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2021-07-04

Dear Sir/Madam,

Ely Area Capacity Enhancement – round 2

Railfuture is Britain's leading, 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 at local, regional and national levels to implement pro-rail policies in transport and development planning.

We welcome this latest consultation by Network Rail as an opportunity to further develop our engagement in the sequence of public consultations which began last year, and to which we responded on 1st November 2020: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display2495>. We note that this second consultation focusses on potential options for the area called Ely South and is due to be followed by a third round later this year on options in the rest of the Ely area, and then by a final round in 2022 on preferred options within the EACE programme before proceeding to an application for an Order under the Transport and Works Act.

4. In general, we support the proposals to upgrade the railway in the Ely south area

Strongly agree

Please explain why

As we advocate a bigger better railway so we support, in general terms, proposals to upgrade the railway in the Ely South area as a vital component in the totality of the wider Ely Area Capacity Enhancement programme. It is imperative however that these Ely South proposals fit as an integral component within the overall programme in order to ensure their full effectiveness and are neither considered nor taken forward in isolation. The strategic national importance of the Ely Area Enhancements programme is recognised by four of the seven Sub-National Transport Bodies in England - Transport East, England's Economic Heartland, Midlands Connect, and Transport for the North - as well as the devolved administration for Scotland.

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

Notwithstanding our strong in-principle support, however, our overall conclusion is that the proposals as presented lack the necessary ambition to deliver the required transformational change, and for this reason Railfuture has developed its own proposals for the Ely area which are set out in the paper accompanying this submission. We shall therefore focus our comments on the proposals as presented in the consultation by describing where they differ from those prepared by ourselves.

The proposed service enhancements of 3.5 trains per hour (tph) do not reflect local passenger service aspirations for two trains per hour for Wisbech, hourly Oxford-Norwich services via Cambridge, and an additional hourly Birmingham service for Cambridge / Stansted Airport. The service assumptions therefore make no allowance for further development as none of these are included in the list of enhancements.

For freight, Railfuture considers that for modelling purposes it is unsafe to assume that Ely will be required to accommodate any fewer than six trains per hour (three in each direction). As recently as August 2020, Network Rail in partnership with the MDS Transmodal consultancy modelled a variety of scenarios for unconstrained freight demand showing that by 2044 up to 120 of these trains per day would pass through Ely between Felixstowe and the Midlands and North, with a smaller number of other freight movements for Kings Lynn and Norwich. While this represents an average of five per hour (aggregated over both directions) this assumes an even flow throughout the day. This in reality is rarely achieved and makes no allowance for perturbation. It is not clear whether there is an assumption of running more trains at night to offset peak-hour restrictions but it has to be remembered that freight services run over distances of 200km or more and avoiding peak-hour passenger services somewhere along the route is all but an impossibility. The assumption in the consultation identifying up to three trains per hour per direction can be demonstrated therefore to make no allowance for growth beyond 2043. Given the likely timescale for delivering the Ely Area Enhancements programme in full, including those elements upon which Network Rail are yet to consult, such as remodelling of Ely North Junction and doubling the line to Soham, which are unlikely to be delivered within the next 10 years, this gives a 'design life' of little more than a decade after programme completion.

As we noted in our 1 November 2020 response to the first round of consultation, it is about 30 years since the railway through Ely was last substantially altered. Perpetual pressure on national budgets gives no comfort to any idea other than that the present EACE programme will almost certainly have to suffice for at least as long, and in the context of a growing national aversion to any more significant road-building and a strategic policy drive to substantial mode shift in the face of a range of socio-economic and environmental imperatives, the presently-proposed changes will be judged as short-sighted and lack-lustre in comparison with the scale of transformation required.

5. Do you have any comments about the Soham branch line proposals we should consider?

While we would have much preferred to see a scheme for doubling the line all the way to Soham, we support the proposals as presented as an initial worthwhile increment but on the clear understanding that nothing in these plans precludes or inhibits doubling of the line at the earliest opportunity.

