



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Huw Merriman MP
Minister of State (Rail and HS2)
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
SW1P 4DR

16 January 2023

Dear Huw,

Firstly, I want to thank you for your time in the last week to discuss the current suspension of the Marston Vale Line between Bletchley and Bedford and for your letter of 21 December. As I am sure you are aware, this route is important to many of my constituents who use it for education, employment and leisure reasons, and so I am keen to see the situation resolved as soon as possible.

On Friday 13 January, I had the opportunity to meet with the Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership (MVCRP), the Chair of Bedford – Bletchley Rail Users' Association (BBRUA) as well as Councillors from Woburn Sands Town Council to update them on the current situation, to learn of the knock-on impacts the suspension is causing and to hear their concerns. I want to take this opportunity to raise with you some of the points that were discussed.

As you know, the main cause of the suspension of the Marston Vale Line is not having the team to maintain and service the rolling stock due to the administration of Vivarail. However, as I understand it, some of the engineers that worked on the Marston Vale Line rolling stock were contractors through an agency and not directly employed by Vivarail. Whilst I am sure some of them will have sought alternative employment, I am certain there are some still job-searching. To that end, I wondered if there is a possibility for them to be re-hired directly by London Northwestern Railway (LNWR) or Network Rail? By having some of these engineers employed, the line should be able to function in some capacity because they would be on hand to ensure sufficient maintenance of the trains, satisfying the necessary safety regulations needed to operate.

Also, I am slightly concerned about the true status of the engines in the trains that were running on the Marston Vale Line. It has been suggested by the Department for Transport that the engines of the Class 230s were reaching a point where a major overhaul would be required. However, I have also heard that the 230s have got a considerable amount of mileage still left in them before they reach the need for an overhaul because they are relatively new and were not used as extensively during the Coronavirus pandemic. Could I ask for this point to be investigated further by the Department for Transport?

Unfortunately, at this current point in time, the only way that I can see a quick reintroduction of a service along the Marston Vale Line is to use the Vivarail trains. To introduce another type of rolling stock will require the traincrew to have to undertake a lengthy training period, unnecessarily delaying the reintroduction of a train service.

Constituency Office:
Suite 102 Milton Keynes Business Centre
Foxhunter Drive, Linford Wood MK14 6GD
Tel: 01908 686830 Website: www.iainstewart.org.uk
Email: iain.stewart.mp@parliament.uk



If replacement stock is, however, to be required, I understand that using Class 150s or 153s would reduce the time requirement for training up drivers as they were used on the Marston Vale line pre-2019 and therefore some train crew will have existing knowledge of them. I further understand that the Class 153s may have some toilet access issues but is there a way to overcome this for a short interim period?

Finally, I would like to highlight the unsuitability of the rail replacement bus service in terms of the extended journey times and unreliability they pose, amongst other issues. An increasing number of complaints from passengers are being received by MVCRP and BBRUA, which are being compiled and sent to LNWR for investigation. I would be happy to share these with you if it is helpful.

My hope is that this letter will reach you prior to the Select Committee hearing on Wednesday 18 January that you will be attending because it is my hope, that if the opportunity arises, I will put some questions to you about the Marston Vale Line.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours ever,

Iain Stewart MP
Member of Parliament for Milton Keynes South