



Podium South, River Park House, 225 High Road, London N22 8HQ

Tel 020 8489 5279
Fax 020 8489 4917
Email dominic.millen@haringey.gov.uk
Web <http://www.nlsa.org.uk>

Richard Price,
Chief Executive,
Office of Rail Regulation,
One Kemble Street,
London
WC2B 4AN

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Draft determination of Network Rail's outputs and funding for 2014 to 2019 – Response from the North London Strategic Alliance

I am writing to you on behalf of the North London Transport Forum which is the sub-regional transport partnership for North London and has a core membership of the London boroughs of Barnet, Enfield, Haringey and Waltham Forest. Given the radial and orbital nature of London's transport network the Forum also works across boundaries and has close links with the adjoining London Boroughs of Brent, Camden, Hackney, Islington and Redbridge.

The challenges of growth in the core North London sub-region are substantial. With 1.9 million people and 1.6 million jobs in 2008, forecasts are for an additional 305,000 people – equivalent to a city the size of Belfast or Malmo in Sweden - and 288,000 more jobs in our sub-region by 2026. The transport network is a vital dimension in meeting this growth agenda and promoting social and economic inclusion.

Given this it is important that the Draft Determination recognises the pressure on the rail network as passenger numbers grow. This is particularly acute in London and the South-East where Office of Rail Regulation figures show that there were 262.0 million journeys on London and South East services in Q3 2012/13, a 5.1% increase on the same period in 2011/12¹. In contrast on regional services there were 90.4 million journeys, a 1.1% increase.

This trend is set to continue with recent figures showing that London's population is growing at a faster rate than originally forecast and at a pace much faster than the rest of the UK. It is estimated that by 2030 the population of London alone will have grown by another 1.7 million people to 10 million.

Therefore it is welcome that the Draft Determination confirms funding for large scale capacity enhancements via the completion of Crossrail and the Thameslink programme. However it should also recognise that the next control period will see the development of a cross London rail line from the south-west to the north east – Crossrail 2 – which will be supported by an initial £2m in funding from the Government as set out in the Comprehensive Spending Review.

¹ <http://www.rail-reg.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.11128>

In a similar vein the Draft Determination should also now reflect the electrification of the Gospel Oak to Barking Line as a committed major enhancement project given that it is now supported by £90m in funding, again announced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

In terms of the wider enhancement programme it is particularly welcome that up to £44m in funding is included for West Anglia main line capacity increases. It is imperative that this scheme receives at least this level of funding because it addresses existing gaps in the network and will allow much needed increases in capacity.

Also of importance are plans for Stevenage and Gordon Hill turnbacks costing up to £26m. This investment will allow more efficient operation of inner suburban services into Moorgate and is linked to the improvements currently being made to the layout of tracks between Alexandra Palace and Finsbury Park. In addition it has links to the nationally important Thameslink Programme which will see additional capacity both into and through London.

However there are some concerns that the proposed approach to defining enhancement schemes in the determination could lead to delays in delivering improvements. This is particularly important for the West Anglia mainline capacity increases (SE022) where additional funding from London Enterprise Panel and Transport for London (£25m and £3m of respectively) for complementary improvements, which will allow four trains per hour from the Upper Lee Valley to Stratford, is contingent on Network Rail funding being made available in 2014. *For this reason the Forum would like confirmation that enhancement schemes, as set out in the determination, that reach GRIP 3 and above before March 2015 can be approved for funding by Network Rail.*

There is support for the ring-fenced funds as outlined in the Draft Determination as these could also be of significance for north London:

- Level Crossings - an ongoing issue on the West Anglia Routes is the number of level crossings so it is positive that funding is committed to 'Level Crossing Risk Reduction' and, given their locations on a high frequency mainline, we would welcome some of this funding being used to look into addressing the safety issues at various locations.
- Station Improvements - stations are the gateway to the network so it is positive that, outside of various committed schemes for large scale improvements, funding has been included for improving station infrastructure (for example better passenger information) and delivering Access for All schemes. Obviously there will be a great deal of interest in these funds and north London partners look forward to working with the rail industry to identify priority schemes.
- Reducing Journey Times - reduced journey times to Stansted Airport would support more passengers using existing latent capacity - the airport currently has around 17.5m passengers per annum but can accommodate 35m.

Confirmation if funding for developing schemes for delivery in Control Period 6 is also important. There is a strong case for developing an infrastructure scheme which removes existing constraints along the Lea Valley mainline to allow more frequent services, reduce journey times and improve reliability. The investment in West Anglia main line capacity

increases will see additional rail infrastructure from the Lea Valley main line to Stratford and is a step towards this. However it is only the first part of a series of incremental improvements needed to address the ongoing constraints arising from having a twin track main line.

Previous work (Network Rail's London and South East RUS) has shown that delivering additional tracks along the Lea Valley main line from south of Broxbourne has a positive Benefit Cost Ratio even without a second runway at Stansted Airport. This is because of the high levels of growth projected along the corridor which is anchored in the south by the City of London and Stratford, runs through the Upper Lee Valley (as outlined above) and the Broxbourne Lee Valley Enterprise Corridor, which has the scope to delivery up to 6,300 jobs and 4,200 houses, and goes on to the Harlow Enterprise Zone and the international science and technology hub at Cambridge.

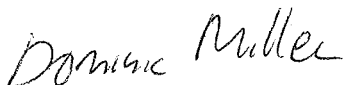
Given the high levels of growth already forecast along this corridor and the potential to deliver much needed housing it makes economic sense to develop a solution as soon as possible. To wait condemns passengers to again suffer from years of crowded conditions, infrequent services and delays.

In addition current work by Transport for London and Network Rail on Crossrail 2 has shown that an option (which is strongly supported by north London partners) running north along a four track Lea Valley main line out to Hertfordshire is feasible and offers positive value for money. However delivery of this option assumes that (due to its positive business case) four tracking of the Lea Valley mainline will already have taken place by 2025.

Along the London to Luton corridor there is also a strong case for investing in a new station at Brent Cross Cricklewood (BXC) where a new BXC Thameslink station funded by partners should unlock delivery of 7,500 new homes.

In conclusion overall the level and spread of investment outlined in the Draft Determination is to be welcomed. In particular funding for schemes on the West Anglia and Great Northern routes will go some way to addressing long standing capacity gaps. It is also clear that more generally investment in the rail network will drive forward growth and kick start regeneration so is strongly supported by north London partners. However recent funding announcements and long term priorities also need to be reflected so that they are included in Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan.

Regards



Dominic Millen
North London Transport Partnership Manager

Cc: North London Transport Forum Membership