railfuture

Campaigning for better services over a bigger rail network

Freight Network Study
Consultation Response
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Dear Network Rail planner,

Railfuture Response to Network Rail's Freight Network Strategy.

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

2. The promotion of freight on the railway is important for our members who recognise the contribution that rail freight makes to the general environment and quality of life in the United Kingdom. This includes making the road network safer in terms of accidents, air pollution and reducing congestion. The national economy benefits as the railway network allows goods to be shifted in a timely, safe and efficient manner that cannot be matched by other modes. We do however recognise that the network does require more capacity to enable it to do even more and to that end we warmly welcome this consultation and the opportunity to respond to it.

General commentary on this consultation aims.

3. We welcome the study for its thoroughness, its scope (30 years) and because it is based on market forecasts. The study is quite properly based on the premise of the present national policy on freight transport in Britain which

reflects an imperfect market (particularly related to meeting infrastructure costs). Over a thirty year period, this approach may change, for example to encourage modal shift to meet emissions targets, or as a result of worsening road congestion undermining the reliability of road transits. Under such circumstances, we believe the assumptions in the study would need to be revisited, and that the proposals it contains would need to be enhanced to meet a substantial increase in demand for rail following any significant change in the current policy.

4. The study sets out clearly where the pinch points on the network are and will be. We welcome the recognition that all the pinch points need to be looked as holistically rather than individually. Since the last study of this nature in 2008 we are pleased to note progress being made to creating a network where freight and passenger trains can operate efficiently. A good example is the creation of a major freight railway parallel to the ECML between Peterborough and Doncaster - though it is a pity the route was not completed with the reestablishment of a Peterborough Bypass Line between March and the Spalding area as the 2008 report suggested was to be the next step. A second example is major reconstruction of the railway from Kilmarnock to Leeds/Blackburn through Carlisle and Hellifield for freight (coal in particular) allowed the development of other traffic flows though this does highlight the risks of upgrades that depend on a single commodity such as coal for major investment. The coal traffic has by and large ceased. The deep water port at Hunterston and the high quality freight routes serving it especially from the south via Settle, Carlisle and Dumfries perhaps should have been showcased for the new biomass flows. It is a reminder that, in a market economy with the absence of central planning of infrastructure, both road and rail infrastructure may require expensive alterations to suit shippers' decisions which will depend primarily on the efficiency of the port, or its charges, rather than its accessibility.

5. In general we want the needs of the passenger railway to be considered alongside that of the freight railway to enable both to be operated efficiently with sufficient capacity for both. It is important that a high quality network for freight can be forged where possible making use of passenger routes that have limited expectation of expansion beyond one passenger train per hour. This will allow best use of legacy but underused infrastructure, together with the judicious construction of new curves and loops to interconnect and enhance existing routes. The freight railway uses sophisticated and expensive equipment that needs to be worked intensively. Our freight trains need to be longer and move quicker end to end, to enable the freight railway to achieve its greatest attributes for transporting goods, 'volume and velocity' as well as safety.

6. The need to work with local authorities and new regional bodies such as Rail North and Transport for the North is paramount too. The demographic and economic landscape of the U.K. is changing rapidly. Planning the network needs to recognise that some parts of it require a much more intensive passenger service to serve the new emerging economies than ever could have been envisaged just a few years ago, for example around Exeter,

Bristol, Cambridge, Ely, Ipswich, in West Yorkshire, Manchester and Newcastle.

7. New works projects normally benefit both the TOCs and the FOCs but rising costs are a concern, and we know are being tackled following the Shaw Report and the others published earlier this year. The Freight Network Study should help in producing a clearer prospectus to reduce the uncertainty in planning individual projects, and we hope that skilful possession planning linking projects on the same route, may also help to reduce the cost of possessions, and particularly of compensation to operators (by reducing disruption to passenger services).

Intermodal freight interchanges/ distribution depots.

8. For the freight railway to continue to develop there must be more depots to enable modal transfer to take place efficiently. The study should show where in indicative terms the rail freight industry considers such depots should be provided. The track record here is not good, with many failed attempts by developers to provide rail connected depots. This is not helped by the lack of a national planning framework to allow the many conflicting issues to be addressed and resolved. Local resistance to the siting of depots is strong, and local councils struggle alone to balance local against national need. We note and support the Northern local authorities for call for freight distribution depots at most large towns and cities. This should be the case nationally, particularly in the South East, where the number of depots is particularly low. The case for this is perhaps strengthened by the high forecasts in the study for the growth in domestic intermodal traffic.

