



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Ms Fiona Gillon
Office of Rail and Road
25 Cabot Square
London
E14 4QZ

Our Ref: HD16589

18 September 2025

Dear Fiona,

Re: Temple Mills International Depot Capacity Allocation - Supporting Wider Access for International Rail Operators

In addition to the previous letter I signed alongside Labour MPs for Kent and Sussex, I am writing to you individually on behalf of the over 800 constituents who have signed my petition to urge the ORR to take full account of wider regional economic benefits when determining capacity allocation at Temple Mills International Depot, and to support measures that will facilitate market access for new international rail operators.

Regional Economic Impact Evidence

We draw your attention to the recently published report "Light at the End of the Tunnel" by the Good Growth Foundation (August 2025), enclosed, which provides compelling quantified evidence of the substantial regional economic benefits that flow from enhanced international rail connectivity. The report demonstrates that reopening international rail services to Ashford International alone could generate:

- £534 million annually in visitor economy benefits to the South East
- Up to £2.7 billion over five years in gross value added
- Approximately 500,000 additional visitors per year to Kent, Sussex and the wider region
- Significant employment creation in hospitality, retail, and transport sectors

These findings are particularly relevant to the Temple Mills capacity allocation process, as increased competition and new operator market entry would directly facilitate the restoration of services to stations like Ashford International, delivering these quantified economic benefits to my constituency of Hastings and Rye and the broader South East region.

Statutory Duties Requiring Economic Benefits Assessment

We draw attention to the ORR's statutory duties under Section 4 of the Railways Act 1993 which explicitly require consideration of these wider economic impacts when making access decisions:

1. Section 4(1)(b) mandates that the ORR promote "the use of the railway network...and the development of that railway network, to the greatest extent that it considers economically practicable";
2. Section 4(5C) requires the ORR to "have regard, in particular, to the interests, in securing value for money, of...the general public" when affecting users or potential users of railway services.

Current ORR Guidance Commitment

Your own Open Access Guidance (December 2024) explicitly commits to assessing "wider costs and benefits" including economic, social, and environmental factors

based on Department for Transport's Transport Analysis Guidance (TAG). The guidance states at Section 3.29-3.30 that you will "monetise factors including: Social; Economic; Environmental; and Indirect tax transfers" and that "monetised costs and benefits" will inform the ORR's consideration.

Competition and Public Interest Arguments

Breaking Eurostar's effective monopoly at Temple Mills would deliver significant regional economic benefits:

- Employment creation from increased competition and service provision
- Regional connectivity improvements benefiting Kent and Sussex
- Tourism and business travel economic multiplier effect
- Innovation in service provision through new operator business models

Wider public interest benefits would include:

- Enhanced consumer choice and service quality improvements
- Fare competition and downward pressure on fares
- Network resilience through service diversity and reduced single-operator dependency
- Environmental benefits from modal shift away from short-haul aviation and road to rail.

The Good Growth Foundation report demonstrates that current underutilisation of Kent's international rail infrastructure represents a significant economic opportunity cost. New operators with commitments to serve stations like Ashford International would help realise this dormant economic potential.

Request for Consideration

We therefore respectfully request that when determining Temple Mills capacity allocation, the ORR:

1. Apply TAG-compliant economic assessment to quantify the wider regional economic benefits of increased international rail competition
2. Consider the substantial evidence provided by the Good Growth Foundation report of economic benefits flowing from enhanced international rail connectivity
3. Weight heavily the public interest in breaking monopolistic market structures in favour of competitive provision
4. Prioritise applications that demonstrate commitment to serving underutilised international stations with significant economic development potential

The Temple Mills decision represents a pivotal moment for international rail competition in the UK. We urge you to use your statutory powers to facilitate market access for new operators and thereby unlock the substantial regional economic benefits that competition can deliver.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further and provide additional evidence of the economic case for widening access to international rail markets.

Yours sincerely,

Helena Dollimore MP
Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament for Hastings, Rye and the villages

Signed by the following constituents: [names redacted]