

## Dave Horton

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**From:** Hobbs Geoff <HobbsGe@tfl.gov.uk>  
**Sent:** 21 October 2014 16:37  
**To:** 'campaigns@abfly.org.uk'  
**Cc:** Herbert Sarah (MD Correspondence); andy.smith@watford.gov.uk; themayor@watford.gov.uk; Janet.Tyndale@hertfordshire.gov.uk; richard.harrington.mp@parliament.uk; MAINA@parliament.uk; sandy@sandy4stalbans.org  
**Subject:** RE: Crossrail feasibility study, London Overground and the Abbey Line

Dear Mr Horton,

Thank you for your email of 16 October 2014.

Yes, making the Abbey line part of London Overground would be less of a step-change than Crossrail. Nonetheless, it would still need to pass the Treasury's tests associated with value for money and affordability, given that this idea would be in funding competition with other projects elsewhere in the UK.

You asked for an explanation as to why such investment from TfL's budget would be hard to justify. I should say at the outset that there is no formal study as such. This is outside of the GLA area, and I only have access to data in the public domain. There are roundly 0.5 million trips per year for the line (about the same as Hatch End station on its own) and a fares revenue of perhaps about £1 million. I understand that there is a net subsidy required given rolling stock lease costs, staffing, maintenance, and so on. The average load per train is around 70 people, so my estimate is the maximum load is unlikely to be more than 200 by the time it reaches Watford Junction (you may have better data). This compares to London Overground's 5-car trains which have capacity for around 500 passengers.

As I understand it, the 2010 proposal to convert to light rail was originally based on the idea that the capital expenditure required to increase the quality of service could be recovered through lower operating costs. In the event, this model was not found to be sufficiently durable, and the proposal has of course been dropped.

A 'conversion' to London Overground faces similar challenges. London Overground is a 'high quality' operator in terms of frequency, general travel environment and staffing, and such quality inevitably has a cost. Investments in additional heavy rail infrastructure and associated additional operating costs would be material. There would also be transaction and legal costs from any transfer. All are inevitably relatively large in contrast to the scale of the services and the number of passengers. Given current and expected passenger volumes, the London Overground model is unlikely to offer value for money even if there is exceptional growth generated by such investment. Furthermore, TfL has competing projects it is being asked to fund, including London Overground extensions. The case for investment in transport and/or regeneration terms looks compelling for these, but the context is declining levels of grant in the future and hence a need for rigorous prioritisation.

This is also a railway that operates wholly outside London and for which TfL is not funded, relevant given that there is a net subsidy. The Mayor and Transport for London does not currently have general powers over the National Rail network beyond the boundary, except where granted specifically, and the transfer of a railway wholly outside that would be unprecedented. The relevant transport authority is of course Hertfordshire County Council.

The Abbey line does of course have a valuable local transport role, and the challenge is to enhance this. The case for improvement has to be proportionate, relatively low cost, and involve as little overhead as possible. A transfer to London Overground does not seem to meet these conditions, while there is an existing structure that could deliver change without the costs of transfer. I believe such money as there is available in these austere times is better put into the means to enable frequency improvements than organisational change that would bring the costs of an urban railway to Hertfordshire. The other factor that could transform the case is if the enhanced railway would enable significant development, such as house building, which is a catalyst for many London schemes.

I hope that this helps explain further Mike Brown's previous emails.

Kind regards,

Geoff Hobbs

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**From:** Abbey Flyer Users' Group (ABFLY) [mailto:campaigns@abfly.org.uk]  
**Sent:** 20 October 2014 21:42  
**To:** Herbert Sarah (MD Correspondence)  
**Cc:** Hobbs Geoff  
**Subject:** RE: Crossrail feasibility study, London Overground and the Abbey Line

Dear Sarah

Thank you, I look forward to the response.

Kind regards

David Horton

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**From:** Herbert Sarah (MD Correspondence)  
**Sent:** 20 October 2014 11:30  
**To:** 'campaigns@abfly.org.uk'  
**Cc:** Hobbs Geoff  
**Subject:** RE: Crossrail feasibility study, London Overground and the Abbey Line

Dear Mr Horton,

Thank you for your further email to Mike Brown about the Abbey Line. I have passed your email across to Geoff Hobbs, Head of Transport planning, who will address the further points that you have raised.

