

Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership

Draft Transport Strategy response

Introduction

Railfuture is an independent voluntary organisation which campaigns for better services over a bigger rail network, this document is our response to the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership Draft Transport Strategy.

As an organisation campaigning for improvements to the rail network we will keep our comments to that part of the strategy.

We generally welcome the proposals relating to rail in the draft strategy, in particular the plans to work with the key neighbouring transport authorities (TfN, TfW and Midlands Connect) to develop their plans in conjunction with them. One of the key issues we think is often missing from current transport planning is a lack of strategic thinking such that whilst a relatively minor project may not have much impact on a local level, when the bigger picture view is taken, benefits may then be realised that can feed back to make the project better value for all.

We are pleased in particular to see a plan in place for the area to be able to take advantage of both HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail when these arrive in the north.

We note that as well as a general aim to improve services, there is a specific aim to improve service frequencies on rail from east to west of the region but are concerned that this seems to be limited to existing corridors in the north of the region (Liverpool-Warrington-Manchester); we think some thought should be given to looking at new rail corridors across the south of the region connecting the town of Macclesfield (which is identified as a key cluster for the emerging digital economy) with others across the region. This could be helped by the opening of a new north to west curve connection at Kidsgrove to allow direct trains from Macclesfield to Crewe and beyond. (This may have some difficulties in crossing the canal basin almost adjacent to the Kidsgrove – Crewe line at Kidsgrove, but there does seem to be space there to fit a connection in without needing any property demolition.)

With regard to the proposals for Rail Station facilities upgrades, we would like to see more specific plans as to which stations will come under this remit; some of our concern is that Network Rail do seem to “over-engineer” new developments for improving access to stations in particular, such that the costs outweigh the benefits and the projects don’t then get the go ahead.

Re the Mid-Cheshire & Middlewich lines proposals for development; we are pleased that these two key areas are to be looked at but we think this should be pushed to the delivery stage much quicker than seems to be proposed, i.e. both the capacity improvement and the re-opening of the Northwich to Sandbach line to passenger services should be taken forward. One of the key drivers is that a number of towns on the route have passenger numbers such that if they were in Greater Manchester, they would reach the qualification level to merit at least two trains per hour, but currently only have one, and the town of Middlewich would benefit from a new rail service.

Related with this, a new connection to Manchester Airport via a Western Link is an essential scheme in our view, existing connections to the Airport from the south are limited and providing this route would enable through journeys that would also assist in better utilising the platform capacity at Manchester Airport station (i.e. less trains terminating requiring platform capacity to turn round), so we think the impetus should be to move the project on as quickly as possible to the delivery stage.

Another key route is that from Liverpool – Chester and in the current new Wales and Borders franchise just let, its proposed that the existing shuttle services provided by class 150's or similar are replaced by new class 230 trains which we understand are limited to 60 miles per hour which we think would limit capacity further, so some thought should be given to replacing these with faster trains in the short term (possibly by redeploying class 185's shortly to be released from the Trans- Pennine franchise) and in the longer term, as part of a rolling programme of electrification of the line (to Holyhead ultimately), making all these services electric. This may mean transfer of services from the Wales & Borders franchise; in our view it makes little sense that these services, wholly within England, are provided by a franchisee who's main focus is delivering train services in Wales.

We do hope these comments are able to be incorporated in the final strategy and would be very willing to engage with discussions on the detail.

Many thanks

Regards,

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