Timetables/ the digital railway

9. We believe that investigations should take place fairly quickly as a part of this study along all 8 corridors but particularly along corridor 3 and 8 to enable an understanding of just how much more capacity the railway can provide through better timetabling. We mention corridors 3 and 8 because that is where there is so much capacity constraint and latent demand set against the need for the urgent renewal of track and signalling infrastructure and installation of resilience measures especially at critical junctions or on routes with long stretches of unrelieved plain track.

EWRL

10. The East West Rail Link will interface with important freight railways at Oxford, Bletchley/MK, Bedford and Cambridge. Within this study there should be an investigation of ways in which the EWRL will interface at the nodes above and how this is will affect flows on other routes. The EWRL *could*, if constructed with sufficient capacity for freight and passengers over the longer term, mean interventions are not required at other nodes on such a large scale, for example at Ely, Leicester and so on. The EWRL must be constructed throughout for at least two freight trains per hour. (By throughout we mean from Felixstowe to Oxford.)

Electrification

11. We note the commentary regarding electrification. Electric traction is desirable because heavier loads can be lifted at higher speeds especially on steeper gradients. In the long run, electric traction allows power to be supplied by any method from carbon based fuel to nuclear and renewables.

12. We endorse the comments regarding wiring up the line from Felixstowe to Birmingham as this will also align with the TOCs' aspirations to do so too, especially in East Anglia and the West Midlands. We assume the completed EWRL will be electrified from the outset so this will fit in with the local TOCs aspiration to see an electrified route via Newmarket.

13. The electrification of routes out of Southampton via Salisbury / Laverstock Jct and Andover will align with the aspirations of the TOC and continue to give the important versatility needed for freight routing to and from such an important freight point of origin.

14. Wiring the extremities of the Barking Gospel Oak line to enable through running from to the Midland Mainline and into the Port of London Gateway must be completed in the short term.

Nodal Yards / Loops

15. Keeping freight trains on the move is the most efficient method of operation, hence the suggestion above that the freight railway should be concentrated on links that have a lighter use by passenger services where feasible. However the mixed use railway will continue to form the backbone of the network so the suggestion of the need for nodal yards at key junctions that are able to take in full length freight trains for regulation purposes is a good one.

16. On all 8 corridors full length loops that can recess freight trains so that they can be overtaken by passenger trains are essential too. Often 'legacy' loops are too short for the modern freight train so there should be a programme to lengthen them to enable them to be useful. The entrance and exits of loops must redeveloped for higher speeds so that trains be recessed and start up again more quickly to maintain optimum capacity. On many routes there are sites where loops existed previously and these should safeguarded, reinstated and reused as appropriate and in relatively short order, as this can be a classic 'quick win.' There should be a full length loop wherever possible at roughly 10 mile intervals and this should be the established norm on routes which are expected to carry regular freight traffic. In some cases, especially where gradients are significant, longer stretches of four tracks should be reinstated so the heavy freight trains are not brought to a stand unnecessarily.

17. While generally supporting the concept of infrastructure being redeveloped to take 775m trains, we would urge a pragmatic approach to applying this standard. An example is on the Felixstowe to Birmingham corridor east of Ely where Felixstowe port itself can only accommodate 700 m trains.

18. Apart from capacity enhancements on existing lines, we believe there is scope for some alternative routes that avoid major passenger nodes where possible (see below). Major interventions are proposed on the Southampton to West Midlands route, for example, including long loops between Eastleigh and Basingstoke and what is likely to be a costly intervention at Winchester, as outlined in the Wessex Route study. In view of the potential cost and physical impact of schemes in the Basingstoke and Reading areas, we are prompted to wonder whether it would not be worth comparing this with the cost and feasibility of restoring the line from the former Winchester Junction or Newbury to Didcot as a freight only route which would remove the need for the extra capacity via Basingstoke and possible further interventions between Basingstoke, Reading and Didcot. Whilst there have been many incursions on this route, it might be considered as the basis of a future freight spine, at least over part of the route.

