

please reply to:

Network Rail Ltd
167-169 Westbourne Terrace
London
W2 6JX

70 Dynevor Road
Stoke Newington
London
N16 0DX

cambridgesouth@networkrail.co.uk

roger.blake@railfuture.org.uk

2020-11-29

Dear Sir / Madam,

Cambridge South station – 2nd consultation

Railfuture is Britain's leading and longest-established national independent voluntary organisation campaigning exclusively for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users, to support economic (housing and productivity) growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities.

We seek to influence decision makers across local, regional and national levels to implement pro-rail policies in transport and development planning.

This response follows our previous response dated 02 March 2020 to the first consultation, and again represents the shared view of three regional branches across the East-West Rail as well as existing corridors – East Anglia, London and South East, and Thames Valley.

We address the principal questions in the on-line survey in turn.

4. What do you think about the station facilities including access arrangements within the station?

Support.

Reason: please see further comments in paragraph A below in response to 7.

5. What do you think about proposed access arrangements to and from the station?

Support.

Reason: please see further comments in paragraph D below in response to 7.

6. What cycle facilities do you wish to see at the station?

Security concerns are paramount, just as they are elsewhere for car-owners using station car parks. Cycles are no longer simply conventional pedal cycles and the rapidly-growing use of e-bikes needs to be anticipated and accommodated. This heightens the requirement for excellent security arrangements and also introduces the requirement for exemplary recharging facilities.

www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk
www.railwatch.org.uk

7. Do you have any further comments on the proposals?

A. Details of Passenger Facilities to be provided

a. We understand that the station user facilities will be based on an annual footfall of 1.8m (page 6, FAQs). This figure is apparently derived from a formula devised by HM Treasury in its 'Green Book' and used by the DfT as a basis of developing the user facilities. We are frankly alarmed at what we regard as a very low estimate. In the context of the near-universal experience of new and reopened stations across Great Britain, this we submit is another case of institutional 'pessimism bias'. We would say that given the nature of the site's very large regional hinterland for the five specialist hospitals and for a large general hospital, the dispersed nature of the very large workforce travelling to and from them, the huge range of research institutes, and given the eventual train service offer which will give the station unparalleled connectivity over a wide region of eastern, southern and central England, the footfall will be not only much larger but grow to a higher level more quickly once East-West Rail is 'plugged in'. As well as the large nearby sixth form college, there are considerable residential areas on either side of the station easily accessible by foot and cycling. The Bio-Medical Campus's own management report supports the contention that station footfall will climb rapidly to an annual figure within the range of 5-9m. Furthermore, there are good grounds to foresee that this station will be less affected than others post-pandemic with less scope for many users for the hospitals and research institutes to work from home due to the essential need to attend, and interact, in the labs and at the hospitals.

b. The planned station entrances, one on either side of the station and linked by the main footbridge and lifts in the conventional manner will, in our view and in light of the Bio-Medical Campus's management report mentioned above, soon prove to be inadequate. Instead we advocate a single large concourse over all the tracks to provide more circulation space at street level for better segregation of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists and for additional facilities such as secure cycle parking and disabled parking bays. An entrance onto a widened busway bridge, to facilitate interchange with the metro (referred to as Cambridge South East Transport) should be examined, as well as on either side as currently planned. An over-line concourse will not have problematic bulk to viewers from housing developments to the west of Hobson Park as it will be immediately in front of a much larger existing building; the two artist impressions convey an already-significant planned station structure.

c. Crossing Francis Crick Avenue is likely to be a problem for the many users of the station and so we hope that a high-level covered walkway from the new concourse to an entrance on 'the Circle' would also be reconsidered.

d. We are pleased that lifts will be duplicated, and that a 'changing places' toilet will be provided. We much prefer the language of automatic ticket gates, not ticket barriers.

e. We particularly welcome "platforms with all-weather cover to the trains the length of each platform" (para. 5.2.4 – Stakeholder Information Pack). Waiting areas and seating must likewise be distributed along the full length of the platforms in order to reduce congestion and passenger alighting and boarding times, in the cause of an on-time / every time railway.

f. Just five bays for Blue Badge holders seems to us to be a quite extraordinary level of under-provision for a new station serving such a wide catchment for onward journeys by rail.

g. A question being asked increasingly is whether, particularly in new stations such as this, the platform-train interface is being designed to facilitate level boarding and alighting for passengers. We wholeheartedly endorse that aspiration.

