railfuture Herts & Beds

Comments on the Hertfordshire County Council Draft Rail Strategy

0. Introductory remarks

0.1. Background

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

0.1.2. Set out below is the Railfuture response to the consultation on the Hertfordshire County Council draft Rail Strategy of December 2019. The response has been prepared by the Herts & Beds Division of the London & South East regional Branch, with input from other relevant parts of Railfuture.

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0.2. Overall comments on the document

0.2.1.   We have the following recommendations for the document as a whole:

- There have been several significant developments since the document was drafted and the document's 'facts and figures' require a significant refresh. Given railway planning timescales, it for the best if the document describes the expected "as at December 2020" status, qualifying statements where appropriate. For instance:

  o Assume that the East Midlands Railway Timetable consultation proceeds as currently set out – thus the status is "Council seeking return of EMR Intercity services to Luton Airport Parkway", with a rider "(note: December 2020 timetable might include this, following responses to the consultation by the Council and others)".

  o Assume that Stevenage is a 5 platform station with through services via the Hertford Loop restored.

  o Work on the basis that Thameslink Programme future developments are no longer 'transformative'; what remains outstanding is much smaller (albeit still important), the transformative element having already occurred.

- The document generally requires update for the passage of time – for instance passenger count data can all be refreshed with ORR data issued since the draft was finalised and data from the Transport Focus Autumn 2019 National Rail Passenger Survey ("NRPS"). We have listed as an appendix several smaller changes since drafting (note: we do not warrant that this list is complete).

0.2.2.   The document would benefit from an Index and page numbering to help future use and clear selection of content ("paragraph 3.4.5 refers").

1. Introduction

1.0. Introduction

1.0.1.   In referencing the role of rail, this should be to 'live, work and visit', rather than just 'live and work'.

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1.1. Role of the Rail Strategy

1.1.1. The Council's Rail Policy should also include in the definition of 'attractive' *comfortable and well equipped trains.* Our experience of Class 700 (and consequentially Class 717 design[1]) shows the importance of influencing design and equipment to make for a more comfortable, usable train that will encourage rail travel (eg more comfortable seats, tables, power sockets and Wi-Fi).

1.1.2. We note that operational aspects such as maintenance, station cleaning and operational performance are not explicitly listed. Given the Council's overall role, this seems acceptable, but we do believe the Council should regard these as an implicit goal of 'improvements to train services'.

1.1.3. In working to make rail travel more attractive, a key aspect to be highlighted is the end-to-end journey.

1.1.4. An addition should be made to specifically support regular travellers for whom the conventional paper season ticket is not an economic choice – eg those who travel 3 days a week or more regularly but use off-peak tickets.

1.2. The Rail Context for Hertfordshire

1.2.1. There is an important imprecision on page 4, in that figure 1 implies that the Metropolitan Line to Watford runs to Watford Junction. There is a dot on the map which is probably intended to be the Metropolitan line station, but the line connects to Watford Junction.

1.3. Key Issues & Themes

1.3.1. We are strongly supportive of the issues set out, the factors driving growth and the need to increase capacity.

1.3.2. As regards the comments on satisfaction, it will be more useful to give focus to variability in TOC performance, which can change significantly over relatively short periods – for instance, West Midlands Train is currently the bottom performing TOC serving Hertfordshire and Thameslink the best performing commuter operator.

1.3.3. Four key additions to this summary would be useful:

- Recognising that a railway journey is part of the end to end journey and thus attention also needs to be paid to the start and end of the journey. Safe walking, cycling (with e-cycles and micromobility vehicles generally specifically called out due to the greater distance that can be covered) are all essential, as is an effective bus network (service times, frequency, cost etc). Finally, appropriate car parking also needs to be recognised, at, or adjacent to, stations, particularly for the London commuter[2]. Finally, integrated information provision is essential.

- A recognition of the capacity tensions – long distance travellers vs local commuters etc. Given the importance of the 'Commute to London' service for local residents, ensuring this is suitable is appropriate as an explicit goal. A natural by-product of this is that this also

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[1] We note that the operator made some design changes such as Wifi before finalising the design of these units but was effectively limited to the scale of change possible.

[2] We are not promoting car parking as a 'wanted' or 'preferred' choice, simply recognising that for some travellers it will be the only realistic choice – for instance for the less mobile, or for those living rurally.

provides the commute to Hertfordshire services needed to support local economic growth etc.

- A greater linkage to changes in demand arising from local growth – eg more demand to travel to non-London destinations like Stevenage (and also destinations outside Hertfordshire such as Cambridge).

- Identifying the principal locations for main housing growth and acknowledging that not all are well-placed to be supported with mainline or even light rail as sustainable transport to influence incomers' travel behaviour and drive modal shift and that this will require a wider initiative within the Council to address this.

