

## Dave Horton

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**From:** Transport Committee <TransportCommittee@london.gov.uk>  
**Sent:** 06 July 2015 10:10  
**To:** 'Abbey Flyer Users' Group (ABFLY)  
**Subject:** RE: How would you run your own railway? - London Assembly consultation response

Dear Dave,

Thank you for emailing the London Assembly Transport Committee. We welcome your submission to the Call for Views on Rail Devolution in London and your response has been noted.

Please do not hesitate to get back in touch should you have any further comments or questions.

Kind regards,

### The London Assembly Transport Committee

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**From:** Abbey Flyer Users' Group (ABFLY) [mailto:campaigns@abfly.org.uk]  
**Sent:** 03 July 2015 02:23  
**To:** Transport Committee  
**Cc:** Anne Main MP; Richard Harrington MP; Dorothy Thornhill  
**Subject:** How would you run your own railway? - London Assembly consultation response

Dear Mr Berry

In responding to your consultation exercise at <https://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly/london-assembly/investigations/how-would-you-run-your-own-railway>, I must firstly apologise for slightly missing the 1<sup>st</sup> July deadline, but nonetheless I hope that these views can still be taken into consideration by the Transport Committee.

The recent extension of London Overground's reach into former Greater Anglia territory, raises an intriguing possibility – why not incorporate the Watford Junction to St Albans Abbey branch into the LO network?

This 6.5-mile, single track, A.C. electrified branch with 5 intermediate stations fits comfortably into the 'metro' genre, yet suffers from a significantly less-than-convenient 45min frequency (hourly on Sundays), archaic over-staffing, significant ticketless travel, downtrodden 25-year old rolling stock (which has never seen an interior overhaul), a service that finishes far too early in the evening, and several stations which are fearful places to be after dark. All of this suppresses demand for the service and puts people off from using it – just as the pre-London Overground network did.

Regular users look enviously across the tracks at Watford Junction to the transformation of what is now the London Overground network, remembering how it used to suffer from very similar ailments, yet the 'Abbey Line' serves as a living reminder.

Apart from the step change in quality and revenue that Overground-style investment would surely bring, there are also prizes to be had in terms of operating efficiency. The existing Train Operator, London Midland, has to run the branch using a small sub-fleet of 100mph Class 321s (soon to be replaced by 319s). This itself is an inherent inefficiency, but it is compounded further by the fact that they are maintained at Northampton, some 50 miles away. Beeching would surely have balked at the idea of a 100-mile round trip to maintain just one unit for such a small stretch of railway. Allow us the use of some dual-voltage, 75mph Class 378s and those 321s/319s could go off to standardise or strengthen another fleet elsewhere.

Following the announcement of Crossrail's feasibility study into a WCML link last year, the advent of HS2 at Euston, the great success of London Overground and the arrival of the Croxley Rail link in 2018, Watford Junction's status as a major outer-London transport hub is suddenly coming to the fore again. The 'Watford Interchange Hub' project looks set to become one of Hertfordshire County Council's top investment priorities with the releasing of its revised Rail Strategy later this year. Significant funding has also been allocated by the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for the upgrading of facilities and access arrangements at several stations in Hertfordshire, which we understand to include Watford Junction.

Furthermore, Network Rail have had the foresight to install last Christmas an upgraded 'mainline-standard' connection which would allow regular signalling of passenger trains on and off the St Albans branch if so required. This connection 'faces' Willesden depot, a mere 12 miles away and on the same side of the tracks, where of course the 378s are already maintained. To operate a higher frequency service on the single-track Abbey Line would require further infrastructure enhancements, namely a new passing loop and additional signalling, but in comparison to the cost of other railway mega-projects such as Crossrail and HS2, this is small fry.

Though physically separated from the LO network, it is nonetheless our view that the Abbey Line urgently requires upgrading in order to make it both the local people carrier of choice on the congested Watford to St Albans corridor, and a mass-transit feeder service fit for the 21st century. It is without doubt that upgrading the branch in line with the LO model and absorbing it into the network would be welcomed very strongly by passengers. Think also of the benefits to TfL from serving St Albans – one of the UK's most affluent dormitory towns - in direct competition with Govia Thameslink Railway.

Would you therefore please consider in your current exercise the feasibility / business case for transferring the Abbey Line to the London Overground network post-2017 (when the London Midland franchise is due for renewal).

Kind regards

Dave Horton  
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Abbey Flyer Users' Group (ABFLY)

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