

Former rail minister Norman Baker back on track with community rail role

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Former rail minister and one-time British Rail booking office clerk Norman Baker has taken on a new role within community rail.

He has been chosen to chair the newly renamed Sussex Downs Line community rail route running from Seaford to Brighton in East Sussex.

Mr Baker said: "Our railway is an essential part of the fabric of our local life and I am delighted to be able to help support it in my new role."

He served as a transport minister with responsibility for rail from in the coalition government from May 2010 until October 2013. He was the Liberal Democrat MP for Lewes from 1997 to 2015. Since losing his parliamentary seat, he has maintained his interest in transport and is now the policy and campaigns adviser at the Campaign for Better Transport.

Mr Baker previously worked for British Rail for eight months in 1984 as a booking office employee at Finsbury Park, Haringay and Hornsey stations in north London.

Representatives of the communities on the Seaford to Brighton railway line have chosen to rebrand the route as the Sussex Downs Line to encourage people to use the train to travel to the area and between the places on the route.

Tim Barkley, chair of the Southeast Communities Rail Partnership, welcomed Mr Baker to the organisation at Lewes railway station.

He said: “We are very pleased that Norman Baker has been elected as the Chair of the newly renamed community rail line Sussex Downs Line. He brings a wealth of experience to this role at the national and local level and is committed to improving rail travel for the local communities along the line.”

Chris Fowler, customer services director for Southern, commented: “We welcome the news of Norman Baker’s appointment as Line chair for the Sussex Downs Line and look forward to working with him and Southeast CRP. I’m sure the newly renamed route will flourish with Norman’s wealth of experience helping to continue developing community rail.”

The rebranded line was launched at Lewes railway station with a poster unveiling using a photograph of the Sussex Downs near Brighton taken by Southern’s Lewes station manager Andy Gardner who is an amateur photographer.

The line covers 10 stations and runs alongside the South Downs, linking the towns, villages and city from countryside to coast.

The route passes through the South Downs National Park with direct links to the South Downs Way long distance footpath. It serves the University of Sussex, University of Brighton and Brighton and Hove Albion’s Amex stadium at Falmer. The line is used by commuters, students, football fans and leisure travellers including hikers, ramblers, cyclists, dog walkers and bird watchers.

Mr Baker takes over as community rail Line Chair from former Seaford town councillor Jon Freeman who died last autumn.

Photo credit: Southeast Communities Rail Partnership