Kind regards  
Sarah Herbert



Sarah Herbert | MD Correspondence

Mike Brown's Office-MD

Rail & Underground, 11th Floor, 11B4  
Palestra, 197 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8NJ

Email: [sarahherbert@tfl.gov.uk](mailto:sarahherbert@tfl.gov.uk)

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**From:** Abbey Flyer Users' Group (ABFLY) [<mailto:campaigns@abfly.org.uk>]

**Sent:** 16 October 2014 23:40

**To:** Brown Mike (MD)

**Cc:** [andy.smith@watford.gov.uk](mailto:andy.smith@watford.gov.uk); [themayor@watford.gov.uk](mailto:themayor@watford.gov.uk); [Janet.Tyndale@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Janet.Tyndale@hertfordshire.gov.uk);  
[richard.harrington.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:richard.harrington.mp@parliament.uk); [MAINA@parliament.uk](mailto:MAINA@parliament.uk); [sandy@sandy4stalbens.org](mailto:sandy@sandy4stalbens.org)

**Subject:** RE: Crossrail feasibility study, London Overground and the Abbey Line

Dear Mr Brown

Thank you once again for your responses.

I can now appreciate more readily the significant obstacles that would need to be overcome to integrate the Abbey Line with Crossrail, in particular the rolling stock aspect where the new trains will be fixed 9-car sets at over 200m in length.

However, at the risk of sounding like an armchair railway economist, should it not be the case that integration with London Overground is far less of a step-change?

I accept that platforms would require lengthening from 4 to 5-car for the Class 378s, but Network Rail have developed low-cost modular solutions to achieve this which have now been widely rolled-out, and I can't think of any stations on the Abbey Line where space / land is at such a premium as to make this an engineering challenge (some stations would already accommodate 5 cars).

The building of an extra couple of 5-car units would presumably be required to cover the service (cost approx. £1.2 million per car so £12 million?). Bringing the stations up to London Overground standards, installing Oyster and upgrading the PI system would obviously incur a good deal of capex, and the additional issue of the Abbey Line being unstaffed would need to be addressed. I am not suggesting for a minute that stations should be staffed, but I don't think there is a precedent anywhere else on the LO network for unstaffed stations (correct me if I am wrong). There is scope to actually reduce staffing costs on the Abbey Line, with the application of the right technology.

Operationally, as you know, there is a precedent in the old Silverlink Metro. I am not advocating the 'physical' extension of existing LO services at Watford Junction. Obviously this would be completely unfeasible, not least because of the need to cross the WCML on the level, for which the pointwork and signalling does not exist for a direct movement. Even if it did, the movement would have a horrendous impact on capacity, not to mention the reliability risk of having to change from 3<sup>rd</sup> rail to overhead. But assuming the line would remain as a standalone operation in the short term, this would require the allocation of one unit (two with a passing loop), which could be serviced at Willesden, some 12 miles down the WCML. Some may say "there aren't the paths on the WCML" to do that, but compared to the current 100-mile round trip to get the 321s to and from Northampton depot, I can't believe it is impossible.

Going back to a previous question, which I would respectfully suggest has not been answered yet, how can you be certain that the benefits of integration (with London Overground) would not outweigh the costs? I would hope that providing a modern metro-style service on this busy Hertfordshire corridor should, with the right investment and incorporation into an already very strong brand, reap good rewards over the long-term. Would you be prepared to either share with us the results of existing studies or at least allow your staff to spend some time examining it?

Kind regards

David Horton

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**From:** Brown Mike (MD) [<mailto:MikeBrown@tfl.gov.uk>]  
**Sent:** 14 October 2014 13:56  
**To:** 'campaigns@abfly.org.uk'  
**Cc:** 'andy.smith@watford.gov.uk'; 'themayor@watford.gov.uk'; 'Janet.Tyndale@hertfordshire.gov.uk'; 'richard.harrington.mp@parliament.uk'; 'MAINA@parliament.uk'; 'sandy@sandy4stalbans.org'  
**Subject:** RE: Crossrail feasibility study, London Overground and the Abbey Line

Dear Mr Horton

Thank you for your email of 28 September about the Abbey Line.