1.4. Hertfordshire County Council's Role

1.4.1. In addition to Station Travel Plans, work to promote more sustainable travel can take place outside these plans – eg as part of town centre improvements and s106 funding, some of which may already have been designed and achieved necessary consents, and this should be specifically stated.

1.4.2. We consider that it is appropriate to explicitly mention the wider stakeholder community in the list of activities, using similar words to those referring to 'other authorities'.

1.4.3. Additionally, encouraging / enabling Cycling, including the use of e-bikes should be made a specific goal.

2. Rail Strategy Development

2.1. Rail Industry timescales

2.1.1. We agree that these timescales are long, however the process has changed and should be reflected in this section of the document. It is likely that the Williams Review and other events will cause further change, although there are suggestions of delay in publication and 'bland' conclusions.

2.1.2. We note that the table of rail industry timescales is not yet present. As an educator for consumers of the final strategy, such a table – or a clear pointer to a suitable external source, would be a useful inclusion.

2.2. A Capital Regional Transport body or equivalent(s)

2.2.1. The Council has previously described its aspirations for a Capital Regional Transport Body – a coming together of Councils, Sub-national Transport Bodies ['SNTB'] (such as England's Economic Heartland), TfL and other relevant organisations. Critically, such a body would cover both London and the two English Regions that surround London (East of England and the South East).

2.2.2. Such combined coverage is particularly important given the Thameslink routes – which span from Brighton and Horsham to Cambridge and Bedford and serve three Government Regions. By working together, local authorities, SNTBs etc can become a significantly more important influencer on the services to be provided and reduce 'divide and conquer' approaches by others.

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2.2.3.   It is essential that government / political governance arrangements have similar geographic spans to Train Operating Companies, so that governance and oversight is aligned with operational activity. Whether through a Capital Regional Transport Body or one or more equivalents (for instance, a TSGN Governance Board with representatives from London, the South East and East of England), the Council should express an aspiration for the geographic span of governance to match the geography of the related rail lines covered by operators. Such mechanisms could also be a way to align to the Network Rail route structure.

2.2.4.   Such a Board would also provide a mechanism for TfL to achieve their aspiration of greater involvement in the GN Inner services, whilst still provide a mechanism for Hertfordshire CC and/or EEH to represent their constituents.

2.3. The Government's "Decarbonising Transport: Setting the Challenge" Paper

2.3.1.   The Government published this paper[3] on 26 March. The ministerial forward notes "Public transport and active travel will be the natural first choice for our daily activities. We will use our cars less and be able to rely on a convenient, cost-effective and coherent public transport network." The rail services calling at local stations are generally already electric powered (the notable exceptions being some of the longer distance services from Stevenage and also Chiltern Railway services [and also a portion of longer distance and freight services that pass through, or in the latter case, serve the County]).

2.3.2.   Delivering this vision will need some very significant increases in public transport capacity and technology. Rail is generally well placed to move large numbers of people quickly and as a consequence could become the modal choice for some services that, at present, are candidates for road vehicle solutions.   It will be important that the ambitions of the Rail Strategy are in line with the Government's paper.

- Note: We have not yet had the opportunity to review the paper in detail.

2.4. Covid-19

2.4.1.   Covid-19 will likely have a very substantial impact on the Rail industry beyond the UK's return to "Business as usual". It has already suspended the current franchising approach – moving all operators on to some variation of the GTR contract and with the Government taking full revenue and cost risk (and this much encouraging the adoption of a new contract design). Covid-19 is also likely to cause substantial change to everyone's approach to workplaces, most notably a significant, 'permanent' increase in home working for some, but not all business sectors (see 2.5.1 below) – as well as having impacts on leisure travel patterns, which might even increase in some cases.

2.4.2.   Railfuture believes it is still appropriate to proceed with Rail strategy development as the type of requirement identified therein will still be relevant; what may need the most attention afterwards are business cases and relative priorities. Having a firm basis to process these variations is still important.

2.4.3.   The possibility of a further brief round of consultation on the strategy could be appropriate once some of the uncertainty from the current Covid-19 crisis reduces.

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[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creating-the-transport-decarbonisation-plan

2.5. Changes in the demand for Rail travel

2.5.1.   Over and above the longer term impacts of Covid-19 on travel patterns (eg the increased portion of work time spent at home) we believe that the Rail Strategy should recognise:

- Increases in demand driven by new Housing – with an acknowledgement that not all are well-placed to be supported with mainline or even light rail as sustainable transport to influence incomers' travel behaviour and drive modal shift.

