

By email: sbp.comments@orr.gsi.gov.uk

CC: Dave Ward Managing Director for Anglia,
Network Rail

Your Ref:
Date: 11 February 2013

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Dear

Strategic Business Plan for Control Period Five

Thank you for extending the opportunity to comment on the Strategic Business Plan for Control Period Five.

Norfolk County Council has recently agreed its Norfolk Rail Prospectus. This sets out what the County Council and its partners see as being needed from rail in order to ensure the continued economic success of the county and deliver the planned jobs and housing growth. Our prospectus was agreed following a number of studies, which provided the evidence base, and consultation with a range of partners including the rail industry and businesses.

The Norfolk Rail Prospectus takes as its starting point the wider Rail Prospectus for East Anglia, which was prepared and agreed across the region by Local Enterprise Partnerships, local authorities, MPs, businesses and the rail industry. Our Prospectus is consistent with this, and adds the detail relevant for the county. A copy of the Executive Summary is attached.

The Norfolk Rail Prospectus clearly sets out our priorities over the short, medium and long-term, based largely on outcomes. Our evidence base provides the supporting justification for what measures are needed, and why, showing the economic benefits that would arise across the county (and further afield) from enhanced rail services. The evidence base also demonstrates why enhanced services will be required, showing how a number of services are already at, or close to capacity and that to keep pace with passenger demand more train capacity will be required. Finally, the evidence base has identified some of the infrastructure constraints and requirements that are needed.

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We consider it vital that the final plans for Control Period Five include firm commitment to delivering tangible benefits between 2014 and 2019, together with progression of longer-term measures to ensure that these can be brought forward for delivery during CP6.

Our priorities to be delivered during CP5 are:

- Delivery of real improvements to journey times on the Great Eastern Main Line before 2019. The aspiration of stakeholders along the route is to deliver journey times from London of 40 minutes to Colchester, 60 minutes to Ipswich and 90 minutes to Norwich. Our short term aspiration would be a minimum of four daily express services between Norwich and London in less than 100 minutes.
- Bow Junction remodelling scheme and longer loops at Chelmsford to release additional capacity into London Liverpool Street
- Enhancements at Ely to allow the full range of service aspirations: Norwich to Cambridge every ½ hour; King's Lynn to Cambridge every ½ hour; Norwich to Peterborough (onwards to Liverpool) every hour; Ipswich to Peterborough every hour; and increases in the numbers of freight trains from the East Coast ports.
- Renewal and maintenance works to ensure reliable journeys, with a particular emphasis on improving reliability on the Great Eastern Main Line
- Important, smaller, more local improvements (which might not be specifically named in the spending programme, but could be developed and delivered during CP5 using funding streams identified for such measures):
 - Step-free access to platforms, and between platforms, at stations. Our priorities are Wymondham, Thetford and Diss
 - Improvements to the condition of stations and their environs. Our priority is Great Yarmouth station
 - Infrastructure to provide faster services (all services) and more capacity / enhanced frequencies (Bittern Line).

We also consider it vitally important that during CP5 resource is provided to advance feasibility work on measures that have been identified as needed, so that these can be ready for delivery in subsequent Control Periods. We would like to engage with government and the rail industry and secure commitment from Network Rail for funding to take forward the following priorities for delivery during CP6:

- Provision of more capacity on the Great Eastern Main Line. The *GEML Capacity Study* (Atkins, October 2012), commissioned by the local authorities, local enterprise partnerships and current train operator, found that the additional capacity could be provided by a length of three-tracking in the Chelmsford area. We seek a commitment to taking forward the study during CP5 to assess the feasibility of the options identified by Atkins, so that a suitable solution can be brought forward for delivery during CP6
- East West Rail. The County Council is a member of the East West Rail Consortium, a group of local authorities and businesses seeking to establish a strategic railway connecting East Anglia with central, southern and western England. Following confirmation that the Western Section, linking Oxford to Bedford, will be opened in 2017, the Consortium is now seeking to take forward the Central Section which will complete the strategic link to East Anglia. The County Council supports the East West

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Rail Consortium in seeking commitment from Network Rail to work with the Consortium during CP5 to identify and develop route options for the Western Section so that it can be brought forward for delivery in subsequent Control Periods

- Infrastructure enhancements to allow enhanced services providing more capacity / increased frequency. In particular our work identifies enhancements needed at Norwich Station approaches and on the Bittern Line. Although this work does not put Trowse Swing Bridge as the principal constraint to enhanced services, we remain concerned that this is the only route into Norwich from outside the county. The bridge has not operated reliably for some time, and has remained closed to river traffic. If the bridge sticks in the open position, Norwich will be cut off from the rail network. The Strategic Business Plan identifies some funding for feasibility work, which is welcome, but it is vitally important to ensure the reliable operation of this bridge.

