

*Please reply to:*

The Secretary

12 February 2013

John Larkinson  
Office of Rail Regulation  
One Kemble Street  
London  
WC2B 4AN

Dear Mr Larkinson

**NETWORK RAIL STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN FOR CONTROL PERIOD 5**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan. Our comments relate to projects affecting the East Midlands as described in Network Rail's Summary Route Plan for the East Midlands Route.

**Midland Main Line (MML) Electrification ('Electric Spine') and Capacity Schemes**

We note that electrification is now scheduled for completion by 2020-21, in Control Period 6. We accept this extended timescale providing that the route receives a full upgrade before electrification takes place.

We are concerned that several MML capacity schemes are shown as 'still in development' and listed as 'possible options'. These affect the critical sections of route between Sharnbrook and Wigston (which is a mix of two and three tracks) and Kettering and Corby (which is single line). We regard provision of an additional line between Sharnbrook and Kettering, re-doubling between Kettering and Corby, and realignment in the Market Harborough area as essential for the medium and longer term capacity requirements of the MML.

We feel that the option 'loops or realignment in the Desborough/Market Harborough area' should be more clearly defined. Leaving aside requirements for freight, realignment at Market Harborough is desirable to eliminate the 60 mph speed restriction for non-stopping trains, currently the most severe between St Pancras and Leicester. Realignment can be achieved using land already in Network Rail ownership, and would lead to the provision of new straight platforms at Market Harborough station. The current platforms are short and on a reverse curve, and the consequent large platform to train stepping distance is a handicap for less able passengers. We believe that freight train loops would be more appropriate at Market Harborough than at Desborough, which is too close to Kettering and on a rising gradient.

Capacity improvements between Wigston and Syston should also be defined more fully and ideally should include grade separation for east-west freight trains crossing the MML.

*"TravelWatch East Midlands" is the public name of the East Midlands Passenger Transport Users Forum  
Secretary: Mr Stephen Abbott, 5, Monroe Close, Market Harborough, Leics LE16 7QN*

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We ask ORR to allocate sufficient funding during Control Period 5 to allow all of these schemes to proceed.

### **Enhancement Schemes (not currently funded)**

We are concerned that a number of desirable schemes are shown as not currently funded. The East Midlands suffers from slow inter-regional rail links and we suggest that the journey time improvement schemes between Birmingham and Stansted Airport and Nottingham and Leeds should be priorities for funding.

The Nottingham-Newark Castle-Lincoln line fails to fulfil its potential as an inter-city route due to slow journey times. We therefore support the proposed increase in linespeed between Lowdham and Newark Castle, but are disappointed that that this is only to 75 mph. We suggest that the work should be funded to achieve 90 mph, as proposed between Netherfield and Allington on the Nottingham to Grantham route.

### **Improved Passenger Capacity and Capability**

We welcome the proposal that services between Sheffield/Nottingham and London will be operated by an electric fleet of up to 10-cars in length, but would like to see more details on what is intended. We believe that providing tilting trains and equipping the route for them is unlikely to be cost effective, and prefer to see inter-city style rolling stock which makes full use of the loading gauge to maximise comfort.

We support the proposed increase in overall service frequency from five to six trains per hour. However, we find confusing the statement 'Outer suburban services from North Northamptonshire and Leicestershire will be operated by formations of up to three 4-car Class 350 type rolling stock and the frequency will be increased to two trains per hour'. Stopping trains to London St Pancras serving North Northamptonshire and Leicestershire run twice hourly at present, alternately from Corby and Nottingham. Is it intended that the service from Corby will be doubled in frequency or will there be an additional hourly train from Leicester or beyond? We suggest that this statement should be clarified.

We appreciate the attempt to segregate the market between outer-suburban and longer distance travel, but believe that outer-suburban services should start no further north than Kettering or Corby. We would expect Market Harborough and stations northwards to retain a mix of fast and semi-fast trains to London.

We support the proposals to reduce crowding on the Birmingham-Leicester-Stansted Airport route. We note that the planned completion of enhancements on the Hope Valley route may allow the provision of a new interurban service from Leicester and Derby to the North West. This is highly desirable, Leicester and Derby have no through services to the North West and are the largest centres within 100 miles of Manchester without direct trains. Journey speed, even with tight connections, barely exceeds 50 mph from either city to Manchester, which is unacceptable in 2013.

### **Delivering CP4 & CP5 plans**

The first sentence of this section states 'The volume of work to be delivered across East Midlands Route during CP5 requires a step change in the way that work is planned to ensure the most efficient use of available access.' It is most important that maximising efficiency for Network Rail and its contractors and suppliers does not override the reasonable expectations of passengers.

Given the large amount of disruptive work planned for CP5, we appreciate that there will be diversions and bus replacement of trains on occasions. Passengers do not like being carried

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by bus if alternatives are possible – we note the list of key stations supplied by EMT and CrossCountry. During the West Coast Main Line upgrade provision of alternative services, and of information about them, varied from excellent to appalling. We hope that Network Rail and the TOCs apply good practice learnt from this exercise to the upgrade of the Midland Main Line.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott  
Hon Secretary

**About *TravelWatch East Midlands***

***TravelWatch East Midlands***, like its namesakes within other regions of England, is a federation of public transport user groups representing the consumer interest across all modes of public transport. We have developed good relationships with our bus, train, tram and airport operators as well as local and regional government and Passenger Focus.

Our officers are all volunteers, and we offer our experience and success in representing public transport users in our communities as an input to future business, economic and policy development involving the transport sector.

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