



Promoting Britain's
Railway
for Passengers
and Freight

Lead Strategic Planner
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28th April 2015

Dear Sir,

Response to Network Rail's draft East Midlands Route Study

Railfuture is the UK's leading independent organisation campaigning for better services for passengers and freight. A voluntary organisation to which many rail user groups are affiliated, the organisation is independent both politically and commercially.

This Railfuture response is based on input from our East Midlands and London & South East branches, which serve the area through which the East Midlands routes run. Our Lincolnshire, Yorkshire and West Midlands branches, for whom decisions regarding the East Midlands routes have implications, have also been consulted. The comments made are not confidential, and we would be happy for them to appear on your website and you are welcome to use them in discussion with funders and other stakeholders. We would be happy to enlarge on any of the points made above or to work with you to identify the best options for the future.

Scope and Objectives of the Study.

Railfuture welcomes the philosophy of expansion and upgrading embodied in the document. It is an uplifting change from the philosophy of controlled decline, which has characterised much of the last few decades on the railways, especially in the post-Beeching era. We endorse the approach adopted in Network Rail's Passenger Market Study with its long-term view and strategic outcomes-based approach. We are pleased that this is followed through in this draft Route Study, looking ahead over a 30 year period which is the lifespan of many industry assets and reflects the lengthy lead-times necessarily involved in planning, funding and delivering significant development of the railway. In that context we also welcome the more focussed view over the next decade and the clarification of some of the requirements for Control Period 6.

The study is comprehensive and we welcome the inclusive process, which has allowed a wide range of stakeholders to contribute, both at the meeting at Derby and through written responses, and our comments are offered in that positive spirit. We express some reservations below, and we suggest some additional outputs. In particular, we would underline the need to look at creating greater capacity for freight through Leicester and the capacity available at Kentish Town, along with the need to consider

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a number of station and line reopening schemes. We also believe that there is considerable latent demand for rail travel to and from Nottingham, which has been constrained in the past by the limitations of the train service provided. However, these comments are offered in the spirit of creative, constructive challenge between fellow advocates of shared strategic goals and aspirations.

The East Midlands region is in the middle of England and thus the most significant function of its rail network is connectivity: between places within the region, between places within and places outside the region; but also between places both of which are outside the region, round all points of the compass, but pass through it. The retrenchment of the network in the 1960s and 70s resulted in a disproportionate loss of east-west connectivity within the region, so we are particularly pleased to see the focus on Bedford and Leicester, and associated plans to restore and improve these links.

Making the Case for Rail.

We are keen to see the delivery of the expansion plans contained in this draft study and will be making the case to opinion-formers, decision-makers, and funders for sustained investment across the routes described. The draft study understandably focuses on creating the capacity needed, but the final version should perhaps make more of the wider economic and environmental case for substantially increased investment in the network, which is also supported by the case we make below for new or reopened lines and stations.

Forecasts. We note that the growth forecasts are modest compared with the actual levels of growth seen over the last ten years, and would regard these as a minimum. We would recommend that a sensitivity analysis should be carried out, considering, say a 5%pa growth to 2023, and a 3.5%pa growth to 2043 to test the levels of overcrowding that would result. Our concern arises from the fact that previous forecasts of demand have generally proved to be underestimates, with the consequent shortfall in capacity and overcrowding that we see today.

Electrification.

Electrification of the Midland Main Line for fast passenger services, and for extension of London outer suburban services beyond Bedford to Kettering, Corby and Leicester are welcomed. However, that is only a start and we would want to see extensions to cover alternative routes, particularly Corby – Syston Junctions and the Erewash Valley Line and connections, following fairly quickly to ensure resilience and the ability to maximise the benefits of the basic electrification.

We would endorse the proposed candidates listed for inclusion in the refresh of the Electrification RUS, in particular:

- Peterborough – Manton Junction and Wigston S Junction – Nuneaton,
- Derby – Birmingham including Wichnor Junction to Lichfield
- Tupton Junction to Sheffield via Beighton Junction
- Ambergate - Matlock
- Nottingham – Grantham
- Sheet Stores Junction to Stenson Junction

We would suggest also including North Stafford Junction to Stoke Junction. The list is quite long, but this is inevitable given the focal role of the East Midlands routes in the national network.

Closer to London, the growth in demand, and the effect of the new Radlett terminal should support the case for electrification of freight lines between Cricklewood and Hendon, as well as requiring greater flexibility to move between fast and slow lines (particularly in the Scratchwood area) than is provided by the current crossovers.

