

SUBJECT CC MASTER.

FILE SW
bcc: Mr. Owen

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

28 April, 1983

Hastings-Tonbridge Rail Service

The Prime Minister held a meeting on Wednesday, 27 April to discuss the renewal of the Hastings-Tonbridge rail service. Your Secretary of State, Mr. Ian Gow, M.P., Mr. Alan Walters and Mr. Osmotherly were present.

Your Secretary of State said that there were three options for renewing this service. It would be possible to renovate and patch up the existing stock, to provide some further years service. Alternatively diesel bus stock could be developed and used as a replacement for the existing stock. The third alternative was to single the track through the tunnels and electrify it using the third rail method.

In discussion, it was noted that the British Rail submission had been shown to be inadequate in a number of important respects. The costing of the diesel bus option must be subject to particular uncertainty, since this would be breaking entirely new ground in British railway operations. The economics of the diesel and the electric options were not markedly different from one another, and it seemed likely that the local pressure groups would be much less enthusiastic about the electrification, once they realised that this would mean withdrawal of all services for a number of months while the new track was laid.

The Prime Minister said that your Secretary of State, together with Mr. Gow, should consult the Government supporters most closely concerned to test the strength of their declared preference for electrification. If, as seemed likely, they saw great difficulty in the prospect of losing their rail service for a number of months altogether, while electrification took place, the Government should conclude in favour of the diesel option.

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I am sending a copy of this letter to John Gieve (Chief Secretary's Office).

M. C. SCHOLAR

Richard Bird, Esq.,
Department of Transport

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