



# Petitioning Parliament



## TEACHERS' NOTES

### Background information

An underground postal railway once ran beneath London's streets. Opened in 1927, it operated for over 75 years, and it was called Mail Rail.

The General Post Office had millions of letters to carry across London every day. On the busy, congested London streets traffic could only move at an average speed of 6.5 miles an hour. The Post Office dug deep and built a clever railway to carry the letters in driverless electric trains underground.

In order to build Mail Rail, Parliament had to be consulted and pass a special bill.

### Who is it for?

7 - 11 year olds

### How long will it take?

Approximately 1 hour. Letter writing could be set as a homework activity.

### Learning outcomes

Students will learn about congestion on London streets and how this slowed down delivery of the mail and write a letter to persuade the Prime Minister of the need for Mail Rail.

### What to do

Download the PowerPoint and print STUDENT CHALLENGE CARDS.

Read through the PowerPoint and Mail Rail Fact File to familiarise yourself with the content.

Set the scene by explaining that over 100 years ago sending letters was very important because it was the only way people could stay in touch. You may wish to discuss ways we communicate today (telephone, email etc) and explain these had not been invented 100 years ago.

Show students the photographs of London c.1900 on the PowerPoint. Explain that the streets are very busy and it is hard for postal workers to deliver letters on time. You may wish to discuss how London streets looked different then to today.

Ask the students to draw a couple of the obstacles they face on the CHALLENGE CARD (horses, pedestrians, trams).



Explain that the General Post Office had an idea to move mail underground but needed to get permission from the Prime Minister H.H. Asquith to build the tunnels.

Divide the students into small groups. Give each group paper and pens and ask them to discuss what they would write in a letter to the Prime Minister.

Ask each group to share their arguments with the class.

Ask students to write their letters on the CHALLENGE CARD. You may wish to ask them to draft the letter first before writing it up in neat on the template.

You could play the role of H.H. Asquith and ask some of the students to read their letters to you.

Explain that the petition was successful and in 1913 a Parliament Bill was passed to allow Mail Rail to be built.

### **Extension activities**

This is an accredited CREST SuperStar Challenge.

The Challenge can be used towards a CREST SuperStar Award.

Visit [postalmuseum.org/learning](http://postalmuseum.org/learning) to claim The Postal Museum CREST SuperStar stickers for their passports.