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Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan (SBP) for Control Period 5. Comments by the City of Edinburgh Council

Thank you for John Larkinson's letter of 8 January (sent by email) inviting comments on the SBP.

I am pleased to enclose below the City of Edinburgh Council's comments. In doing so, we have taken account of the full suite of documents published by Network Rail on 8 January:

- Industry strategic business plans for England and Wales, and Scotland
- The Strategic Business Plan for England and Wales
- The Strategic Business Plan for Scotland
- The various Route Plans, particularly the Scotland, London North East and London North West Route Plans
- but not the 'Supporting Documents'

We have confined our comments to those matters of particular interest to the Council, generally defined in terms of whether they affect existing or planned direct passenger services to/from Edinburgh, or freight services affecting the city.

We are generally supportive and content with the documents. We therefore particularly look forward to the implementation of the various enhancements set out therein.

However, we are disappointed to note the reduced scale of Edinburgh to Glasgow Improvements Programme (EGIP). We consider at least some elements of the original, such as electrification to Dunblane, should be re-established. It has clear synergies in regard to both construction and operation of EGIP as now planned.

Furthermore, we are concerned that EGIP, as now set out, will introduce new demands at Waverley station; particularly the limited number of, and train access to, 8-car platforms. The removal of the Dalmeny/Almond chord from EGIP eliminated a significant element of operational flexibility, and we are concerned that what is left will prove to be less reliable.

A number of projects are identified in the SBP which were not included in either HLOS. This Council considers that all three should be implemented in CP5:

Edinburgh South Suburban Railway electrification

We understand that W12 gauge clearance works are imminent. This will enable electrification to proceed without further clearance costs. We note that

the Industry's view is that the cost to electrify should be included in the SBP request for funding; the Council strongly supports this view.

It will remove the last gap in an electrified freight route from Doncaster to Carstairs (The SBP cites 'reducing congestion in Edinburgh Waverley by pathing electric freight trains via the ESSR'; in fact freight paths through Waverley are limited and at peak times practically non-existent).

It will provide paths for empty coaching stock via the ESSR to/from the proposed new Millerhill EMU depot; essential for EGIP.

It will offer a flexible diversionary route.

Furthermore, although not cited in the SBP, using electric traction on the ESSR will reduce air and noise pollution; the ESSR is adjacent to residential areas along almost its entire length.

The deployment of plant and personnel to electrify the E&G line (under EGIP) also means that it will be logistically efficient (and therefore cheaper) to electrify in the same area simultaneously.

Linespeed improvements

Being reviewed along with renewals at a number of locations outwith projects specified in the HLOS, including WCML (a number of locations) and Haymarket – Carstairs; where the linespeed is a mix of 60mph to 95mph. The current signalling capability and linespeed constraints on this section reflect a historic low level of use which is no longer the case, and is clearly inadequate, today.

Carstairs Junction

Reference is made to improving the capability of Carstairs Junction, particularly linespeeds. We consider this proposal important and beneficial, for the same reasons as apply to Haymarket – Carstairs above. Irrespective of the construction of a HSL, as announced by the Scottish Government in November 2012, the proposal will benefit local services whether or not long-distance services continue to operate via Carstairs. It is not tenable to continue to limit modern services by a 15mph speed restriction.

Portobello Junction redoubling under EGIP

The SBP identifies this, but we are not clear whether it was included in the HLOS. In any event, the Council considers it essential to address new rolling stock movements arising from EGIP (associated with Millerhill depot); it will also significantly benefit the reopened Borders Railway.

However, there are two points where we would raise concerns about the SBP. Page 23 of the London North East Route sets out a target PPM MAA rising from 87% in 2012-13 to 88.6% in 2018-19. Page 27 explains 'There is a wide acceptance that the ECML's geography and asset configuration limits the maximum PPM MAA to around 88% due to limited diversionary capability and a number of bottlenecks on the route.' This reads as though the industry has given up trying to improve performance beyond a remarkably disappointing level. We suggest it should be challenged on this.

Secondly, albeit in the Industry (not Network Rail's) SBP for Scotland, HS2 is referred to, but not really integrated into references to upgrading the WCML; despite the importance of the WCML for HS services at least between completion of phase 1 and phase 2. It reads as though integrated planning for HS2 is not taking place. In contrast the Industry SBP for England Wales, and Network Rail's documents, give the impression that the relevant planning is taking place in the operations they address.