- That changes in home to work travel patterns are likely to vary significantly by sector – for instance staff at the Cambridge Bio-medical campus are likely to largely continue to travel to work as they need to use specialised equipment there.

- That the Cambridge area will become an increasingly important destination, particularly for work, with the planned Cambridge South station being a particular trigger for an increase in demand.

3. Section 3: Overall aspirations

3.1. Franchises

3.1.1.   The Rail Industry model is likely to change substantially if the Williams review recommendations are implemented as expected.   This content, as written, suggests that the Council would oppose a substantial change; we do not believe that this is actually the case. Rather, the Council should be seeking:

- That local stakeholders (such as the Council) have very significant influence over the service specification (including the qualities expected from the operator and the incentives and penalties to be in place) – see our comments in 2.2 above.

- That operators have longer term contracts (as in the 10 years suggested); and with break points in case of inadequate performance.

3.1.2.   The Council should set more ambitious targets for 'direct influence on the service specification and on the operator selected'; i.e. not just contribute if asked, but proactively seek involvement, either directly or through other bodies where it has influence, such as sub-national transport bodies such as EEH.

3.1.3.   We note the Council's desire for Open Access operators and believe that for longer distance services, this is the right approach. To date, there have been no Open Access operators for commuter services and, whilst we could welcome such initiatives, we have significant doubts as to how it might work in practice – important passenger needs such as a seamless service, the setting of a shared timetable, offering tickets valid on either, the benefits of giving a single controlling mind a large span of control for operational matters etc are all supportive of a single operator.   Therefore, we recommend that the Council focus its desire for Open Access operators on longer distance service operators only.

3.1.4.   There is a specific comment that Open Access operators should not lead to a reduction in train paths for local services. This should be expressed as a free standing goal (ie applicable to long distance Franchise operators as well). It may be better to express this as 'No reduction in capacity, frequency or journey time': ie as the local resident might experience a reduction in service (the last is important as there is a material risk of local services having to move from the fast to the slow lines, with linked journey time increases).

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3.1.5. We note that the Council would welcome the involvement of Transport for London in the GN Inner services. If so, there need to be mechanisms for the Council to influence the service – see our comments at 2.2 above. As shown for the Croxley link, funding constraints within the GLA could mean that TfL might de-emphasise service quality north of the boundary.

3.1.6. Putting in place arrangements that localise government oversight and influence (eg TfL manage the GN Inners with defined involvement from Hertfordshire CC) does not necessarily mean a line is separated operationally from other services. We are of the view that there is much interaction between the various service clusters – eg in the case of the GN Inners, the sharing of slow lines north of Finsbury Park with GN Outers and Thameslink, which mean that there are considerable benefits in a 'single mind' making operational decisions and planning detailed implementation. Delivering fares and tickets that are fully operator agnostic is also essential.

3.1.7. Generally, the Council's strategy should be to seek local influence and oversight, but to seek a railway operating structure that delivers 'single mind' decision making and operation.

3.2. Service levels

3.2.1. It is sensible for the Council to define expected service levels.

3.2.2. The Council should set a higher aspiration for Sunday services as they are often as busy as the rest of the week (and this should apply to both London and non-London services). As a practical matter, Sunday services may need to start later, in order to give Network Rail time to undertake engineering work, and, particularly in the morning, recognise that limits in capacity (eg only two of four lines available) will lead to lower frequencies and can mean that the aspiration of 4 trains an hour cannot be achieved on selected Sundays (and, occasionally, Saturdays).

3.2.3. The Council should define an aspiration that there are rail services in the County on Boxing Day. Whilst the service frequency might be less than that for a Sunday, it should still be sufficiently frequent (and trains should run with sufficient capacity) that residents see it as a viable alternative to cars and other more carbon intensive transport.

3.2.4. As a matter of course, Council requirements should require sufficient train capacity (eg 6 / 8 / 10 / 12 carriage trains) – Operators only providing 4 carriage trains may be very much unwanted, particularly on the Radial Routes through the County.

3.2.5. Whilst a baseline aspiration for 4 trains an hour is sensible, this will not always be achievable without very significant investment due to specific rail pinch points (eg on the West Anglia Mainline, if each branch has 4 services, the mainline would have in excess of 12 trains an hour [i.e. 4 + 4 + 2 each of Stansted Express and Cambridge 'fast']) which is unlikely to be immediately deliverable. Therefore, there does need to be some recognition of practicality. It may be sensible to split the aspiration into two:

- Deliver 4 trains per hour where already allowed by infrastructure.

- Develop business cases and deliver, where justified, additional infrastructure to bring in 4 trains per hour (with a split between tactical and strategic investments).