19. For the longer term we welcome the development of a railway that is able to provide 1500m intermodal and car carrying trains and up to 2600t heavy haul trains of denser materials.

New Lines

20. Three new lines have actually been suggested in the consultation paper:

    Stenson Junction - MML for Felixstowe to Manchester traffic, avoiding the constraints of Sheet Stores and Trent Junctions.

    Matlock – Buxton which would provide direct access from the Peak Forest quarries to the East Midlands and East Anglia, while relieving capacity in the Manchester area and on the Hope Valley line and Midland Main Line through Chesterfield. This is a sensible suggestion to fill a gap in the network. See also below in the route 8 commentary.

    Pitsea – Ingatestone would serve the London Gateway port and create capacity in the Tilbury/Barking area and across North London. This routing would feed traffic onto the GEML that is currently under severe capacity problems, particularly on the Chelmsford – Colchester section. With this in mind, we suggest it might be preferable to consider such a link in connection with the Braintree – Stansted Airport link referred to in our response to the East Anglia route study. This would allow freight trains from Tilbury and London Gateway to be routed via Witham, Stansted, Cambridge and Ely towards the North West and Yorkshire & Humberside. The WAML was an important freight route well equipped with legacy loops still extant or the land they occupied still available. Such a 'via the airport' line may attract third party funding.

21. We would add:

    March - Spalding. As mentioned above, this link was suggested for reinstatement by NR in 2008. As the Peterborough Avoiding Line it would

keep many freight trains away from the busy Peterborough junctions and considerable shorten transits. It would provide alternative routes to and via Nottingham, MML and Stenson Junction avoiding the ECML. An alternative might be on a new alignment by-passing Peterborough from Whittlesea to Peakirk (north of Werrington Junction), following the corridor of the Peterborough eastern by-pass (A 15).

Manchester Avoiding Line...see note in 'Corridor 8' below.

Reading Avoiding Line ...see above, Winchester – Didcot suggestion

See also section on nodal yards/ loops above.

Comments on proposals for each of the strategic corridors.

Corridor 1 WCML

See comments above re EWRL.

Corridor 2 East Mids Yorks/Lincs

See note also re corridor 3 below.

Corridor 3 Felixstowe -Ely -Peterborough/ -Leicester -Birmingham/ Yorkshire/NW/ NE...Strategic Business Case

We note the proposals for this route concentrating on the Ely and Leicester areas. At a more detailed level we would suggest that to cater for the expected number of intermodal trains and other traffic growth, as well as great local pressure for more passenger trains into Cambridge, including a reinstated Soham station and Newmarket West Curve, a series of loops be constructed using legacy infrastructure where possible, for example as at Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket, Chippenham - Snailwell Junctions, March....that is every 10 miles or so. The proposal to put all the projects along the full route 3 into one TWA application we support as a good idea.

We mention the Peterborough Avoiding Line above ...probably a better idea than an Ely avoiding line, as it will provide a shorter route to the north and allow the development of the Sleaford to Netherfield Jct. line via the Allingham Junctions. It would perhaps be useful to consider some of corridor 2 with 3. For example the problems at the Lincoln level crossings caused by frequent long freight trains could be partially alleviated by routing the oil trains from Immingham to run via Sleaford and Bottesford, which would also remove them from the crossing over the ECML at Newark. This would require the construction of an east to south curve on the eastern approach to Lincoln from Cherry Willingham level crossing round to the Joint Line at Branston & Washingborough and a second curve (north to west) at Sleaford West Junction. We recognise that grade separation is still vital at Newark. This suggested diversionary route would also allow the Immingham to Rectory Road oil trains to run directly avoiding the ECML and a run round at Grantham.

Given the pressures of on the passenger railway in East Anglia and the latent demand at Felixstowe port for more freight services, we suggest that development of this corridor throughout from Felixstowe to the West Midlands and the North of England via Ely, then using a variety of routes be given the highest priority. This will help the FOCs stabilise as they readjust to sudden and permanent loss of coal traffic.

Corridor 4 Southampton West Midlands

We welcome the development of alternative routes as suggested. In the long term the Reading traffic node will need attention hence the need to keep in mind the Winchester or Newbury-Didcot route.

The work to alleviate congestion at the nodes of Southampton, Basingstoke, Reading, Didcot/Oxford should be, along with corridors 3 and 8, be the highest priorities.