Rolling stock.

In our response to the Sussex route study consultation, we expressed criticism of the high-density layout of the new class 700 Thameslink trains with relatively few seats and a more limited allocation of floorspace to each standing passenger. Clearly, these units could not be deployed on the extended London commuter services beyond Bedford to Wellingborough and Kettering, as the rules require a seat

to be provided for all passengers travelling for more than 20 minutes. The design of stock should reflect the journey time with reasonable standards of comfort for seated passengers and this may therefore be reflected in the frequency of trains and the train length.

For other cross country services covered below, there is a strong view that the replacement trains for the class 158s will need to offer superior standards of comfort and more room for luggage in line with rising passenger expectations. Whilst this is currently a matter for franchise specification rather than the infrastructure provider, we refer to it here, as it will have an effect on train length, and to some extent on service frequency.

Route capacity

This has generally been effectively addressed in the study, but we highlight two areas where we believe particular problems may arise which have the potential to spread widely throughout the system.

Leicester station and approaches. Leicester is in some ways the key piece in the jigsaw of the East Midlands network. It is complex and is affected by a number of schemes including the electric spine, Felixstowe to Nuneaton and the Leicester Area Capacity Scheme, to which we would also add access to the Leicester – Burton line. We believe that this should be given some priority as the key to unlocking a number of other schemes and that while some £400m is likely to be committed here, the opportunity should be taken to provide direct access from Leicester to the Burton line, recognising that the limited space now available is likely to mean a low speed on this Knighton north curve. Without close attention to unlocking the constraints, we are concerned that the further development of local passenger services in the Leicester area may be constrained.

Thameslink. The Thameslink Programme proposals provide for 24 tph, or a train every 2.5 minutes, and 16 of these will run through Kentish Town, with a mix of stopping and non stopping services. The risks of delay are self evident and we believe that the timetable will need to be carefully devised to reduce that risk, and that, ideally, the track layout at Kentish town should be designed to allow greater flexibility to accommodate variable performance, for down trains in particular.

Cross country routes

As mentioned at the outset, the East Midlands Route network is at the heart of a number of cross country services that start and terminate well beyond its boundaries. The **Liverpool – Norwich** trains, for example, have developed a strong market with many origins and destinations along the way. For this reason, we would not want to see the service split at Nottingham, and believe that the passenger benefits of a through service should be maintained, nor would we want to see a lot of additional station dwell time inserted there to provide a buffer for performance reasons. We welcome the fact that the study recognises the need to lengthen these trains, particularly on the busiest section of the journey between Nottingham and Liverpool, and would urge that early plans are made for the seven additional vehicles required.

It might be reasonable to consider diverting these trains to run via the south curve at Dore, which would both reduce journey time to Manchester significantly, and reduce congestion at Sheffield. This would require good connections at Nottingham for Sheffield, however.

A similar acceleration could be achieved on the **Nottingham – Cardiff** service if it were routed via Sheet Stores Junction and Stenson Junction, avoiding Derby.

The **Derby – Stoke – Crewe** route has grown significantly with the support of the successful North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership and it has the potential to deliver a great deal more. In particular, the final version of the Route Study should perhaps note the role it could play linking with HS2 at Crewe. The draft study notes the existing and future overcrowding on this route and proposes a solution through train lengthening even though this represents poor value for money. A stronger case might be made for a frequency increase to two trains per hour, and a second train is likely to perform better financially if it were to link the major cities of Nottingham and Stoke on Trent. Various through services could be considered, particularly once the line is electrified, but this core link is important. The infrastructure on the route should be developed to support 2 tph as well as freight.

Nottingham is now reasonably well connected to the south, and to Leeds, but longer distance demand to the north is not so well met. Apart from connections to the East Coast Main Line via Grantham, we believe there is also scope to improve links to North Yorkshire, Cumbria and to Scotland by linking the **Nottingham – Leeds** service with that running from Leeds to Carlisle.

Coventry – Leicester. We are aware that the restoration of a through service between these two important cities is inhibited by the current need to cross the West Coast Main Line on the level at Nuneaton. However, we believe the link has strong passenger potential and would welcome a review of how such a through service might be provided and what infrastructure alterations would be required to enable it. The other constraining junction is at Wigston, but this and capacity at Leicester is fully addressed by the conditional outputs outlined in the route study. Given the 30 year timescale of the study, we think it should encompass this link as well as considering how it might be extended to serve Leamington in one direction and perhaps East Midlands airport and Nottingham in the other.