3.2.6. Although not in the County, it is appropriate to recognise that Luton Airport Parkway plays an equivalent role for the Midland Mainline to Watford and Stevenage – and that Bedford Midland (and possibly the new station between St Neots and Sandy) would be expected to do so after the completion of East West Rail. Similarly, West Hampstead Thameslink and Finsbury Park

provide important interchanges for travellers not going to Central London (as well as to parts of Central London).

3.3. Fares and Ticketing

3.3.1. It is appropriate to specifically mention (and commit to the retention of) the existing right of Concessionary Bus Pass holders to a 50% reduction in off-peak fares.

3.3.2. Rather than seeking Carnets, the Council should seek a more generic "Reduction for regular travel, such as the 10% reduction available for Paper Carnets". It seems clear to us that these sorts of discount will be delivered using smart card (and phone etc) technologies.

3.3.3. The Council should specifically champion pay as you go techniques and other e-tickets, such as the existing GTR KeyGo product. It should, however, also be seeking the retention of paper and other low tech solutions for those who cannot use smartcards etc.

3.3.4. Integrated or through ticketing is also essential – a single ticket / purchase covering bus and train, or cycle hire and train.

3.4. Stations

3.4.1. We concur with the view that the expectations for stations should be based on Department for Transport standards, but believe the Council should be prepared to lobby for requirements in excess of these, covering both:

- The station design and built facilities (such as the availability of toilets [including for those with reduced mobility]).
- Maintenance and availability standards – eg for lifts & toilets (including ways for these to remain open when the station is unstaffed).
- Staffed hours and services – eg turn up and go for wheelchair boarding.

3.4.2. The Strategy would benefit reference to the DfT 2015 requirement[4] 'Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations'; improvements for the specific benefit of the less mobile will usually be of benefit to all passengers.

3.5. Access to Stations

3.5.1. We agree with the goal of sustainable travel where feasible. It is important, however, to recognise that this will not always be possible for some travellers.

3.5.2. It is appropriate to make a specific reference to Council support of the 'PlusBus' scheme; this offers the potential for both regular travellers to save money (and thus encourage bus use) and for visitors to the area (who can both often save money, and have assurance on costs).

3.5.3. E-Bikes, E-Scooters and micromobility vehicles generally should be listed as specific methods. These will allow passengers to travel further, over hillier roads – but may require some charging facilities and will require significantly better security for storage.

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[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accessible-railway-stations-design-standards

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3.5.4. The possibility of cycle (and scooter) hire at stations servicing employment locations (and larger leisure destinations) should be included. A realistic end to end journey option is Home >< Own cycle >< Train >< Hired cycle >< End destination.

3.5.5. The Strategy should reference the Government's work on "Future of mobility: urban strategy"[5]; this could mean significant change to the options for travel between the rail station and home / ultimate destination. Additional micromobility vehicle possibilities and bus and equivalent services that are more flexible are likely to encourage travellers not to use the car to get to the station.

3.6. Car Parking

3.6.1. We are comfortable with these goals. The possibility of encouraging Car Club use of station car parks should be noted.

3.7. Passenger information

3.7.1. We agree with these goals but observe that paper timetables etcetera remain important for individuals who do not have Internet access – and, whilst on the move, do not have mobile internet access (including those temporarily without it, and 'not spots'). There is a requirement for a minimum level of non-internet based information delivery.

3.7.2. Provision of integrated public transport information for rail and bus is strongly supported; a specific sub-goal of consistent information presented by every channel should be added.

3.8. Interchanges

3.8.1. Cycle and E-Scooter storage (including that of sufficient quality [i.e. security] for e-Bikes/Scooters) should be specifically called out as a goal.

3.8.2. Walking can also be a specific 'interchange' improvement, particularly where there are options for new entrance points (such as Aysgarth Close in Harpenden and the eastern access in Hitchin); such entrances should be cycle capable where possible.

3.8.3. Reference should be made to the Government's new Bus strategy.

3.9. Freight

3.9.1. Railfuture is supportive of more freight facilities being made available.

3.9.2. The content in this section should be moved to section 6 of the document.

3.10. Engineering Works and Emergencies

3.10.1. We are comfortable with these goals. Not necessarily for the Strategy, but the Council should generally champion early and pro-active publicity of these works.

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[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-of-mobility-urban-strategy and https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-transport-regulatory-review-call-for-evidence-on-micromobility-vehicles-flexible-bus-services-and-mobility-as-a-service

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3.11. Passenger Safety

3.11.1. We are comfortable with these goals.

3.11.2. It would be productive to specifically mention smaller and unstaffed stations, and the public realm in the immediate vicinity (eg lighting on nearby streets and footpaths).

