

West Anglia Routes Group

Office of Rail Regulation,
One Kemble Street,
London
WC2B 4AN

15 February 2013

Network Rail Strategic Business Plan for England & Wales - January 2013

I am writing to you on behalf of the West Anglia Routes Group (WARG). The Group is an association of public and private sector organisations from along the routes running from Liverpool Street and Stratford through north London into Essex, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. These organisations are working together, with cross party political support, to promote economic growth through securing timely rail investment to enhance capacity and improve reliability.

In previous correspondence the national importance of the West Anglia Routes has been highlighted and the case made for ongoing investment to address existing crowding issues, close gaps in connectivity and reduce journey times. In light of this the Network Rail Strategic Business Plan for England & Wales which covers the period from 2014 to 2019 is welcome since it recognises that demand on the rail network keeps increasing and that substantial investment is needed to meet this and other demands.

For the West Anglia Routes it is particularly welcome that the wider enhancement programme includes £44m in funding for West Anglia main line capacity increases and £32m for service improvements in the Ely Area. It is imperative that both of these schemes receive at least this level of funding because they both address existing gaps in the network and allow increases in capacity.

It is also positive that, despite being funded by third party contributions, the reopening of Lea Bridge station is recognised as a significant enhancement.

West Anglia Main Line Capacity Increase (SE022)

This scheme will address the core capacity outputs required by Government by relieving overcrowding and absorbing additional forecast growth on the West Anglia main line by delivering the infrastructure required to increase the frequency of Lea Valley line services to Stratford to four trains per hour.

This capacity is urgently required so that demand for access to / from the Stratford area from along the corridor (which runs through the Upper Lee Valley out to Hertford, Stansted Airport and Cambridge) can be met. For this reason the Group

strongly supports at least £44m of Network Rail funding (as outlined in the SBP) being allocated to the West Anglia Main Line Capacity Increase enhancement.

But this investment is just part of the story and partners are working together to secure the remaining funding of around £28m to deliver a scheme which will lock in the benefits of improved capacity and connectivity to Stratford.

A regular four trains per hour train service from the Upper Lee Valley (Angel Road and Northumberland Park stations), via the strategic transport hub at Tottenham Hale and a re-opened Lea Bridge station, to Stratford will deliver a scheme which supports the delivery of over 15,000 homes, 15,700 jobs and by 2031 cumulative additional GVA of £10.7 billion within the core opportunity area. More specifically this investment will be key to:

- The Meridian Water development which is currently forecast to provide 5,000 homes and up to 4,500 jobs;
- Supporting the development of High Road West in Tottenham which includes the re-development of the Tottenham Hotspur football stadium and should see 1,800 new homes as well as 1,500 jobs;
- Delivering 3,500 homes and 500 jobs at Northumberland Park;
- Strengthening the case for developing a number of sites around Tottenham Hale with the potential to create 4,700 residential units and 4,900 permanent jobs;
- Securing 1,600 homes and 1,000 jobs in the Lea Bridge area.

The delivery of the whole scheme should also result in safety and reliability improvements, particularly if Northumberland Park level crossing is closed to vehicular traffic and a new pedestrian / cycle bridge put in place.

Service Improvements in the Ely Area (SE027)

The Group supports investing in the upgrading of the Ely North Junction since this will help unlock the economic potential of the wider region by allowing more frequent services from Kings Lynn, Peterborough and Norwich via Ely. This will benefit not only commuters into / from Cambridge and London but will also support local businesses and encourage tourism, particularly with a more frequent service going north from Stansted Airport.

Level Crossings

Level crossings are an ongoing issue on the West Anglia Routes so it is positive that £67m in funding is committed to 'Level Crossing Risk Reduction' and, given their locations on a high frequency main line, the Group would welcome some of this funding being used to look into addressing the safety issues at various level locations.

Station Improvements

Stations are the gateway to the network so it is positive that, outside of various committed schemes for large scale improvements, £103m of funding has been

included for for improving station infrastructure (for example better passenger information) and £103m to fund Access for All schemes. Obviously there will be a great deal of interest in these funds and the Group looks forward to working with the rail industry to identify priority schemes.

Reducing Journey Times to Stansted Airport

It is positive that the SBP indicates that journey time improvements to Stansted Airport (Page 47) will be subject to further discussion and perhaps development of a solution should be funded by the £206m Journey Time Improvement.

Reduced journey times to Stansted Airport would encourage more passengers to use the airport and thus make use of significant latent airport capacity in the south-east (the airport currently has around 17.5m passengers per annum but can accommodate 35m), the early development of infrastructure options and the related business case is encouraged.

CP6 Development

Key to reducing journey times on the West Anglia Routes is the development of the next stage of investment which will also address longer term capacity, reliability and connectivity requirements. The investment in additional rail infrastructure from the Lea Valley main line to Stratford 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 (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.

The Group do not think it makes economic sense to further delay development of a solution which will allow the rail industry to more quickly respond to the high levels of growth already forecast on this key rail corridor. To wait condemns passengers to again suffer from years of infrequent services and delays.

In addition current work by Transport for London on the development of a cross London rail line from the south-west to the north east – Crossrail 2 – has shown that an option which runs north along a four track Lea Valley main line out to Hertfordshire is feasible and has positive value for money. However delivery of this option assumes that (due to its positive business case) four tracking of the Lea Valley main line will already have taken place by 2025.

Other Investment

The Group also welcomes the £44m allocated to improve track alignments at Bow Junction as well as further work to look at delivering increased capacity on the Great Eastern main line. These will have benefits for the wider Greater Anglia area.

Efficiency Savings

The Group supports ongoing efforts by Network Rail to reduce the cost of maintaining, renewing and improving the railway. Initiatives such as moving towards regional business units and aligning more closely with train operators are already seeing costs cut and efficiency improved.

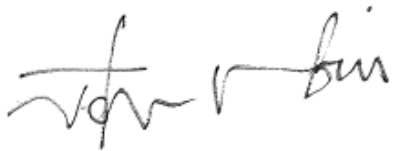
However there is some concern that seeking to deliver a further 18% of cuts over the five years of the SBP will result in lower than expected investment in those schemes being developed. This is unacceptable and all schemes must be subject to the same savings regardless of where they are in the delivery cycle.

Summary

Overall the level and spread of investment outlined in the Network Rail Strategic Business Plan is to be welcomed. In particular the funding allocations for key schemes on the West Anglia Routes will go some way to addressing long standing capacity gaps. It is also clear that investment in the rail network will drive forward growth and kick start regeneration. For these reasons the Group would look to the Office of Rail Regulation to make sure that the investment plans in the Strategic Business Plan are not reduced.

If you require any further information about the Group or this response please get in touch with my colleague Dominic Millen on 020 8489 5291.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John McGill', written in a cursive style.

John McGill

Chair of the West Anglia Routes Group
Director of the London Stansted Corridor Consortium

Cc West Anglia Routes Group Membership