

Your Ref:
Our Ref:
Date: 29th August 2013
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The Office of Rail Regulation
1 Kemble Street
London
WC2B 4AN

Dear Sir or Madam,

Suffolk County Council Consultation Response to 2013 Draft Determination of Network Rail's Outputs and Funding for 2014-2019

Suffolk County Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Office of Rail Regulation's Draft Determination. The county council is supportive of the outputs suggested by the document. We are also supportive of the evidence presented in the Draft Determination which suggests that the £2bn saving on the cost of running the railway could end above inflation fares.

However, for Suffolk, there is little within the Draft Determination that will address the current capacity and infrastructure shortfalls that blight the county's railways, let alone its future demands. The document states that '...it reflects the need for investment in growing the capacity of the network, and in addressing historical underinvestment in network assets over many decades.' The Draft Determination does not take a view on rail underinvestment in counties/regions. Investment is essential to growing capacity and is a major issue for Suffolk and the East Anglia region, as it received a relatively poor deal under the CP5 funding round. East Anglia is the second biggest net contributor to the Treasury's coffers outside London, yet its economic potential is being stifled by piecemeal investment in its railways.

Infrastructure needs

Local Development Plans for Suffolk's districts and boroughs show that the county will grow by approximately 52,000 dwellings.

Recent rail passenger growth figures from the ORR demonstrate a 2.7 million increase in Suffolk over the past 16 years, amounting to an average of over 168,000 passengers a year. Network Rail's London and South-East Route Utilisation Strategy claims that by 2031 there will be a shortfall of 5,000 seats during high peak hours on the Great Eastern Main Line (GEML) which connects Norwich, Suffolk and Essex to London Liverpool Street. Additional services will add to the already congested mainline, which requires infrastructure to speed up journeys, reduce delays and increase line capacity. Some of the examples of infrastructure needed on the GEML include: four five-mile tracks north of Chelmsford; additional platform capacity at Ipswich Station; upgraded overhead power lines between Chelmsford and Norwich; and new level crossings and signalling. A study conducted by the East of England Development Agency in 2010 found that such improvements would deliver £3.4bn in economic impacts and £280m in wider impacts.

For connectivity within the county, double tracking is required between Woodbridge and Saxmundham on the East Suffolk Line, which provides a link between Lowestoft and Ipswich.

Suffolk has a need to develop this route (a 49-mile stretch) which has a longer journey time than the 68-miles of track between Ipswich and London. In 2011, Suffolk County Council contributed £1 million to the £4 million Beccles loop (on the East Suffolk Line) to improve service frequency and deliver modal shift to rail. As a result of the investment, from December last year, the two-hourly Lowestoft to Ipswich service is now an hourly service and has seen passenger growth of 12% over 6 months (30,000 passengers).

Such investment on other parts of Suffolk's railway could also deliver similar success. Double tracking between Chippenham Junction and Cambridge would allow a service frequency increase between Ipswich and Cambridge to a half-hourly service. The current hourly service is not considered attractive to commuters and businesses, who choose the congested A14. Improvements to the service frequency would provide an economic boost to the Suffolk economy. By 2021, employment in Cambridge is set to rise by 38%, and the city provides highly skilled employment where average annual earnings are £6,500 higher than in Ipswich.

Freight

It is interesting to see that Government funding is committed to the electrification of Gospel Oak to Barking rail line (which will serve the London Gateway), and to the Electric Spine (which will serve Southampton Port). Yet The Port of Felixstowe, the UK's biggest container port, has been overlooked. The county council recognises the critical importance of the port to the local economy. Together with the Haven Gateway, the port provides over 30,000 jobs to the county's workforce; contributes an annual £780 million to the economy; and provides over £1 billion a year in wages. The Port of Felixstowe handles more than 3.4 million Twenty-foot Equivalent Units (TEUs); welcomes over 4,000 ships each year, including the largest container vessels afloat today; and has around 33 shipping lines operating from Felixstowe, offering approximately 90 services to the 365 ports around the world. The port is expanding and will see an increase in the number of rail services using local, cross-country and mainline routes.

Although the Strategic Rail Freight Network Fund has assisted in a number of rail freight developments for Suffolk and the East of England, infrastructure gaps still exist. Some examples of these gaps include the need for full electrification between Felixstowe and Nuneaton and double tracking between Felixstowe and Westerfield Junction. It is these gaps that are constraining the economic potential of the port. Studies show that the port's expansion could deliver £93 million to the local economy. However the lack of track capacity, line speed and joint usage of the route with passenger services makes it difficult to meet current demands.

Passenger services between Felixstowe and Ipswich already struggle to meet the timetable and are frequently marred with cancellations due to delayed or broken down freight trains on the single-tracked line. Such improvements would also enable an hourly Ipswich to Peterborough passenger service from its current two-hourly frequency - the poorest frequency of all passenger services in Suffolk. A study commissioned by the county council in 2012 showed that an hourly Ipswich to Peterborough service could generate £63 million in economic benefits over a 60-year period.

Stations

The county council seeks further clarification on the level of funding that would be awarded to franchised stations in the Anglia region, specifically how the ORR has derived the figures for station maintenance and renewal. What contingences are in place to test the level of funding? - considering the uncertainty on how the Greater Anglia franchise will manage maintenance and renewal responsibilities.

Suffolk has many stations with poor facilities and platform access. Newmarket station is just one example where waiting facilities consist of dilapidated bus shelters (as the station building has been sold for commercial use), and inadequate car and cycle parks. The single platform, which was only recently lengthened to take a three car train, is the gateway to Newmarket's horse racing industry and the town. As indicated in the Prince's Foundation report on Newmarket, the single

platform and lack of station facilities gives a poor impression of the town to tourists who may be attending the races or visiting the new Horse Racing Museum. It also does little to assist the large numbers of passengers using the station daily to commute to work or attend educational establishments. Other stations, such as Needham Market, have appalling access between its two platforms. Passengers using the station have little option but to either use the level crossing or a narrow, poorly lit, disused cattle tunnel, which is not DDA compliant. The lack of, and inconsistency of, facilities at stations does little to provide a good passenger experience or a good impression of the county.

Joint working

The county council would like to see the Draft Determination encourage closer working with local authorities on all Network Rail projects as well as train operators, customers and business groups. This we see as essential to assisting Network Rail on planning and implementing projects, and understanding the needs of Suffolk's railways.

Train Performance

The county council would also like to see improved ways of measuring performance and punctuality targets. The use of a national target means that local services could be underperforming, but are masked by overall performance. Therefore, passengers would not be able to access details about problem routes. Public Performance Measures (PPM) only indicate 'on time' arrival at the destination, so a train could be late at the intermediate stations but still be considered to be 'on time' when it reaches its final destination. The concept of 'on time' also needs to be reconsidered. The current PPM would deem a train to be on time if the service arrived five minutes late. For inter-city services, the train can arrive ten minutes after its timetabled arrival.

I hope that you find these comments useful and that they assist in the development of the final Draft Determination.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Graham Newman". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Graham L. Newman (Cllr)
Member for Felixstowe Coastal Division
Cabinet Member for Roads and Transport