3.11.3. The 'Safety' described here seems to relate to the risk of crime etc. It is important to recognise two other important safety aspects, which are, perhaps, better listed under 3.4, 'Stations':

- The Platform Train Interface: the horizontal and vertical gap between the train floor / door and the platform.

- Mental health aspects, most notably discouraging and the making difficult of suicide and other self-harm attempts.

3.11.4. Both of the above should be an integrated part of the station improvement programme (as should the type of security measures imagined here). Indeed, there is an argument for combining the two topics in the strategy.

Specific lines

3.12. Introduction

3.12.1. It may be worthwhile referring to GTR's Passenger Benefit Fund, not least because it will be a source of funding for some improvements at the very start of the document's life.

3.12.2. On specific stations, we are of the view that maintenance issues (eg the car park markings at Hitchin) do not need to be listed in the Strategy (it should, of course, remain a goal for the Council to see these maintenance backlog item addressed).

3.12.3. The specific stations tables would benefit from using additional columns to identify repeating themes – such as cycling storage needs, 'Access for All' improvements and new access points.

3.13. East Coast Mainline

3.13.1. We agree with the existing aspiration for intercity services and note that the First Group Open Access plans include services to Newcastle, Morpeth and Edinburgh. There would be value in adding York as an aspiration, although we observe that many destinations requiring a change of train at York are served by train services that also call at Leeds.

3.13.2. For Inner suburban services the key challenge is capacity, so specific aspirations on train length are appropriate. We note there is risk to the peak hour Baldock services as their path over Welwyn viaduct might be 'given' to long distance operators. An aspiration to retain at least the current peak total train count for local services should be set (see also our comments in 1.3.3 above).

3.13.3. We agree with aspirations for both Stevenage and Hitchin stations, noting that the former is a difficult site to improve further.

3.13.4. Any future link between Stevenage and Luton would not form part of East West Rail as the route for this has now been selected. With East West Rail certain to be built first, and also the construction of the DART service between Luton Airport and Luton Airport Parkway railway

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station, the business case may be difficult; nevertheless, it is appropriate for it be investigated properly and we support the idea of such a line; it may be worthwhile considering the route Luton Airport >< Luton >< North of Luton [to serve planned developments in Central Bedfordshire] >< Stevenage. Our first preference for a rail based East West connection serving Hertfordshire would be light rail from St Albans (including St Albans Abbey station) to Hatfield / Welwyn Garden City, and possibly further east to Hertford, and west to Hemel Hempstead.

- A productive first step might be to create a bus based mini mass rapid transport link between Luton and Stevenage (via the Airport).

3.13.5. We have commented earlier in 3.1.5 above & 2.2.4 above on TfL's aspirations for transfer of Moorgate services.

3.14. Midland Mainline

3.14.1. On Intercity service calls at Luton Airport Parkway (or Luton), we believe that it is not a realistic expectation that all services call, and it would be better to seek, say, a minimum of 2 trains per hour for destinations in Leicester or further north; such a change could make it easier to obtain support from stakeholders outside Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

3.14.2. As the airport is a significant destination in its own right, it is better to focus attempts to get Intercity calls there (rather than at Luton [Town]).

3.14.3. Once East West Rail arrives in Bedford, there will be pressure for East Midlands Railways services to make additional calls at Bedford. The Council should support this desire and be prepared to support proposals for a new platform on the London bound fast line for EMR services.

3.14.4. For St Albans calls on Corby (or EMR Electric) services, the immediate aspiration should be for a proper assessment of the advantages and disadvantages with this then evolving into an aspiration for calls if there is an identified net benefit.

3.14.5. On calls for EMR to call at St Albans during times of disruption, this should be for EMR Electric / Corby services rather than Intercity services and we do not believe there is a need to mention infrastructure works.

3.14.6. For St Albans, the need for a second footbridge should be included explicitly; this has already made substantial progress through the rail RNEP process.

3.14.7. We have commented on the proposed Luton to Stevenage link under East Coast Mainline.

3.15. West Anglia Mainline

3.15.1. We support the aspirations for 4 tracking and Crossrail 2, as well as the establishment of new stations.

3.15.2. We comment further on Stansted Airport links in 4.3 below.

3.16. West Coast Mainline

3.16.1. We welcome the proposals to:

- Develop the train services at Watford Junction to make it a 'super hub' for Western Hertfordshire.

- Invest in Watford Junction station; it is currently not fit for purpose and substantial upgrades including a new overbridge and secondary access/egress are required as part of any rail hub scheme. Such a development should specifically address capacity (including on the platforms) and Access for All improvements.

3.16.2. The 'super hub' proposals would benefit from:

- Setting out that this will be a multi-stage journey with a series of largely independent initiatives each of which can be delivered in isolation.

