



APPG Thames Estuary Fair Growth

HS1 Sub-Committee Meeting – 16 July 2025

Summary and Actions

Attendees:

- **Sojan Joseph MP (Ashford) – Chair**
- Jim Dickson MP (Dartford)
- Kevin McKenna MP (Sittingbourne and Shepney)
- Tris Osborne MP (Chatham and Aylesford)
- Bjorn Simpole (on behalf of Lauren Edwards MP, Rochester and Strood)
- George Nkazi (on behalf of Lauren Sullivan MP, Gravesham)
- Annie Jack (on behalf of Helen Whately MP, Faversham and Mid Kent)
- Vince Lucas, Rail Adviser, Kent & Medway Economic Partnership
- Jonathan Shaw, Secretariat – Thames Estuary Growth Board

Summary of Discussion:

Opening Remarks (Chair – Sojan Joseph MP):

- Welcomed members to the inaugural meeting of the HS1 Sub-Committee, which had been agreed at the recent **APPG Thames Estuary meeting**.
- The Sub-Committee was formed following a compelling presentation by **Robert Sinclair**, CEO of **London St Pancras High Speed**, who set out the company's ambitions to expand services on HS1, including the **restoration of Ashford and Ebbsfleet**.
- Sojan, as Chair, commended the persistent campaigning of local organisations and stakeholders seeking to reinstate international connectivity to Kent, and reiterated the Sub-Committee's goal to help drive that effort forward.

Agenda Item: Terms of Reference

- The **Terms of Reference** for the Sub-Committee were discussed and **formally agreed** (see Appendix 1).
- Members supported the Sub-Committee's aims to advance competition, improve rail access, and align HS1 improvements with Thames Estuary economic growth priorities.

Presentation from Vince Lucas – Rail Adviser, Kent & Medway Economic Partnership:

- Highlighted that HS1 remains an underused strategic asset, with Eurostar currently showing no intention of restoring stops at Ashford or Ebbsfleet before 2027.
- Noted that the **Temple Mills depot** offers **train storage capacity** that is crucial for new operators—Eurostar has so far resisted shared use.
- Informed the group that the **Office of Rail and Road (ORR)** is concluding a **consultation on Temple Mills capacity**, and that **Kent County Council** has submitted a position arguing spare capacity should be reserved for future HS1 operators to enable competition and those that enable both UK and regional growth by calling the Kent stations

Discussion Points:

- Members welcomed Kent County Council's submission and ORR's current review.
- General agreement that increasing competition on HS1 would benefit passengers, pressure Eurostar to act, and support regional growth.
- Discussion aligned with the Chancellor's **Mansion House speech** on boosting infrastructure-led economic development.

Agreed:

- To write to ORR, the Chancellor, and the Secretary of State for Transport to reinforce these messages.
- Secretariat to coordinate with the Chair's office to prepare and send letters promptly.
- **Vince Lucas to be appointed as Specialist Rail Adviser to the HS1 Sub-Committee**, given his expertise and existing involvement via the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership.

Additional Points:

- Vince noted that any new operator would not have the benefit of public financial support to launch the service, unlike Eurostar at the start, so would need efficient and fair charging, and pay as you use arrangement to call at the intermediate stations.
- MPs agreed to continue efforts to secure a **Westminster Hall debate**.
- Annie Jack proposed engaging the **Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)** to assess whether Eurostar holds a **monopoly** in UK to Europe international rail services and whether its actions are an abuse of its position, to the disbenefit of UK taxpayers and businesses.

Actions Agreed:

1. **Letters (to be drafted by Secretariat in coordination with the Chair's office):**

- **To ORR:** Support Kent County Council's position on Temple Mills capacity allocation.
- **To the Chancellor:** Emphasise HS1's role in delivering competition and regional growth, emphasising the role of the intermediate stations.
- **To the Secretary of State for Transport:** Request public support for new entrants, including access to depots.

2. **Terms of Reference:**
 - Agreed and adopted (see Appendix 1).
3. **Specialist Adviser Appointment:**
 - **Vince Lucas** appointed as **Specialist Rail Adviser to the Sub-Committee**.
4. **Westminster Hall Debate:**
 - MPs to continue submitting for debate opportunities in the upcoming session.
5. **Engagement with CMA:**
 - Write in the autumn to explore Eurostar's market position.
6. **Next Meeting:**
 - Scheduled post-recess.
 - Secretariat to expand the invitation list, including additional **Kent stakeholders (KCC, Ashford and Dartford councils) and representatives from London St Pancras High Speed**.

Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference: APPG Thames Estuary HS1 Sub-Committee

Draft Terms of Reference – Purpose

The Sub-Committee exists to champion the role of High Speed One (HS1) as a strategic national and regional asset. It will advocate for the restoration and expansion of international rail services — including at Ashford and Ebbsfleet — and support the realisation of HS1's full economic and environmental potential for the Thames Estuary, the wider region, and the UK through increased passenger and freight use, enhanced connectivity, and stronger integration with local and national growth strategies.

Additionally, the Sub-Committee acts as an interface for various campaigns and interest groups that share similar objectives regarding HS1, fostering collaboration and coordinated advocacy to maximise the impact of these efforts.