



## Department for Transport

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Dear Christian

I'm aware of the local importance in Kent placed on the continuation of international rail services at Ashford International station. I'm also aware that a signalling upgrade project is being progressed to that end, principally using the Local Growth Fund. However, I wanted to take the opportunity to highlight the unique circumstances of this proposal.

It's extremely rare for the public sector to fund rail upgrades which will only be used by open access rail operators (ie those that run services at their own commercial risk, without any government subsidy or specification). The Ashford International signalling project fits within this category, inasmuch as only Eurostar (or other potential international open access operators) would use the upgraded infrastructure.

As such, I wanted to take opportunity to highlight the possibility that significant public investment could take place, without any guarantee that the upgraded infrastructure would be used in the long term.

I am aware of several letters from Eurostar over recent years indicating their strong intention to maintain and potentially even increase their services at Ashford International. Indeed, I have seen a letter from the Eurostar Chief Executive earlier this month, confirming that they will put in place arrangements to allow the continuation of services to/from Ashford International until February 2018. The same letter confirms Eurostar's long term intentions to continue to serve Ashford International. This of course is extremely welcome and a testament to the strong working relationship between Eurostar and local stakeholders.

However, I note that such indications are not legally binding and I would like to make clear that the Department would have no ability whatsoever to compel Eurostar to operate a certain level of service, or indeed any service whatsoever.

In light of the above, I would encourage you to consider seeking more robust reassurances from Eurostar regarding their future intentions. We would of course be happy to facilitate such contact, and provide advice where this might be helpful. In the first instance any such queries about advice should be made to [james.conway@dft.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:james.conway@dft.gsi.gov.uk)

Allow me to make clear that the Department is in no way intending to intervene in local decision making in relation to LGF funding of the Ashford International project. However, I did want to take the opportunity to draw your attention to the above issues and the unique circumstances.

Finally, allow me to make clear that DfT Ministers are aware of this letter and its contents.

I am copying this letter to Cllr Matthew Balfour, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport at Kent County Council. I am also copying this letter to Margaret Lee, Section 151 at Essex County Council, in the authority's capacity as accountable body for South East LEP.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Boucher', is shown within a rectangular box. The signature is stylized and cursive.

**Anthony Boucher**