- Distinguishing between those proposals which might be delivered from existing resources or relatively limited investment (and might be fundable from regional funds) and those which will require very substantial investment and could need nationally provided investment (eg the Watford Junction link for the Aylesbury proposal). It may also be worthwhile specifically identifying that improved West London line services may require primary legislation (to reduce the portion of capacity allocated to freight services).

- With regard to the existing resources point, setting a two train per hour (or more) target for the Abbey line is appropriate – this should meet the "relatively limited investment" test.

- Recognising that some of the proposals are not all or nothing – for instance, an increase in the West London line service to 2 trains per hour but running only to East Croydon is still a worthwhile improvement.

- We note that there is no specific reference to reactivating the Metropolitan Line Extension proposals to re-route these Watford services to Junction station. Given that the infrastructure works to achieve this would probably be common to the proposed Watford Junction to Aylesbury service (see 3.17.2 below), this could be mentioned as an additional or complementary benefit.

- A specific reference to HS2 – this may be needed to release train paths for some of the initiatives.

3.16.3. A specific goal should be set that West London line services run at least as far south as East Croydon and as far north as Milton Keynes (and continuing to serve all the existing Hertfordshire stations [Watford Junction, Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted & Tring]).

- A sub-requirement should be that West London line services run north of Watford Junction on Sundays – possibly only after lunch (to recognise regular engineering works requirements).

3.16.4. We agree that, in the event of the HS2 line London terminus being Old Oak Common (either temporarily or permanently), then a rail link between Watford Junction and Old Oak Common will be a high priority. Options to be considered should include a St Albans Abbey to Old Oak Common service, to take advantage of newly released capacity on the WCML south of Watford.

3.16.5. We comment on the proposed link to Aylesbury in the Chiltern Line section immediately below and on the East West Mass Rapid Transit in section 4.4 below.

3.17. Chiltern Line

3.17.1. We are of the view that this section needs a significant re-write to better show the distinction between Chiltern Mainline services and the Metropolitan line.

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3.17.2. We welcome the proposal for a new service between Watford Junction and Rickmansworth / Aylesbury and believe that Watford Junction is the best destination within the Watford conurbation.

3.17.3. To better align delivery with the end of the current Chiltern contract (2022, but clearly subject to an extension), it may be worthwhile considering a 'preview' service that uses the Watford Metropolitan line station, with a bus shuttle to/from Watford Junction and the town centre provided. Whilst this is significantly sub optimal for onward connectivity to the North, South and East, it should be deliverable significantly more quickly and with no, or at least limited, investment (other than in rolling stock). With this approach it may be possible to get a Watford >< Aylesbury service added to the Chiltern successor train operator contract.

3.17.4. When a new link to Watford Junction is considered, aims need to include serving Watford Football Club and Watford General hospital, either with a Stadium station or at Vicarage Road on the Croxley Link. Such a link could also be used by Metropolitan line trains (although there may be a case for some, particularly at peak hours, to continue to the existing Metropolitan line station to serve residents in the area).

3.17.5. The Council's aspirations should include operation of the new service as an extension of the EWR Western section between Milton Keynes and Aylesbury; whilst there would be limited end to end traffic due to relatively long journey times, opportunities such as Rickmansworth to Milton Keynes without change would be created, and service operation should be more efficient.

4. Strategic Projects

4.1. High Speed 2

4.1.1. We note the Council's desire for "priority for capacity reallocation given to services at current intercity speeds but providing intermediate stops at Watford Junction and other similar stations…" and support this goal, but believe a review is needed to determine if a portion of that capacity is better allocated to local services.

4.2. East West Rail

4.2.1. We note that since the publication of the draft, "Route E" has been selected as the preferred route; this option has the advantage that it includes the existing Bedford Midland station which can be reasonably expected to mean good connectivity between East West Rail and Thameslink Services.

4.2.2. Consequently, the Council's aspirations should include that the new station to be constructed on the East Coast Mainline between St Neots and Sandy has four platforms on the ECML and thus is suitable for Intercity service stops (as there are platforms on the fast lines). Over the time, the Council will need to decide on the balance between supporting Stevenage and this station.

4.2.3. We comment on East West Rail implications for Bedford station in 3.14.3 above.

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4.3. Access to International Airports

4.3.1. The described short term improvements for Gatwick and Luton are now largely completed; we agreed that Crossrail 1 will offer a step change for Heathrow access. The aspiration for more trains to Stansted for early & late flights should also be extended to Luton Airport.

4.3.2. As regards the longer term improvements, we concur with the appropriateness of investigating rail based solutions for connecting north Hertfordshire towns to Luton and the Airport, but have doubts for the business case, given Mass Rapid Transit proposals to the south and East West Rail to the north – see our comments in 3.13.4 above.

