Network RUS: Stations - Draft for Consultation – Response   8 July 2011

Railfuture is pleased to submit this response to the draft Network RUS – Stations.

Railfuture is a national voluntary group organised in England as twelve regional branches plus two national branches in Scotland and Wales. Railfuture's national Passenger Committee has edited this response with input from several branches.

Chapter 3 Baselining.

3.3 Station Categorisation

3.3.2 We note that the table of station categories on page 16 does not reflect the sub-divisions or revised definitions suggested in the "Better Rail Stations" report. Chris Green and Sir Peter Hall suggested that both categories 'C' and 'F' should be split and that there should be a formal mechanism for revising the coding as the footfall and revenue of stations changed. We further suggest that the lowest category of 'F2' should in future be re-classified as 'G' as this separate coding would better reflect the status of these mainly rural, and generally lightly used, unstaffed stations. This change was first suggested in January 2003 by Network Rail but was never implemented.

3.3.4 Crowding can indeed be an issue at any station where a large number of passengers arrive for a local event. The often narrow platforms at category 'E' & 'F' stations are a particular cause for concern - for example the timber platforms built at some of the 'experimental' stations opened in the 1980s - we are pleased to note that Network Rail are now rebuilding some of these.

Whilst football crowds are usually marshalled there is less control at other events - e.g. Race meetings in rural areas - and particular problems can arise when all passengers cannot be accommodated on the first, or subsequent, train.

3.6 Station Usage Statistics

3.6.3 Although an estimate of the number of passengers who might be changing trains at each station is included in the annual Station Usage tables, this figure is NOT added to the headline total footfall for each station - nor should it be. Whilst this estimate of the number of passengers who might be changing trains is a useful guide there does not appear to be any generally available independent verification other than spot counts where these exist.

Interchanging passengers can result in a transient crowding situation on narrow platforms, stairs and subways - even at modern stations such as Bristol Parkway and Rugby.

3.6.6 As trains get longer it will be important to identify the most congested location on platforms. Unless platforms and subways are exceptionally wide it may be necessary to consider providing a second exit route at busy stations.

There appears to be very little published information about the proportion of 1st Class passengers using each route. This could potentially affect the location of platform crowding resulting from long distance services where the 1st Class section is usually at one end of the train, thus concentrating Standard passengers in set locations.

Interchange passengers can also cause local congestion as they move between platforms - a situation that can easily become dangerous if stairs are involved. This is an issue where a layout that permits cross-platform interchange for the majority of passengers is desirable - providing the platforms are sufficiently wide for both interchanging and boarding passengers.

However at some stations - e.g. Bristol Parkway - interchanges also take place between trains travelling in opposite directions and this can result in conflicting passenger flows on the stairs, footbridge or subway.

3.6.9 ORR Station Usage Data.
We agree that the station usage data is generally a more accurate indication of annual footfall at stations outside the major conurbations where PTE products are not available. However it should be noted that some 'inclusive' tickets to seasonal visitor attractions (such as Alton Towers) and to linked bus services (such as Hanley) are not always counted. Although technically interchanging, these passengers are actually exits and entries from a station perspective.

3.6.15 Ticket Gates.
There should be an obligation on franchised TOCs to share some information from ticket gates with appropriate industry bodies, albeit acknowledging that the data is not definitive.

3.6.21 Manual Station Counts.
We understand that manual "Green Book" counts have been taken at a number of the larger stations outside London and that these counts are now being extended to all-day Spring and Autumn counts; with some also including a separate count of 1st Class passengers. Some of the information given in Table 3.10 is now incorrect.

Although the local and inter urban trains serving stations in the regions are generally much shorter than those in the London area, crowding on peak-hour commuter services is often just as severe and passenger numbers are now growing faster than in London. We suggest therefore that PIXC counts should be taken at all category 'A' and 'B' regional stations on a regular basis.

3.6.32 Automatic Passenger Counting on Trains
We note that passenger-counting equipment will be fitted to the new Class 172 DMU fleet entering service in the West Midlands; but few trains in the other regions are likely to have this equipment in the near future. In this context the overall figure of 39% of trains fitted may be rather misleading in relation to crowding on services running into some regional cities.

