

Thameslink

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Tom Harris): My Hon Friend the Minister of State for Transport (Dr Stephen Ladyman) tabled a written statement on 18th October 2006 (Hansard ref 56WS) announcing that legal powers and planning consent had been granted to Network Rail in respect of the Thameslink modernisation scheme. I now want to update Parliament on the work that is being done by the Department on the issue of whether to fund the scheme.

The scheme, which involves extending and upgrading the existing Thameslink network to operate more frequent and longer trains, is estimated to cost £3.5bn. This is a major scheme, both financially and strategically, and it must be considered in the context of next year's Comprehensive Spending Review, and the Department's five year plan for rail, the High Level Output Specification. As the Department has already made clear, the final decision on Thameslink will be made when these processes conclude - this is likely to be by the summer of 2007.

Before the final decision on funding is made, more work needs to be done on the project to improve the robustness of the plans and cost estimates, and to maintain the opportunity of delivering the project to the planned timetable. Therefore my rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has written to Network Rail today authorising £30m funding for project planning and design development.

This will enable a more informed decision to be made regarding the case for funding the implementation of the project in summer 2007. It also safeguards the opportunity to deliver the first set of outputs of the Thameslink modernisation scheme by December 2011. This funding is being granted without prejudice to the final decision on the funding of the scheme.