opportunities**.

Furthermore, it will also be perfectly possible to substantially cut journey times to certain destinations, improve the quality of the journey across the network, boost the South East economy and enable our towns and ailing businesses to flourish, whilst protecting the surrounding environment. In short, it is good news all round.

So what is the plan? BML2 will reopen the former ‘West’ (LB&SCR) station. It is an eminently worthwhile and sensible proposition and the only means of solving the worrying capacity crisis heading Kent’s way. It is an acknowledged fact that if British Railways had been able to pursue its original 1960s programme of electrifying this London route, then it would now be busy, thriving and carrying many thousands of commuters.

As we commented previously, today we are in the incredibly fortunate position of being able to reverse the enormous mistake made over half a century ago and bring the borough’s rail services into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So how much might it cost and how may it happen?



*BML2 will bring about a new lease of life for one of the borough’s greatest architectural and transport assets*





The private sector began taking a serious interest in the BML2 project during 2015, whereby initial talks were held at a London law firm in order to understand the precise scope of the project as well as the challenges it presented. Such was the confidence in its worth, that these tentative explorations led further to wider discussions at Canary Wharf and among interested investors at their West End headquarters. With links around the world, those who have already declared their interest are responsible for massive engineering projects on a scale unseen in this country.

During 2016, further refining of the project occurred by the new company registered to undertake the delivery of BML2. This principally involved the London Phase which is rightly viewed as the economic driver, because this alone would deliver overwhelming benefits for the capital. Serious revisions were then made to the original proposal. This involved introducing major improvements which elevated this phase from being a mostly re-engineering of former lines within South-east London to a fast and wholly-new tunnelled link from Croydon to Stratford via Canary Wharf and avoiding the notorious Croydon bottleneck. The opportunities this presents are manifold and will represent the greatest advancement in railway development in the region.

In Sussex, the strategy for a new tunnel under the South Downs leading straight into the City of Brighton & Hove has been wholly accepted, alongside welcome aspirations of Network Rail to permit the operation of a better railway. This encompasses a brand new train depot at Jarvis Brook near Crowborough capable of stabling 48 vehicles (equal to four 12-car trains), as well as a similar depot on the South Coast at Newhaven. In addition, the Sussex Phase will restore important lost links between the counties for the benefit of everyone.

The Kent Phase is also in the process of undergoing scrutiny to enable greater use of the route. This seeks to achieve entirely new destinations, alongside much-needed increase in the intensity of services serving West Kent and particularly Tunbridge Wells.

There has been an unequivocal affirmation that there is sufficient available funding for BML2 without call on the public purse. The private sector view the whole BML2 Project as a very sound and worthy investment in transport infrastructure and one which will add value and opportunity across its realm of influence. A spokesman for the financiers says:

***“Over the past twelve months, the company set up to seriously advance BML2 has invested both sizeable amounts of time and capital into the project and has brought together a wide spectrum of interested partners and professional services firms with the view of establishing an international project consortium. Their preliminary work has been focused on the conceptual viability of the project supported with a substantially new investment and financing structure. Importantly, this would remove both the project construction risk and the capital cost of the finished project from the Government’s balance sheet.”***



***One of a number of BML2 meetings held at Canary Wharf Tower in London***

***Sussex MPs (Nus Ghani, Maria Caulfield, Simon Kirby) at Department for Transport to discuss BML2 with Secretary of State Chris Grayling***



During a debate in Parliament in November 2017 about the Government's interest in reopening lines closed in the 1960s as a means of stimulating growth, the MP for Lewes, Maria Caulfield, was quick to respond. She told the House of Commons that private investors have even gone so far as to pledge GBP 15Bn to deliver BML2's entire 3-phase project. She enquired "Would the Secretary of State use that scheme as one of the first to illustrate what really can be done?"

In his response The Rt Hon Chris Grayling told MPs: "My Honourable Friend knows that I met the investors who are interested in pursuing this project, I have said that I am very open to doing so, I'm waiting with interest to see as they come back with the first stage of work that they are doing. I'd be delighted to see this route reopened and I hope that the consortium that is pursuing this project proves to be successful in what they are trying to do."

Previous to this, in March 2017 representatives from one of the largest engineering companies in the world visited London for preliminary discussions prior to undertaking a serious bid to fund the BML2 project. A site inspection included a trip to Tunbridge Wells by train and a guided tour by minibus along key parts of the route. This commenced at the West station before continuing on to Groombridge, Crowborough, Uckfield and the South Downs' escarpments where BML2's Ashcombe tunnel and direct route into Brighton is planned.

## BUILDING FOR FUTURE GROWTH

The most important aspect is the provision of wholly adequate railway capacity for the coming decades which is capable of properly serving the borough. Under discussion is the need for the new station at Tunbridge Wells (West) to have 4 platform faces (it used to have 5). This is regarded as the minimum necessary to manage the services the project aspires to operate and including sufficient margin for future growth.