3.8 Current committed plans affecting stations

We welcome the major station redevelopments planned for Birmingham New Street, Reading and London Kings Cross and note that NSIP and 'Access for All' funding are also providing a valuable contribution to upgrading the network's station assets. We suggest that it would also be appropriate to mention the 'Better Rail Stations' report in this section.

3.8.6 Access for All
The upgrades provided at key stations under the 'Access for All' programme are a significant step forward in providing access to the network for special needs users. However we suggest that because of the wide variation in individual needs there is also a role for a local passenger panel, similar to the Chiltern Passenger Board, who

may in some cases, be able to suggest simple cost effective enhancements at stations not yet covered by the scheme.

3.9 Current congestion at stations

3.9.8 The list of stations near to where special events are held should logically include all stations which are adjacent to a venue which is used for football and rugby matches. In which context, for example, we note that Aston (West Midlands), where platforms are relatively narrow, has been omitted from the table.

Table 3.20 List of Congested Stations
We complement Network Rail in gathering the data in this table, which although incomplete, provides a valuable snapshot of the current situation and a guide to future investment priorities.

3.10 Use of a Station

In addition to the categories listed it will often be necessary to consider interchanging passengers as a separate category not least because they can sometimes move between platforms in large numbers and must effectively be counted twice!

Chapter 4 Drivers of Change.

4.3 Growth in station footfall

4.3.9 We note that commuters are also more likely to have purchased a Season Ticket and do not therefore need to purchase a ticket every time that they travel.

4.4 Train Service Patterns
Consideration also needs to be given to the large numbers of passengers who routinely change trains at some stations. As well as generating a specific flow between platforms, sometimes using staircases and subways against the flow of exiting passengers, interchanging passengers will also need to wait for their connecting service, which depending on the frequency, can in the worst cases be up to 55 minutes.

4.6 Accessing the Station and Onward travel
Although easy interchange with other public transport services, including Taxis, is clearly desirable, it is also important that stationery public transport vehicles or excess street furniture do not obstruct passenger's walking routes from the station.

Chapter 5 Gaps and Options

5.2 Type 1 – Gaps and options: information on station usage

5.2.6 Interchange flows should be included as a specific case of "Known Weakness" in the available data as the published figures are only an estimate and waiting times will be very dependent on the frequency of services. Overlapping flows could be a crucial issue on stairs, footbridges and in subways.

Manual counts rarely identify seasonal trends and do not often even separate Adult Commuters from School/Student flows - despite the latter clearly having shorter period season tickets.

An associated weakness is the assumption that Season Ticket holders in all City Regions make the same number of journeys per annum. Has this ever been checked

- when were the standard assumption of 45 journeys on a Monthly Season ticket and 480 journeys on an Annual Season ticket last verified?

5.2.11 Option 1(b) - Station travel planning
It is unfortunately too soon to comment on the effectiveness of the ATOC Station Travel Plan pilot schemes; and we await RSSB's report with interest.

5.2.15 Option 2(a) - Automatic passenger counting on train
The real weakness of this information (from a station usage perspective) is that it can only show the 'net' change in passenger number as the train leaves each station. For city centre stations, which are not termini the net change in passenger numbers at some stations - such as Birmingham New Street - can sometimes approximate to zero!

This data is clearly not well aligned to the actual platform crowding/station usage.

5.2.20 Option 2(b) - Automatic footfall counting on stations.
This technology clearly has the potential to be installed and used more widely. At many stations passengers are channelled from the platforms via a staircase and footbridge or subway to the station exit. Footfall counters at these locations should be relatively easy and should in theory account for almost all station users.

However it is NOT correct to suggest that footfall counters will provide anything other than a very rough guide to fare evasion hotspots because the necessary information on the actual daily usage of long-period Season Tickets does not generally exist.

5.2.27 Option 2(c) - NPS
The NPS should include a question asking specifically about passengers' experience when changing trains and the station(s) at which they changed trains. Indeed it is likely that with the general growth in passenger numbers many are now changing trains more than once in their journey. Is there any data on this?