For the devolution of any rail service to be viable we have to be able to show the Treasury robust reasons for the change. We have not taken these steps with the Abbey line as it is not a viable option for several reasons.

Thameslink run a radial route to and through Central London which is currently being modernised. Providing another route fairly close to this would not add a great deal of additional benefit, especially as it would be a considerably longer journey than the current Thameslink service.

Improvements to the Abbey Line can, of course offer local benefit, but to integrate it with Crossrail would require an investment in infrastructure well in excess of these benefits. This includes double-tracking, power supply enhancement, 200 metre platforms, signalling enhancements and the reconstruction of stations along the route to integrate it properly with the rest of Crossrail's services. We would also need to purchase at least three new trains for the route which would cost in excess of 30m. There is unlikely to be a case to support such expenditure. As such, I have no plans to pursue integration of the Abbey Line with Crossrail services.

Yours sincerely

Mike Brown

Mike Brown  
Managing Director  
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**From:** Abbey Flyer Users' Group (ABFLY) [<mailto:campaigns@abfly.org.uk>]  
**Sent:** 28 September 2014 22:22  
**To:** Brown Mike (MD)  
**Cc:** [andy.smith@watford.gov.uk](mailto:andy.smith@watford.gov.uk); [themayor@watford.gov.uk](mailto:themayor@watford.gov.uk); [Janet.Tyndale@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Janet.Tyndale@hertfordshire.gov.uk);  
[richard.harrington.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:richard.harrington.mp@parliament.uk); [MAINA@parliament.uk](mailto:MAINA@parliament.uk); [sandy@sandy4stalbans.org](mailto:sandy@sandy4stalbans.org)  
**Subject:** RE: Crossrail feasibility study, London Overground and the Abbey Line

Dear Mike

Thank you for your response.

Whilst I appreciate that the Abbey Line is outside of the Great London Boundary, some of the destinations served by the proposed Crossrail extension are also well outside of the boundary. Since it is now happening in other areas, may I therefore ask what additional criteria are employed by TfL when deciding where and where not to push for greater control of rail services outside of the boundary?

You have stated that the costs to incorporate the Abbey Line into Crossrail or London Overground are 'very high' – this implies that some sort of business study has already been undertaken and if so, would you be willing to share the details? This study must also, presumably, have looked at the other side of the commercial equation since it is not just about costs and risks – namely what are the opportunities? We would be very interested to understand the assumptions considered since this is often the most difficult aspect for us to get a clear picture of.

It may be easier to discuss some of these issues in person, if you would be willing to allow us an hour or so of your time?

Kind regards

David Horton

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**From:** Brown Mike (MD) [<mailto:MikeBrown@tfl.gov.uk>]  
**Sent:** 26 September 2014 09:59  
**To:** 'campaigns@abfly.org.uk'  
**Cc:** 'andy.smith@watford.gov.uk'; 'themayor@watford.gov.uk'; 'Janet.Tyndale@hertfordshire.gov.uk'; 'richard.harrington.mp@parliament.uk'; 'MAINA@parliament.uk'; 'sandy@sandy4stalbans.org'  
**Subject:** RE: Crossrail feasibility study, London Overground and the Abbey Line

Dear Mr Horton,

Thank you for your email of 11 September on behalf of the Abbey Flyer Users' Group about the feasibility of the Abbey line being incorporated into Crossrail or London Overground.

There are many ways in which the Abbey line could be improved upon, however, as you know, this line is outside the greater London Boundary and is the responsibility of Network Rail. The costs to incorporate the Abbey line into Crossrail or make it part of the London Overground network are very high and we currently have no plans for either.

Yours sincerely

Mike Brown

Mike Brown  
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**From:** Abbey Flyer Users' Group (ABFLY) [<mailto:campaigns@abfly.org.uk>]  
**Sent:** 11 September 2014 20:55  
**To:** Brown Mike (MD)  
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**Subject:** Crossrail feasibility study, London Overground and the Abbey Line

Dear Mr Brown

Please find attached a letter concerning our thoughts about the future of the Abbey Line with respect to Crossrail and London Overground.

Kind regards

David Horton  
Abbey Flyer Users' Group  
07739 023316

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