6. Do you have any comments about the Ely Dock junction proposals we should consider?

No.

7. Do you have any comments about the Ely station proposals we should consider?

Our proposals advocate a more radical rethink of Ely station. They include provision for the through Norwich-Liverpool services to turn-back in bay platforms, and the option of adding a second island platform east of the existing.

8. Do you have any comments about the Stuntney Road Bridge we should consider?

We advocate four tracks north of Ely station rather than three (two separate double-track routes) and propose that provision for these should be made within any remodelling of the Stuntney Road bridge.

9. At Cutter Bridge is your preference

Option 2 two bridges side by side

Please explain why

Railfuture supports the replacement of these life-expired bridge structures as part of a package to increase line speeds and secure a safe and reliable future for the line. For Cutter Bridge we support an *enhanced* version of Option 2, the provision of a second bridge but in our proposal we show both bridges accommodating double tracks. We assume that Network Rail will build the replacement Cutter Bridge on a worksite east of the old bridge and then slide the replacement into position upon removal of the old bridge. Our proposal would then go on to construct a second bridge on the worksite.

10. At Cutter Bridge do you prefer

Archway bridge

Otherwise known as a bow-string bridge, preferred both as a symbolic signature of change and as a more elegant structure.

11. At Common Muckhill Bridge is your preference

Option 1 Single deck bridge

We assume that a worksite will be set up to the east of the existing bridge. On this site we would construct a second double-track bridge, probably slightly elevated in relation to the first as this is where our proposals for a grade separated embankment / viaduct begin.

12. If Option 1 at Common Muckhill Bridge is chosen, would you prefer

Archway bridge

For consistency and as a symbolic signature of change as well as a more elegant structure.

13. At Kiln Lane, for the footbridge, would you prefer?

Railfuture advocates an alternative Option 5. The closure of this crossing is avoided under our proposals, as instead of constructing a footbridge over the crossing and providing a separate access road, a parallel double-track railway is carried over Kiln Lane as an integral part of a new grade separation. Even after adding the new Oxford-Norwich service and the second hourly Kings Lynn service, this results in an overall reduction in the number of hourly trains over Kiln Lane from 12 to 10 (aggregated over both directions). The new Wisbech, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Ipswich-Peterborough services as well as all intermodal freight are all then carried on the new line which would pass over Kiln Lane. Although coming at a cost, Railfuture's proposals for grade separation avoid the cost of all four footbridge options as well as avoiding the cost of either of the two road access options presented in the consultation. Furthermore, we consider that the elevated railway will have no greater impact on the SSSI than the options presented in the consultation, and will result in a release of land in the area compared with the likely alternatives at Ely North Junction. Although our proposals include a road diversion, we consider that it will be less inconvenient for local farming interests to cross a road than a railway.

As we indicated previously, in our response last November to the first round consultation question 6, Ely's complex pattern of passenger train movements contrasts with the relative simplicity of its freight train movements. Apart from movements based on the sidings immediately east of Ely North Junction, the predominant freight flow would clearly benefit from being separated from as many passenger services as possible through the Ely area. By separating the south and south-east : north-west flows over a new structure, many of the conflicting moves, particularly those involving longer freight trains, are avoided altogether. By adopting the underlying principles of traffic and route separation, grade separation adds sufficient capacity to the Ely Area to future-proof the junction and avoid performance risk.

We commend the traffic / route grade separation proposals for evaluation, and offer as an option for funders in the next round of consultation for Ely Area Enhancements programme.

14. At Kiln Lane, for vehicle access is your preference

See above.

15. I do wish to be contacted by Network Rail with further information or to discuss the feedback you have provided on the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements Programme.

Yes.

We look forward to contributing to the next rounds of a maturing consultation embracing the necessary bold ambition, and sustained progress towards providing a fit-for-the-future railway for the Ely Area and also for the wider rail network in which Ely is a choke-point.

Yours faithfully,

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