5.2.29 Option 2(e) - Greater coordination of datasets
We believe that the value of the annual Station Usage tables to Local Authorities has previously been understated. The recent change to publishing the main Station Usage tables earlier in the year is particularly welcome as this will permit County and Unitary Authorities to include the annual growth in rail travel alongside ticket sales information from Buses on a comparable basis for the first time.

5.2.30 Option 2(f) – Survey of Fruin level at all stations
The use of Fruin surveys to identify and classify stations with crowding problems is potentially a valuable step forward. However it is important that those carrying out the surveys should be trained to a uniform standard and it is not clear that this was always the case with the TOC sourced surveys presented in the RUS.

We suggest that it may also be useful to tabulate separately those stations where crowding is caused predominantly by passengers moving in one direction from those where a high Fruin score is caused by a contra-flow situation on a footbridge, subway or platform. The latter situation can often arise when two trains arrive almost simultaneously and the flow of passengers interchanging between these services conflicts with those exiting the station.

5.2.32 Option 2(g) - Pedestrian Models at larger stations
It would be worth considering creating pedestrian models for a sample of category 'B' and 'C' stations across the network as a pilot project. The individual costs would be lower than at the larger, multi-entrance, Network Rail stations and the results could

well provide evidence of otherwise hidden regional variations and time-based flows. Ideally Local Authorities as well as SFOs should be consulted in the design of these models.

Table 5.3 Long Term Passenger Growth Forecasts – by market sector

We welcome the recognition that future growth in the Regional Urban and Regional Commuter markets is likely to out-pace the saturated London Commuter market. This clearly has implications for future Rolling Stock provision as well as Station Capacity - even after the current obvious shortfall in the regions has been addressed.

5.3.5 The location of 1st Class seating at one end of the train in most long-distance fleets will tend to skew passengers alighting from Standard accommodation onto platforms towards the country end. If this becomes an issue then 1st Class seating should be distributed more evenly along the train - or at least located at both ends.

5.3.8 It is well known that adjusting the stopping point of shorter local services can have a beneficial effect in balancing train loading. This also affects the location of passengers waiting on the platform and waiting shelters should be relocated to match.

5.4 Type 2 gaps and options: toolkit of options to address generic station capacity gaps

5.4.9 Access Zone
Ill conceived Bus/Tram interchanges directly outside the station can often lead to increased congestion with foot passengers having to run the gauntlet of other public transport modes to reach the Town centre. London Euston is a particularly bad example, lacking a clear walking route from the station to Euston Road.

5.4.11 Facilities Zone
In many older stations the route from the main entrance to the platform is too narrow for the current number of peak-hour passengers. Examples might include Wolverhampton and even Coventry as well as many stations where a subway is used such as Cardiff General.

The problem is exacerbated by the installation of Ticket Gates, which can potentially lead to the dangerous situation of passengers queuing on stairs whilst waiting to exit the station - e.g. Derby, or enter the platforms, e.g. Finsbury Park.

5.4.13 Platform Zone
Surprisingly even recently built stations often have relatively narrow platforms, which can easily become congested. Examples include Rugby (Platforms 5/6) and Bristol Parkway (Platform 2).

Chapter 6 Recommendations

Railfuture broadly supports the conclusions in Chapter 6 and would add the following comments for consideration:

a) The RUS does not appear to discuss the data available to predict the growth in passenger numbers at individual stations. The historic predictive method linked an estimate of future passenger footfall to the population living within 800 metres of a station but this relationship is clearly invalid for rural and urban fringe stations where a high proportion of passengers are expected to drive, cycle or take the bus to the

station. We suggest that an updated survey of the passenger catchment of typical stations in each region is long overdue.

b) We support the recommendation in "Better Rail Stations" that station signage should in future conform to a standard pattern and colour.

c) Whilst the introduction of modern designs of vandal resistant shelters (e.g. 'Macemain') is a great improvement on earlier models these still only provide protection from the weather for a limited number of passengers. There are many stations where a shelter seating only 10 passengers is provided for 50 or more commuters.

In the 19th and early 20th century stations were usually built with a platform awning long enough to shelter at least 100 passengers. Many of these have since been demolished; others remain on just one platform. We believe that serious consideration should be given to reinstating platform awnings at many of our busier stations. A good example of which is currently happening at Finsbury Park.

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