B. The Operational Aspects of the station.

We recognise that land-take is one, among many other, design issues to be considered. From users' perspective however – with the four tracks to be divided into pairs by direction – two island platforms are infinitely more convenient, legible, and safe. The two faces of the single platform on the east side would be used by all southbound trains, and the two faces of the single platform on the west side by all northbound trains into Cambridge, and beyond. Any last-minute changes to train arrivals, especially to Cambridge, would then entail just a crossing of the same platform, rather than the inevitable – and inherently unsafe, with increased risks of slips, trips and falls – scramble up and down staircases, and for the lifts. The currently-planned arrangement flies in the face of all experience whereby passengers congregate on the main overbridge and only descend to the platform as a train arrives, and would build-in an entirely avoidable badly sub-standard design. The current arrangement also designs-in the potential for confusion to unfamiliar users, with southern destinations split between two separated platforms, the single island platform serving trains for opposite directions, and passengers for Cambridge (likely to be a high proportion of northbound travellers) inevitably congregating on the overbridges awaiting the arrival of the first train. This unacceptable layout really must be fundamentally reconsidered in order to strike a far better balance in favour of what is known to work well, and safely, for passengers, and also for the smooth operation of the station and its train services; any relatively small difference in land-take (to be increased for East West Rail) can be but a small price to pay in comparison.

C. The Project Management of Cambridge South station in relation to East West Rail

We recognise that it is hardly all Network Rail's fault that planning and delivery of one project is seemingly not allowed to take cognisance of other well-known plans on the near-horizon. We know that when East West Rail arrives on the scene, only two or three years after the South station is due to open, full quadrupling of the current two lines over the entire length between Shepreth Branch Junction and central Cambridge station will have to be completed. We know that there will be some land-take for the new station and for its new loops, and then shortly afterwards some more land-take for the final track layout. This avoidable duplication of process and resource runs the extremely high risk of exposing Network Rail to being pilloried for inefficiency at both public and official levels, just at the time when so much official emphasis is placed on 'acceleration' and Network Rail itself has reportedly identified 13 schemes in its own 'Project Speed' in response (even though Cambridge South station is not included, it does not lack for scrutiny and high levels of expectation for its delivery).

Currently in the down direction over half the distance planned for an extra track will have it in place by 2025. In the up direction the major works planned to improve capacity at the south end of Cambridge station and at Shepreth Branch Junction will be completed by 2025. We must urge that the case be advocated for all appropriate work for East West Rail and other aspirations to be melded into a unified new works schedule to drive in project efficiency, and save disruption to users and lineside neighbours at this crucial part of the network.

There is at least one very clear, quite recent, precedent for this mature joined-up approach, namely the grade-separated Silwood Junction just south of Surrey Quays station. It was constructed before it was needed, for London Overground's East London Line southern extension to Clapham Junction, as part of the separate route upgrade for an earlier phase to extend beyond New Cross Gate to Crystal Palace and West Croydon. Come its time, that final extension was then literally 'plug and play', with barely-perceptible impact on existing services. That was over a decade ago and we trust that it genuinely is a very practical, and replicable, 'lesson learned' – to which so much lip-service is paid. Cambridge South station, anticipating East West Rail, is a high-profile opportunity for the fragmented rail industry to liberate itself from its silos and come together to surprise and delight its stakeholders!



D. Public Access to the station

We welcome the care being taken to discourage access to the station by car users. It also appears that care is being taken to provide good quality walking and cycling access. We trust that the management of the Bio-Medical Campus will undertake additional measures to ensure that is so.

Design provision should be incorporated for the number of spaces for secure cycle storage to be enlarged as time goes on; we recognise that most users will be travelling from elsewhere to work or visit the Campus, and can walk to all areas in a relatively short time.

8. Please tick if you wish to be contacted by Network Rail with email updates.

Yes please.

Yours faithfully,

Roger Blake BA, MRTPI (Rtd), MTPS
Railfuture
Director for Infrastructure & Networks, national Board