Unlike the present unsatisfactory situation at the Southeastern station, this spacious station is neither cramped nor restricted, whereby full-length (12-car) platforms would be easily accommodated. The borough's magnificent (LB&SCR) terminus building need not necessarily be required for railway purposes; however, it is hoped some role might be embraced within the development, perhaps in much the same way as George Gilbert Scott's incredibly imposing St Pancras delineates its purpose. This building is unquestionably worthy of Tunbridge Wells' heritage, its overall status and enduring appeal, especially as it is within such close proximity to the unique, delightful and ever-popular area around the borough's famous Pantiles.



***As may be observed here, the former West station (centre picture) is merely a few minutes walk from the ever-popular Pantiles***

# THE GRAND VISION FOR TUNBRIDGE WELLS



Rather than being a stranded and sadly redundant railway edifice harking back to the great Victorian era and now incongruously surrounded by a supermarket car park, this wonderful station should be pride of place. With its proper and intended railway role revived, no better place of arrival for visitors could be imagined, whilst it would be a superb terminus for daily commuting with the opportunity for major additional car parking facilities on site.

It is proposed that the opportunity could be taken to redevelop the rest of the site, wholly in agreement and in partnership with Sainsbury's and the aspirations of the Borough Council. Far better mixed commercial/residential use of the land is possible with a hopefully new and upgraded superstore forming an intrinsic part of a revitalised new district with superior rail connections. Needless to say, the planning and design would be entirely compatible with the owners' interests, culminating in a development best-suited to the borough and the region's requirement for vastly-improved rail services, densification of town centre residential development and increased local parking.

Accordingly, from Tunbridge Wells (West) it will be possible to board **direct** train services to Canary Wharf. This will radically shorten and improve journeys made by thousands of commuters who currently have no choice but to waste time going into busy London Bridge - only to travel out again on the equally-busy Jubilee line.

In addition to this, direct services and connections with many other London destinations are currently being discussed and will be put forward as opportunities continue to be developed. Canary Wharf will enable interchange for east-west Crossrail services on the new Elizabeth line, whilst the anticipated Lewisham interchange will give easy transfer to TfL's impending Bakerloo line extension.

Sir George Iacobescu, Chief Executive of the Canary Wharf Group spoke with confidence when he recently declared that Docklands and the City will eventually merge as one large development within the capital. As an employment magnet and one which will continue to expand, it is imperative that Tunbridge Wells and West Kent benefits from the direct rail connections which only BML2 can deliver.

*The view from Canary Wharf Tower across Docklands to the City where a 'new town' is now being developed by the company British Land*





*South Downs National Park*



*Brighton and Tunbridge Wells will once again be connected by direct fast rail services with BML2*

Going south from Tunbridge Wells, there will also be fast, direct services to Brighton & Hove. This will not just be to the centre of the ever-popular seaside city, but also to Falmer for the University of Sussex, as well as the immensely successful AMEX stadium. Just as important will be the direct services planned to Lewes and other parts of the beautiful Sussex Coast. These are vital rail connections which should never have been lost in the first place and require restoration for economic, social and environmental reasons. A constant theme across many years from Brighton residents has been the enduring desire to easily reach Tunbridge Wells by train (the current bus service takes about 2 hours).

Tunbridge Wells will be in a prime location and enviable position: surrounded by outstanding countryside; superior links to the expanding hi-tech London workplace; and an easy rail journey to the multiple and widespread attractions of the Sussex coast. All estate agents know this is what new-buyers and rising generations look for when choosing where to live. The town once had excellent rail connections with a myriad of places, but these links were destroyed fifty years ago and nowadays it is sadly nothing more than a one-station stop on the branch from Tonbridge to Hastings. The Royal Borough's former status would be restored with the superior rail connections only possible with BML2. The 'capital of the Weald' would be opened up to train services not just from East Sussex (Uckfield, Crowborough, Lewes, Eastbourne, Seaford etc) but also Kent and Surrey (Edenbridge, Oxted, Warlingham, Croydon, and potentially through services from the Medway towns).

## **A NEEDFUL PARTNERSHIP**

In partnership with the private sector's firm commitment to BML2, as well as the growing political interest being shown in the project, there needs to be a strong and commensurate involvement from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and local business interests. It would also be requisite for larger authorities, namely Kent County Council, wholeheartedly to embrace the scheme and recognize its potential in a region which is seriously impeded by intractable transport conundrums being made worse due to the county's proximity to London.

The City of Brighton & Hove has already voiced its strong support for BML2 because it appreciates the project's Sussex Phase will bring growth, prosperity and opportunity, whilst delivering more capacity, new connections and other benefits to the South East's hard-pressed network.

Whilst there are a number of planning and engineering challenges to overcome, these are considered to be easily within the envisaged technical scope, as well as the parameters of the business case. Representatives from the engineering sector of the corporations involved have already conducted preliminary site visits. Their knowledge and expertise have created astounding infrastructure projects across the globe on a vast scale, so it came as no surprise that they were undaunted by anything they are anticipating in engineering BML2.

## ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Other aspects must include what provision could be made for the Spa Valley Railway (SpVR) and its operations? Acceptable solutions are currently being investigated.



*Spa Valley Railway train to Tunbridge Wells*

The SpVR operates a tourist service principally over certain weekends and over Christmas; otherwise the route remains unused and effectively closed during much of the year, leaving the Tonbridge main line to struggle on in its attempt to manage demand. Such an immensely valuable asset comprising a once well-functioning main line to London should be returned to its rightful role as a fully-operational part of the national rail network with intensive train services serving Tunbridge Wells and the region.

The former main line from Tunbridge Wells (West) would have to be returned to its previous status with double track all the way through Groombridge where the route would again divide with the junction restored and double track continuing northwards to London and southwards to the Sussex Coast by means of the upgraded Uckfield line. Electrification would be essential, but whether this would be third rail or overhead supply has yet to be determined.



*The former double-track main line from Tunbridge Wells (West) used to run to London via Croydon and also to Brighton via Lewes.*

*Today, the remaining single-line is sparsely used and effectively closed throughout the working week, leaving West Kent with only the overloaded Tonbridge mainline to operate services into London.*

# A VALUABLE TRANSPORT ASSET TOO IMPORTANT TO LOSE

In 1986, when the Wealden Line Campaign (WLC) was instigated to promote the usefulness and potential of these former rail links, British Rail was concerned only with disposing of 'non-operational assets' in an effort to reduce its rising deficit.

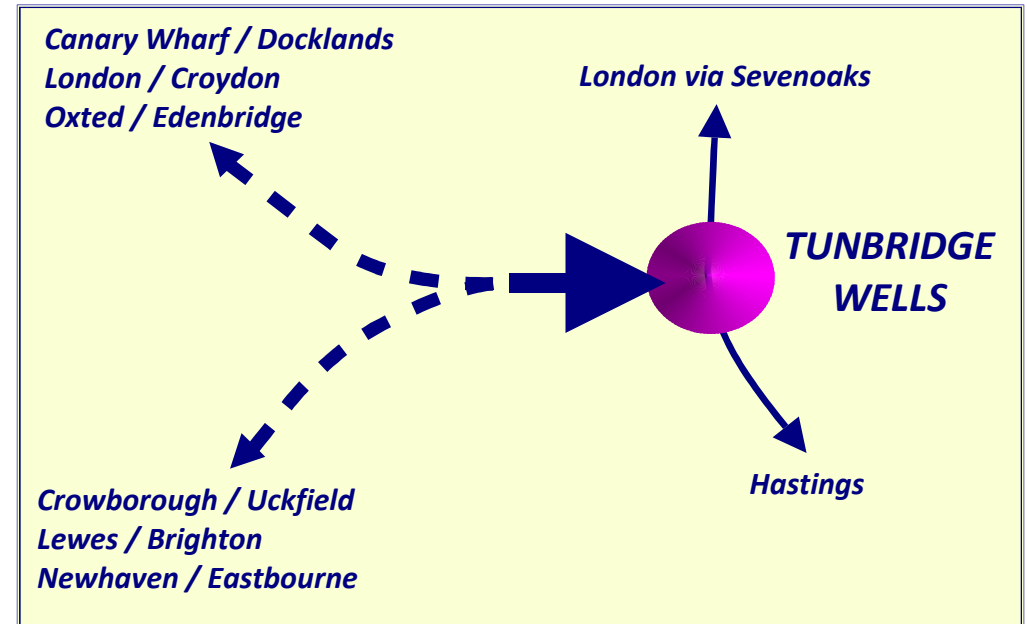
Despite the WLC's best efforts, as well as those from Tunbridge Wells residents and the Eridge Line Action Group, insufficient political pressure led to the eventual disposal of the whole route, prompted overwhelmingly by the valuable station site at the West.

The WLC and others recognized that a seriously regrettable decision had been made, despite ameliorating local planning policies being brought in to safeguard the integrity of the railway for a possible future reopening.

With BML2, it seems that some kind of compromise will be required, whilst numerous questions are also raised. The Kent Phase cannot function without a fully-electrified double-track railway being installed. This will require some substantial re-engineering at certain locations to enable maximum-possible linespeeds being attained and concurrent with Network Rail standards.



*BML2 will restore valuable lost main lines into Tunbridge Wells*



It cannot be too strongly stressed that better economic health and future prosperity of Tunbridge Wells and West Kent will accrue with the success of the BML2 project, which would integrate seamlessly with TWBC's plans for Destination Town status including attracting many more visitors to a nearby new theatre, unique and specialist shops, restaurants and a revitalized shopping centre.

The alternative would be a continuation of already exacerbated problems on the local and regional road and rail network, which could lead to a decline in the borough's long term prospects and appeal.

This must not be allowed to happen.

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