

APPG Thames Estuary: Fair Economic Growth

Meeting Summary

Date: Wednesday, 14 May 2025

Time: 15:00–16:30

Location: Room C3, 1 Parliament Street, House of Commons

Chair: Jim Dickson MP

Secretariat: Thames Estuary Growth Board, jonathan@shawbp.co.uk

Summary of Key Discussion Points

Opening Remarks

- **Jim Dickson MP** opened the meeting by reaffirming the APPG's commitment to driving fair and inclusive economic growth across the Thames Estuary.
 - He thanked the APPG's sponsors **Port of London Authority** and **Thames Freeport** and introduced the agenda and guest speakers.
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Investment and Fair Economic Growth

- **Kate Willard** (Thames Estuary Envoy) confirmed that, despite the withdrawal from the Thames Estuary Growth Board of central government's Pan Regional Partnership funding, a **new private/public commercial model has been developed to include both public sector funding and business and consultancy income**. The **Growth Board has secured regional funding** commitments from **Essex County Council** and the **Greater London Authority** and has a strong portfolio of private sector earnings. There is currently no replacement funding from Kent and Medway, a situation requiring urgent resolution. If not resolved, the Growth Board will only be able to work on projects in this region that have dedicated sources of finance or funding.
 - Kate emphasised that **no staff have been lost**, and the **ambition for the region remains undiminished**. The Growth Board's work is continuing **"full steam ahead."** By way of example, the Growth Board has safeguarded **£2bn of investment**, collaborating with stakeholders including Forth Ports.
 - **Lauren Edwards MP** raised the importance of the **GridLink project in Medway**, which could drive major economic benefits if French approvals are secured by Autumn. A briefing note and MP sign-on letter will be circulated.
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High-Speed Rail & International Connectivity

- **Robert Sinclair** (CEO, London St Pancras High-Speed) described current and future opportunities for **HS1** and the **St Pancras High-Speed** network:
 - Strong performance, high sustainability credentials, and 50% spare capacity.

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- Support for **reinstating Ashford and Ebbsfleet international stops**, which would unlock economic growth and maximise use of existing infrastructure.
 - There is **growing operator interest** (Virgin, FS Group, Gemini UK Consortium, others) and the launch of an **International Growth Incentive Scheme**.
 - APPG members are urged to lobby for new services and station stops. A **Kent MP alliance** would be influential.
 - **Vince Lucas** and **Sojan Joseph MP** emphasised the economic case and public support for restoring these stops, especially Ashford International Station, where existing infrastructure is underused.
 - A new **APPG sub-committee** will be formed to support engagement with operators and stakeholders, proposed to be chaired by **Sojan Joseph MP**.
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Future Priorities

- **Jim Dickson MP** outlined upcoming agenda items:
 - The **TEGB's Spatial Investment Strategy**
 - The **Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) Skills Strategy**
- **Dr Lauren Sullivan MP** proposed a **future discussion on the Thames River** as an underused transport and economic asset.
 - This was supported by **Sian Foster** (Port of London Authority), who offered to assist with organising a session and presentation.
 - The discussion will take place during the **December meeting**, with the **possibility of holding the session aboard a river vessel**.

Additional topics were also noted:

- Local government reorganisation and devolution
 - Green industries and low-carbon opportunities
 - Freight and rail service growth
 - Operation Brock and other regional planning concerns
 - Creative industries and job opportunities
 - Transport and infrastructure, including the Elizabeth Line extension
 - Sustainable growth and low carbon options
 - Regeneration of Royal Docks – beyond the housing needs
 - Skills, training and healthy socio-economic growth
 - Housing and affordability
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Actions Summary

1. **Spatial Investment Strategy** – Kate Willard to present an update at the **September APPG meeting**.
2. **LTC Skills Strategy** – To be discussed at the **September APPG meeting**, with a view to engaging Lord David Blunkett.

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3. **GridLink Briefing** – Lauren Edwards MP to circulate information for MP signatories to help unlock project approvals.
 4. **Rail Sub-Committee** – To be established and chaired by Sojan Joseph MP, supporting the international services campaign. Kate will also support the work of this committee. Jonathan Shaw to contact Sojan's office to make arrangements for the first meeting.
 5. **River Thames Session** – A **December APPG meeting** will include a session on unlocking the River Thames for economic and transport benefit, potentially **held aboard a river vessel**, supported by the Port of London Authority.
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Future Confirmed Meetings

- 3:00-4:30pm, Tuesday, 9th September 2025
 - 3:00-4:40pm, Wednesday, 10th December 2025
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Meeting Attendees

Parliamentarians

Jim Dickson MP, Lauren Edwards MP, Sojan Joseph MP, Kevin McKenna MP, Tristan Osborne MP, James Asser MP, Dr Lauren Sullivan MP, Naushabah Khan MP, Jen Craft MP, Daniel Francis MP

Stakeholders and Experts

Kate Willard – Thames Estuary Envoy

Robert Sinclair – CEO, London St Pancras High-Speed

Sian Foster – Director of Corporate Affairs, Port of London Authority

Vince Lucas – Railways Adviser, Deputy Chair of the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership

Lee Scott – Essex County Council

Hannah Staunton – Director of Communications, Thames Estuary Growth Board

David Godfrey – Executive Director, Thames Estuary Growth Board

Secretariat Support

Jonathan Shaw & Mark Hill – APPG Secretariat