As well as our priorities listed above, the County Council makes the following more detailed comments on the Strategic Business Plan:

- At Ely we have concerns that the works proposed do not allow for the full range of service enhancements. Our understanding is that an extra £5m of works would be required if the work is carried out at the same time as the other enhancement work is completed. It is likely that the cost would be considerably more if the works were not carried out at the same time, but were undertaken at a later date. We strongly support the full works to be undertaken during CP5 because they will be required in order to deliver the enhanced services required, and there will be efficiencies undertaking them now. We are disappointed to see the reference to Norwich to Cambridge services, and the need for work at Ely, included in the section *Strategy Beyond CP5*
- Page 30, the *Strategy Beyond CP5*, sets out the longer term view regarding electrification of the Felixstowe-Ipswich-Nuneaton line, suggesting it may be electrified during CP6. We see that there is a case for considering electrification of the Norwich-Cambridge route at the same time. Once Felixstowe-Nuneaton is electrified, Norwich-Cambridge will be the only remaining route connecting major centres in the east of England that is not electrified. We believe it is a priority to provide good connections between the major centres. Electrification of the route will, amongst other benefits, provide flexibility regarding rolling stock: without electrification there is a risk that the service will degrade due to the lack of availability of rolling stock (eg by not being able to provide sufficient capacity to cater for demand on the route), or through the necessity of having to use older, diesel rolling stock, leading to poor quality compared to other services
- The *Network Availability Strategy*, page 35, sets out how Network Rail intends to manage services during works. Norfolk County Council supports, in so far as is possible, a railway that operates seven days a week. We see this as particularly important for the routes to London. We appreciate that this is not always possible. Where train services are suspended and replaced by buses passengers should be made aware of this at the time of purchasing tickets, and be advised of the details of the travel arrangements and any alternative (rail) routes they could use. Replacement buses should be accessible for all passengers to use.

- The Council supports track, overhead line equipment (OLE) and other renewals to improve reliability of the services. The Plan acknowledges that on the GEML the OLE has been unreliable and that the ongoing renewals project has suffered from delay. We urge this project to be completed as soon as is practicable, acknowledging the constraints imposed by the desire to operate the railway seven days a week

I have attached a copy of our Norfolk Rail Prospectus, which identifies our priorities, together with summaries of the supporting evidence. This evidence can be made available to the ORR on request. In summary, we have commissioned the following main studies:

- *The Economic Case for Investment on the Great Eastern Main Line* (Atkins May 2010). This found that wider economic benefits worth some £3.7bn for Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex could be realised from shorter journey times, more capacity and better quality on the GEML.
- *GEML Capacity Study* (Atkins October 2012). This study identified a range of options to meet the challenges of reduced journey times and more passenger capacity on the line. Principally these were: remodelling Bow Junction (to provide additional capacity in/out of London); provision of a new three-tracked section at Boreham, north of Chelmsford; and refurbished / new rolling stock.
- *Wider Economic Benefits of Improved Rail Frequencies* (Mott MacDonald July 2012). This looked at wider economic benefits (non-transport benefits including impacts such as increased productivity of business, reduced unemployment and labour market effects) accruing from service improvements on Norwich-Cambridge, King's Lynn-Cambridge (both ½ hourly) and Ipswich-Peterborough (hourly). It estimated direct benefits of £216 million over the 60-year appraisal period.
- *Breckland Line Rail Demand Forecasting Study* (Atkins, May 2012). This study found passenger demand between Norwich and Cambridge would rise as a result of housing and jobs growth. Doubling the frequency to ½ hourly will be needed and would be likely to lead to a positive demand response on the line, with a revenue increase of £350,000 to £500,000. The rail offer might need to improve given increased competition from a dualled A11.
- *Fen Line Rail Demand Forecasting Study* (Atkins, January 2012). The high levels of housing and jobs growth on the King's Lynn to Cambridge corridor is likely to lead to increased passenger demand which couldn't be accommodated on the existing rolling stock. Doubling the frequency and implementing other service enhancements could lead to further passenger demand.
- *Rail Services in Norfolk Demand Analysis* (Mott MacDonald, April 2009). This study considered likely passenger demand given the large amount of housing growth planned in and around Norwich. It found that in the am peak the Bittern Line service would be close to capacity by 2012 and with just background population growth at 141% of capacity by 2027. With the planned housing and jobs growth, the line would be at 231% of the available capacity in 2027. The work therefore suggested capacity issues south of North Walsham "*with an additional hourly service between North Walsham and Norwich as the minimum aspiration.*" It also suggested a ½ hourly service between Norwich and Cambridge.

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- *Timetabling Exercise* (Mott MacDonald, April 2009). This identified the infrastructure constraints on the rail network that will need to be overcome for the range of enhanced services.

In summary, Norfolk County Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Strategic Business Plan. We are pressing for commitment to delivery of tangible benefits during Control Period Five, together with a commitment to taking forward feasibility work on longer-term measures for delivery in subsequent periods.

Thank you for providing the opportunity for comment at this critical time for decision-making on rail.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'DC' followed by a long, horizontal, slightly wavy line that ends in a small tick.

David Cumming