Corridor 5 Channel Tunnel Routes, South London, Kent

No specific comment

Corridor 6. Cross London Essex Thameside

Development of alternative routes especially via Ely to be the priority.

Corridor 7 South Wales Midlands

Development of Birmingham Avoiding Lines should be the priority.

Corridor 8 Northern Ports Trans Pennine

The railway network in the North of England has had much spare and resilience capacity stripped out of it over the years so that current passenger operations take most capacity. This is particularly so across the critical trans Pennine routes which includes the Wakefield to Heaton Lodge Jct., the Hebden Bridge route; the Huddersfield (Diggle) route and the Hope Valley line. The lack of capacity that now exists together with poor gauge clearance has severely inhibited the development of East/West traffic flows and possible placed even existing traffic flows at risk because of extended transit times from loading to unloading points. Freight trains on these routes often are given poor end to end running times that defeat rail's greatest attribute of volume and velocity. There long stretches of unrelieved plain line and the 10 mile loop rule would be of particular benefit, especially in view of the steep gradients and plentiful curves.

Concurrent with the development of plans for electrification of the trans-Pennine route via Huddersfield we support the urgent priority for gauge clearance and the development of two freight paths per hour and a stopping passenger train service between Wakefield and Victoria/Guide Bridge using existing disused track formations and parallel disused track east of Stalybridge to enable full flexibility. Such a

reinstatement would transform passenger and freight service reliability at a relatively modest cost and could be initiated relatively quickly.

In this area alternative routes are a priority and the route from Wakefield through Heaton Lodge Junction to Hebden Bridge and Brewery Sidings must be available for most freight traffic. The TOC is committed under the new franchise to enhanced passenger train services and dynamic loops or four tracking should be reinstated at locations such as Brewery Sidings, Rochdale, Mytholmroyd and Brighouse for timetable regulation and emergency regulation.

The route from Liverpool to Wigan, Farrington Jct / Lostock Jct, Blackburn and Hall Royd Junction should be similarly upgraded to enable different classes of train to be operated either as timetabled or in periods of perturbation, especially in view of the gradients encountered in this route.

Critical is the lack of a quality East/West Manchester bypass line. Currently it is circuitous and very time consuming. For rail freight to access the Liverpool area this has to be tackled to enable the rail mode to be competitive with road and to make the use of the workforce , engine and wagon fleets more efficient. To this end consideration should be given to re-opening of Glazebrook Junction – West Skelton Junction to recreate a 'round Manchester' orbital route.

The Matlock to Buxton (and Chinley) proposal in this report is referred to above. If this were to come about huge capacity uplift would be achieved which would ease problems around Dore/Sheffield station and south towards Chesterfield and on the Hope Valley line. This proposal should be kept in mind during planning for HS2 in this area which is likely to cause disruption during the construction phase requiring diversion of both passenger and freight traffic.

Conclusion.

a) The ideas contained within this Consultation are welcomed by Railfuture.

b) It represents a welcome approach to expanding the capability of the network and creating the opportunity for significant additional capacity for the rail freight sectors where growth is forecast. It provides some of the capability needed for the long term sustainable network that is the railway. Such development will be good for the country in terms of people's quality of life, as well as for virtually all other environmental considerations. It provides a sustainable way of moving freight for the long term, and electrification can 'future proof' the network as the electrical supply can be from any power source, and is not limited to fossil fuels as is the case with road haulage.

c) It also takes some account of the growth of the passenger railway which is equally important, where the capacity demands of both often coincide. For example, around Manchester, Birmingham, Peterborough, Reading, Leicester, Ely, and along the GEML, NLL, WCML, ECML. Where possible to enable both activities to grow, we have suggested the gradual development of a long distance national freight network that enables many freight services to avoid these nodes and lines, using more lightly used passenger routes or new

routes that enable rail freight to achieve its greatest attribute of volume and velocity. Where a parallel freight railway is not entirely possible, the development of loops, nodal yards as suggested, is imperative.

d) It does not provide the capacity and capability that would be required if transport policy were to change, and (for example), other European road hauliers were charged the full infrastructure costs they incur or if, for environmental reasons, fiscal incentives were to encourage modal shift to rail, particularly to encourage exports to the rest of Europe post Brexit, for example. If the policy were to change, this study would need to be reviewed.

Yours sincerely

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