4.3.3. For Stansted, we are of the view that more than double tracking the tunnel to the Airport station is needed. Railfuture East Anglia has been considering more effective options, in particular the possibilities of creating a new double track link to the airport from Broxbourne Junction and 4 tracking south from there, this meaning the equivalent of a 4 track railway exists all the way to the Airport. Initiatives like this would create the capacity to meet both the needs of local residents / businesses and airport travellers. The Council should set an aspiration of a 4 track (equivalent) railway to north of Stansted Airport.

4.4. Hertfordshire East West A414 Corridor Strategy / Mass Rapid Transit

4.4.1. We note that this is only lightly referred to in the Rail Strategy, presumably in part because the Council's A414 Corridor Strategy[6] sees it as " .. unlikely to involve rail tracks and is more likely to be a system using purpose-built on-road vehicles running on a mixture of dedicated new routes and repurposed existing highway".

4.4.2. Our experience of other rail based transport improvements shows they frequently outperform expectations and do strongly encourage a modal shift from the car to public transport. For instance, in Scotland, the Stirling to Alloa line shows actual ridership 3 times higher than predicted.

4.4.3. By contrast, many road vehicle based solutions have shown to be less successful and more expensive than predicted.

4.4.4.   We draw the Council's attention to the following articles and presentations:

- Railfuture: "Prospects for light rail".

- The analysis undertaken for Cambridge Connect. This concluded that Light Rail was the "most effective long-term solution to deliver reliable, frequent, fast and sustainable transport for Cambridge". In the light of the expected shift towards public transport from the Government's Decarbonisation Strategy light rail's high volume capabilities might be particularly important.

- BBC: "Edinburgh's trams see passenger numbers and profits up".

- UK Tram presentation to the 2018 Railfuture London & South East Branch Annual meeting: "The benefits of modern trams in cities and towns".

- CityMetric: "Why is light rail still in the sidings? The case for trams".

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[6] https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/news/press-releases/new-rapid-cross-county-transport-system-proposed-for-hertfordshire.aspx

- Bath & Bristol Trams: "Why trams work and buses don't – buses are good for tram feeder routes and rural routes" and "Car drivers will not use buses – 5".

- Wikipedia on Coventry Light Rail (mentioned more for the innovations on track, rather than the vehicles, designed for intra-urban, rather than inter-urban). See also this presentation by Dr Nick Mallinson of the University of Warwick.

4.4.5. The reflections that will take place in the Council as the Rail Strategy are finalised are also a suitable moment to initiate a revisit of the targeted approaches (rail, road etc), and also to consider the implications of the Government's Decarbonisation in Transport and Mobility as a Service initiatives. Revised approaches could include making the core of the Mass Rapid Transit service rail based and supplement it with a road vehicle based solution for the periphery – or use feeder options similar to Coventry Light Rail.

4.4.6. Irrespective of the option chosen for the Mass Rapid Transport service, the Rail Strategy should specifically reference the importance of effective interchange with existing (mainly radial) Rail stations. Without such interactions, journeys such as Harpenden to Hertford will remain difficult and slow; much better that there is easy interchange at St Albans (or a new) Railway station.

4.4.7. It is essential that the whole solution is ambitious – and integrated. If the whole end-to-end journey doesn't make sense to travellers by a combination of public transport and foot, cycle and micromobility options for the 'last mile' then it is likely that none of it will occur that way.

4.4.8. The Council might wish to specifically set a tactical improvement goal of:

- Getting a passing loop installed on the Abbey Line and, subsequently a 20 / 30 minute interval service.

- Considering the linked possibility of changes to, or additional, local buses in St Albans & Watford. For instance, Arriva's 302 from Hemel Hempstead to Welwyn Garden City might be re-routed via Abbey Station. It is noted that it currently runs via St Albans Hospital instead, and a move away from this means that a wider reorganisation of buses in St Alban is likely to be needed.

- A linked express bus service that runs St Albans City station >< St Albans town centre >< St Albans Abbey station >< Hatfield Town Centre >< Hatfield station >< Hertford North station >< Hertford Town centre and Hertford East. A westward extension to Hemel Hempstead and a route via Welwyn Garden City should also be evaluated.

5. Station Facilities, Station Access and Train Facilities

5.1.1. We support the issues and aspirations identified, but believe that activity needs to be assessed for the end to end journey – for instance Thameslink and Great Northern outer trains have toilets, but the Moorgate trains do not; therefore Toilet provision is relatively more important at stations served by Moorgate trains.

5.1.2. On car parking, we agreed with prioritising sustainable access modes where possible. Generically, addressing car parking capacity issues by allowing passengers to travel to/from the station by alternative means 'must' be a preferred option.