Not a cross country route, but we would also note here that **Melton Mowbray** (pop. 25,500, but serving a wider catchment within the borough of 50,000) and **Oakham** (10,000) should now provide a strong enough customer base to support more than the token once daily service to London, and that the Corby trains should be extended to serve them and then run to Nottingham or Derby to provide connections further north as well as to avoid further congestion at Leicester.

Stations. Whilst noting the excellent improvements made at Sheffield, Nottingham, Leicester and Derby stations, we have to highlight those where recent and planned growth means that they are no longer adequate and, in the case of Mill Hill Broadway, no longer fit for purpose. **Mill Hill Broadway** with its narrow platforms and stairs, its dark and intimidating approach under the M1 and minimal passenger facilities requires significant improvement. The station has a recorded throughput of almost 2.5m a year, but the limitations of revenue protection at this point mean that this number will certainly be an underestimate. The number of people over 65 using the station is 4% above the average for similar stations and this may result in an underestimate in view of the number of trips made on Freedom Passes. In any event, the needs of this group of travellers need to be reflected in any plans for improving the station.

Kentish Town is also inadequate for the 1.9m annual users and the level of interchange with the Underground, and is in need of improvement. **Bedford** will see a big increase in the number of trains serving it, particularly following the introduction of East/West Rail services. Here too the expansion of passenger facilities needs to reflect this growth and preferably needs to be planned and implemented prior to the introduction of EWR as it will be more difficult to secure possessions or to close parts of the station subsequently in order to carry out the work. The need for additional platforms for EWR services needs to be covered more fully in the final document, and we believe this might require more than the one additional platform proposed, particularly for through trains to Cambridge. Apart from Bedford, we note that **Luton** will require more capacity to turn back the number of trains proposed to terminate here.

HS2. This presents a paradox and exposes a weakness, which stems from the planning cycle of the route studies and of HS2 respectively. This is certainly no fault of Network Rail, but the alternative sites for the East Midlands hub station present a problem in terms of responding to this consultation. Our concern is the East Midlands hub, its accessibility and its impact on connecting services, from Leicester, Derby and Nottingham. The location at Breaston would have serious drawbacks because of local flooding and lack of rail connectivity. Toton could be better connected by rail, but would require the additional expense of bespoke shuttle services with low speeds on the tight curves approaching the new station. Far better, we believe, would be to locate the station at East Midlands Parkway from which a range of distributor services already exist. We appreciate that this is going beyond the remit of this study, but if your conclusions were similar, we should be happy to support the argument.

The Toton site with its size and access to a skilled workforce in the area means that it has potential value as a railway depot and should therefore be retained for future railway use, at least until the position becomes clearer.

We would broadly agree with the conclusions of your report of July 2013, 'Better Connections: Options for the Integration of High Speed 2', and welcome its positive approach to using the capacity released by the provision of HS2 to meet latent demand, leaving capacity for a number of the proposals listed below.

We believe that more passengers than forecast may choose to remain on the classic network for cross country journeys, so agree that maintaining a high level of capability is essential following introduction of HS2.

New lines, stations and depots.

We welcome the inclusion of **East/West Rail** in the study as well as the planned extension to Cambridge. Whilst its potential for freight use is referred to, there is no reference to the diversion of cross country passenger trains this way. The Wessex study refers to its use by trains from Bournemouth or Southampton to Manchester and Hull. Clearly there is potential for the route to improve regional connectivity as well (see page 27), such as links between Kettering or Peterborough (with the Manton south curve) and Milton Keynes.

The route crosses five NR route boundaries and there is clearly a need for one of these to take a lead in train planning, making best use of the many new routing options that it will open up.

We also believe that there is a case for a number of new passenger lines (or upgraded freight lines for passenger use) and several new stations within the East Midlands route area. In general these proposals do not seek to solve a capacity issue, although they could help in taking some pressure off existing access points to the rail network by providing a rail link to major stations such as Leicester, as an alternative to car. Their value is in making better use of existing assets and in providing the social and economic benefits that have been demonstrated to stem from better access to the rail network. Briefly described, these are:

Leicester – Burton (the Ivanhoe or the National Forest line). This would serve a combined population of 94,000 in the corridor served by this freight only route, and in particular Coalville, Moira and Swadlincote (Gresley). Part of the route is double track and there is little regular traffic between Coalville (Mantle Lane) and Burton although a spur would be required to bring the trains round into Leicester station. We believe this should be considered for implementation in CP6. Commuting, retail and longer distance business trips would be matched with access to the National Forest and it would provide railhead stations to a number of other larger settlements such as Ibstock, as well as a link to the extended Lichfield service listed below.

