

Consultation on the draft determination of Network Rail's outputs and funding for 2014 to 2019

Response from Hertfordshire County Council

Hertfordshire County Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the draft determination of Network Rail's outputs and funding for 2014 to 2019 and sets out its comments below.

West Anglia Main Line

The West Anglia Main Line (WAML) is key for Hertfordshire residents for commuting to and from London, as well as for accessing leisure opportunities such as the Lee Valley Regional Park. However due to significant infrastructure constraints the route has low service frequencies, relatively long journey times and high levels of crowding.

The county council therefore welcomes the inclusion, in the wider enhancement programme, of up to £44m in funding for a West Anglia Main Line capacity increase. Whilst this will not fund the much-needed wider capacity improvements between Tottenham Hale and Broxbourne Junction, it will provide an important first step and will go some way to improving services for residents. In line with the West Anglia Routes Group (WARG), the county council therefore feels that it is imperative that this scheme receives at least this level of funding.

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 WAML capacity increases where additional funding from the London Enterprise Panel and Transport for London for complementary improvements, is contingent on Network Rail funding being made available in 2014.

For this reason the county council, like WARG, would like confirmation that enhancement schemes, as set out in the determination, that reach GRIP 3 and above in 2014, can be approved for funding by Network Rail.

West Coast Main Line

The county council welcomes the re-signalling enhancements proposed at Watford which will improve service reliability for Hertfordshire residents.

The county council is however concerned that the Draft Determination does not specify any outputs in respect of the construction of HS2. In particular the county council has concerns about the capacity of Euston Station to accommodate high speed services, given that it is already operating at capacity. Whilst Euston is outside Hertfordshire, it is important for our residents as a commuting gateway to London, and as such the county council would not want to see commuting services compromised.

The county council therefore strongly requests that the CP5 Delivery Plan includes planning for the growth and refurbishment of Euston Station so as to accommodate continuing expansion in passenger numbers with, or without, HS2.

Further to the above it is understood that during the proposed construction of Euston Station services going south to Euston along the WCML will be diverted on to the Crossrail

line to alleviate congestion at the station. The county council would therefore reiterate its request for these services to be retained after construction has been completed to increase travel choice for Hertfordshire residents and other travellers.

East Coast Main Line

The county council welcomes the confirmation of funding for the Intercity Express Programme and the East Coast Connectivity Fund (£240M) on the ECML, if it facilitates additional stops being made at Stevenage.

Stevenage is a key railhead for Hertfordshire which has seen the range of destinations served considerably reduced over recent years. Increasing these would mean that there would not only be greater opportunities for interchange with the local service network but also a reduction in pressure on the ECML south of Stevenage, by reducing numbers of local passengers travelling to/from Kings Cross to access intercity services.

The county council also welcomes provision for:

- The Stevenage turnback, particularly if this will increase service frequency and reliability along the Hertford Loop, as well as facilitating connections with ECML services and the potential for more through services (particularly at peak times)
- the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS), currently being trialled on the Hertford Loop. It is understood that this will be rolled out on to the ECML between London and Peterborough in CP5/6, which will help to improve service reliability for Hertfordshire passengers

Other funding

The county council welcomes the confirmation of funding for the following schemes, which will provide additional capacity and journey opportunities for Hertfordshire residents, and which the county council therefore supports:

- the Thameslink programme
- Crossrail
- East West Rail: western section

The county council also welcomes the following ring-fenced funds:

- Level Crossing Safety Fund (£65M) - there are a number of level crossings in Hertfordshire, and in particular on the West Anglia routes, and so it is positive that funding is committed to 'Level Crossing Risk Reduction'
- Station Improvement Fund (£200M) – 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 and delivering Access for All schemes.
- Passenger Journey Time Fund (£300m) – the county council would broadly welcome reduced journey times as long as this did not compromise existing service provision in Hertfordshire. However if only fast services to and from London from outside Hertfordshire are improved this would not improve services for residents and could compromise existing slower services, which the county council would not support.

Similarly the county council provisionally supports the new journey time indicator for connectivity.

The county council is particularly pleased to see that representatives for passengers will be able to have a greater say over how ring-fenced monies can be spent and the county council looks forward to working with the rail industry to identify priority schemes to this end.

Development

There are several significant infrastructure issues on the rail network within Hertfordshire that are already restricting capacity and, with future predicted growth, can only cause greater problems. The county council is therefore pleased to see a Development Fund of £140M identified to consider innovative schemes for CP6 and would like the following to be prioritised:

- 4-tracking of the WAML between Tottenham Hale and Broxbourne Junction
- addressing the ECML pinchpoint at the Welwyn viaduct/tunnels

As detailed above the investment in additional rail infrastructure for the WAML is only the first part of a series of incremental improvements needed to address the wider capacity issues. Further to this, delivery of a potential regional route for Crossrail 2 to Hertfordshire, which the county council strongly supports and is currently being considered by Transport for London, is dependent on four tracking of the WAML by 2025.

The county council would therefore urge that wider capacity issues on the WAML are addressed in CP6, particularly in light of the high levels of growth forecast on this key rail corridor. To wait would mean that Hertfordshire residents would continue to suffer many years of infrequent services and delays.

The county council would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate the need to address a significant pinch point on the ECML between Welwyn Garden City and Knebworth, in the form of the two tracked Welwyn Viaduct and tunnels. This already causes issues with capacity and service reliability and will limit the capacity to accommodate growth in the future.

Rolling stock

The county council is pleased to see that, in addition to half of the Station Improvement Fund being for 'Access for all' schemes, rolling stock will also be made more accessible for passengers during CP5.

Punctuality and reliability

The county council welcomes the minimum of 90% punctuality and reliability targets as services in Hertfordshire are currently falling well short of this. With punctuality percentages for Hertfordshire routes in the recent Passenger Focus National Passenger Survey being largely in the 60's and 70's this output would be a considerable improvement, particularly for commuter services which make up the majority of Hertfordshire journeys.

The county council therefore welcomes the statement in paragraph 31 (page 17):

There will be a renewed focus on improving the worst performing services, with the performance for each franchised operator in England & Wales to reach a minimum of 90% of trains on time. This will benefit customers on routes where train service reliability has been much worse than average.

Handling disruption

The county council is pleased to see that, despite the significant planned works in CP5, that service disruption due to engineering works will be kept to a minimum. Many of the key schemes going forward could have severe impacts on Hertfordshire residents' journeys and so it therefore welcomes the output to reduce disruption by more than 10% for passengers, and supports measures such as increasing Network Rail payments for over-running works and reducing compensation for TOCs for providing rail replacement buses.

Partnership working

Further to encouraging the TOCs and Network Rail to work more closely together to reduce disruption the county council is pleased to see that there will also be outputs to encourage this to reduce costs and increase passenger travel with a new route level incentive mechanism and an improved volume incentive mechanism respectively. The county council would therefore also support a 'whole industry scorecard' to this end.

Information

The county council is particularly pleased to see greater transparency as a key output with more information to be published at a greater level of geographical disaggregation, including at route level, so that it is clearer how services in Hertfordshire are faring.

Further to this the county council is pleased to see confirmation of funding for Network Rail's Operating Strategy which will, as part of its remit, consider improvements to information provided during periods of disruption.

Policing

The county council understands the need for efficiencies to be made but does have concerns that a reduction in funding by £26M for the British Transport Police (BTP) appears substantial. It would not want to see a reduction in presence or availability of the BTP as already officers can be based some distance away from parts of the county's rail network.

Hertfordshire County Council's comments to the Draft Determination have also been returned via the responses of WARG and WCR250, which the County Council is a member of.