5.1.3. On Access improvements, we agree with the focus on the 'door to door' journey.

5.1.4.   On Station and Train facility upgrades, disabled access improvements should be called out as a specific goal and it be recognised that the requirement is a combination of improved facilities, reliable operation and enough (trained) staff. Providing facilities such as lifts will be of limited benefit if low reliability means that those who need them do not trust them to be available and therefore do not travel.

6. Freight

6.1.1.   We support the aspiration for encouraging shift towards rail. As regards the key issues:

- That the risk to peak hour passenger paths is not a key issue (the aspiration set out is still sensible).

- There should be recognition of construction impact – for instance, APTU, a Rail User Group on the Midland Mainline, has been less worried about the congestion impacts of trains travelling to the proposed freight depot at Radlett, and more worried about service reductions during time needed to modify the railway (in this case, a suggestion of substantial works in the Elstree Tunnels).

7. Other Projects

7.1. Community Rail

7.1.1.   The Council should include a specific aspiration to support Community Rail.

7.2. Interchanges

7.2.1.   We support this initiative.

7.3. Small schemes

7.3.1.   We support this initiative.

7.4. Intalink

7.4.1.   We support this initiative.

7.5. Joint working

7.5.1.   This will continue to be a very important aspect; many of the Council's aspirations can only be achieved in partnership with others.

railfuture Herts & Beds

Comments on the Hertfordshire County Council Draft Rail Strategy

Appendix – Updates to reflect the passage of time & other smaller omissions

Note: we do not warrant that this list is complete.

1. In the Introduction (top page 2, line 7), refer to 'future train operating contracts' rather than 'franchises' (this change should be applied globally).

2. In 1.1, the third sentence should reference the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline as well as HLOS etc.

3. In 1.2, refer to recent devolution within Network Rail to more empowered Routes (and a hope of easier dialogue?).

4. In 1.2 re the Hertfordshire Journeys, as well as an updated number, the basis of calculation should be included (eg to/from stations in Hertfordshire).

5. Figure 1: it would be helpful to label the Chiltern/Metropolitan lines and add Chesham and Amersham as termini.

6. 1.3 bullet 2: add Hitchin, which has a comparable footfall to Harpenden and Elstree & Borehamwood; amend fraction as appropriate for 2019 data.

7. 1.3 The station list needs to be updated to reflect the current top stations – eg both Hitchin and Bishops Stortford have higher passenger counts than Elstree & Borehamwood.

8. 1.3 bullet 2 of final section, and ECML Inner Suburban Services: is this still the case given the roll-out of Class 717? Also, work in progress on the Northern City line between Finsbury Park and Moorgate includes preparation for a new signalling system that will increase capacity.

9. 1.4 refer to responding to Train Operating Company timetable and other consultations.

10. 1.4 final para: add EEH, the designated Sub-national Transport Body for the Oxford-Cambridge arc that would embrace Stevenage and North Herts. Also expand ECMA, WCR250 (and EEH) to full name.

11. 3.2: For the longer distance service text, this should be usefully clarified by stating "to / from North of Hertfordshire".

12. 3.17.1 Specifically mention in Fig 6: Croxley and Watford (Met) are not covered by the Chiltern line franchise.

13. EWR: The Western section will not be electrified. However, this whole section of the draft will need to be reviewed for the final document in the light of announcements on the TWAO application for the Western Section and the finalisation of the route of the Central section. For example, the interchange station with ECML, "Sandy", could be anywhere between Sandy and St Neots.

14. Section 5 Train Upgrades: Roll out of the Class 717 fleet is now complete.

15. ECML Current Services: alternate Leeds trains are now extended to Harrogate; Newark services are extended to Lincoln. Hull Trains do not serve Stevenage but there is a regular LNER service on Sundays.

16. eg section 1.2 would be improved by giving greater distinction to National Rail Chiltern line services and Transport for London Metropolitan line services. Figure 6 on page 38 should also make this clearer.

Comments on the Hertfordshire County Council Draft Rail Strategy

17. On Thameslink Midland Mainline, there are now effectively no further improvements from the Thameslink Programme; at present there is a significant service impact from the lack of EMR Peak Calls at Bedford and Luton causing there to be fewer stops at Harpenden – hopefully these will be addressed for the December 2020 timetable.

18. On the MML, it would be useful to clarify that the reduction in inter-city services relates to calls in Bedfordshire – net there will be an increase of 1 TPH for East Midlands.

19. On the MML, you may wish to mention future work to deliver 125Mph Electric Trains.

20. On the WAML diagram, identify the Southbury loop.

21. On 8.5, Joint Working, mention England's Economic Heartland.