Lichfield – Burton and Nottingham There is a case for extending some cross city passenger services beyond Lichfield Trent Valley via Alrewas to Burton and Nottingham, to provide better access from Sutton Coldfield and Lichfield to the East Midlands. This might start with a diesel service, but would benefit from electrification of the line. It would also serve new stations at Alrewas and Castle Donnington (see below).

(Nottingham) – Shirebrook – Ollerton The case for this is based on serving a number of medium sized towns (Edwinstowe, Warsop and Ollerton) where currently rail access is poor and where demographic change will be supported by a re-established rail link as new businesses replace coal extraction, coupled with the need for a skilled workforce to travel further afield to work.

Matlock – Buxton We believe this would have a key role in shortening the journey times from Leicester, Nottingham, Derby and Matlock to Manchester, and also in making the movement of stone by rail more competitive from the Peak Forest/Tunstead/Hindlow quarries to East Midlands and East Anglian destinations. It would also open up car free access to the Peak District national park and provide effectively for many more east-west journeys than are possible today. It is important that planning should ensure that developments on the Buxton and Matlock lines are compatible with their future possible development as a through route.

Melton Mowbray – Nottingham This longer term proposal could be developed if at some point the Old Dalby test track were relocated or became surplus to requirement. It would involve using the test track as part of a direct route from Corby or Peterborough, Oakham and Melton Mowbray to Nottingham. At the northern end, it would use the alignment of the Cotgrave branch to access the Grantham – Nottingham line. This is included in this response as a marker to ensure that plans for the lines at either end would not preclude the ultimate use of this route for a passenger service.

Bedford – Northampton Northamptonshire is a large and populous county which has access to the rail network at only six stations. Bedford – Northampton would not only link the two county towns, but would provide an additional east-west link, although we accept that more work needs to be done to establish both the feasibility and the business case. Our reason for including it here is to ensure nothing is done which would preclude its reinstatement either at the site of Oakley Junction on the Midland Main Line, or on the approaches to Northampton on sections owned by Network Rail.

New Stations. A number of potential new station sites are listed below and should be evaluated, preferably during CP5:

- A park and ride station near Saxondale crossing (west of Bingham) on the Nottingham – Grantham line at the crossroads of the busy A46 and A52 roads
- Thurmaston (north of Leicester)
- Near Broom Lane crossing between Syston East Junction and Melton to serve the adjacent community of East Goscote
- Blaby, between South Wigston and Narborough
- A South Leicester Parkway station between Wigston and Kibworth
- Desborough (between Market Harborough and Kettering)
- Irchester (south of Wellingborough) to serve both Rushden and Higham Ferrers and giving access to the A45
- Near Geddington on the Corby line, which would serve an area of significant development at Great Oakley
- Alrewas for the National Arboretum, of which Network Rail has been a sponsor should be added when trains are extended from Lichfield to Burton or Derby, given the national significance of the Arboretum and the fact that it will attract visitors from all over the UK for whom rail will be the natural choice.
- Castle Donington, on the Stenson Junction to Sheet Stores Junction line, to be served by the proposed new (Birmingham) – Lichfield – Burton – Nottingham local service (see above).

Planning consent for the freight depot at Radlett requires prior gauge clearance work on the Midland Main Line which will be quite disruptive within the timescale of the study and, if successful, may require more capacity than reflected in the study.

Level Crossings

We note and endorse the proposals to reduce the risk at level crossings and to eliminate a number of them. We believe, however, that this is a shared responsibility between the rail industry and highway authorities, and indeed road users. We are concerned that the great efforts being made by Network Rail to reduce risks and eliminate problems are not matched by equivalent commitments from the other parties, and that the high cost of the level crossing programme may squeeze out other important investments which would encourage a shift from road to rail, with significantly higher safety benefits.

Resignalling

We look forward to the benefits that resignalling will bring, not only in terms of reliability and better regulation of trains, but also in enabling lines to remain open continuously. This will bring particular benefits on lines such as Derby – Stoke where it should then be possible to run an all day Sunday service, for example, which has proved to be unaffordable in the past.

Apparent inconsistencies

These are few in a document of this size, but we did notice in particular the anomaly in Table 3.3 on page 28 where the conditional output is for only 3-4 peak trains per hour, a figure that is already handsomely exceeded by the current timetable.

The use of EWR by cross country trains referred to in the draft Wessex route study is referred to above.

We trust these comments will be of use.

Yours faithfully,

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