

19th February 2013

Valentina Licata
Office of Rail Regulation
One Kemble Street
London
WC2B 4AN

Dear Ms Licata,

Network Rail Strategic Business Plan for England & Wales, Control Period 5

Birmingham City Council welcomes the proposals outlined in the Network Rail Strategic Business Plan for England & Wales for Control Period 5 (2014 – 2019). These will improve rail services in Birmingham and the greater Birmingham travel to work area, helping to support economic growth through improved connectivity and provide some additional capacity to meet increasing demand. In particular, several important schemes to be delivered between 2014 and 2019 include:

- A new, larger, Bromsgrove Station served by up to three new electric services per hour to Longbridge, University, Birmingham New Street, Sutton Coldfield and Lichfield;
- Additional capacity at Alvechurch to enable services from Redditch to increase from two to three trains per hour;
- Walsall-Rugeley line electrification;
- Improved Leamington Spa-Coventry capacity;
- Peak train capacity enhancements;
- Nuneaton-Coventry-Leamington Spa-Oxford-Reading-Southampton electrification; and
- Stafford area enhancements.

However, the City Council is disappointed that other proposed schemes have not been taken forward, including:

- Improvements to the Water Orton-Tamworth route capacity and access to Kingsbury and Birch Coppice freight terminals: this could have enabled new local passenger services between Birmingham and Tamworth/Nuneaton, which would have improved service frequencies and relieved capacity on the longer distance Cross Country trains;
- Extending the Walsall-Rugeley electrification to a new station at Aldridge; and
- Providing a new turnback facility at Rowley Regis: this, coupled with a reinstated platform 4 at Snow Hill Station, could provide faster journey times, more frequent services and additional passenger capacity on the Snow Hill lines.

We are also concerned that the level of investment in the West Midlands travel to work area, in comparison to other regions, is disproportionate to the predicted growth in demand. Rail patronage in the West Midlands Metropolitan Area has increased by 94% since 2000/1, with Centro data showing growth of over 5% per annum over the last decade. A continuation of this trend would see, conservatively, a further growth of around 20% during CP5, but the HLOS specifications provide capacity for only an additional 10% in the peak 3 hours over the same period.

Inadequate investment in the West Midlands rail network will put the region and its passengers at a disadvantage with severe overcrowding forcing mode shift away from rail and stifling growth of the passenger and freight markets. Additionally, a failure to provide the needed rail connectivity improvements will act as a significant barrier to future economic growth and job creation within the region.

The West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority will be providing a more detailed response on behalf of the West Midlands Regional Rail Forum, of which the City Council is a key partner.

We look forward to your review of the Strategic Business Plan and conclusions in due course.

Yours sincerely,



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