



Walsall Council

Regeneration Directorate

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SBP Consultation
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Dear Sir/Madam,

Walsall Council welcomes the chance to comment on Network Rails Strategic business Plan (SBP). We are broadly supportive of the schemes set out in the document, in particular the inclusion of the Walsall to Rugeley electrification. We would ask that you pay particular attention to the case for the addition of a spur to Aldridge to this scheme.

Walsall has the potential to become a rail hub if the correct infrastructure is delivered. There is currently only one line through Walsall served by passenger services, however the Sutton Park Line and Walsall to Wolverhampton (via Willenhall) lines which are currently freight only offer active routes for development. In the longer term the Stourbridge – Walsall – Lichfield route which is partially mothballed and partially protected track bed offers another route through Walsall for freight and passenger services with large benefits to other congested areas on the network.

Walsall station should also be considered for investment with the likelihood that more passenger services will stop here, and we particularly support the need for longer distance services to offer direct connections to and from markets, jobs and workforces further afield.

We have set out more detailed comments in the attached document. We hope you find our comments useful, please contact Matt Crowton tel: 01922654358 if you require any clarifications.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Tom Ansell
Walsall Council – Transport and Environment Portfolio Holder

**Walsall Council Response to the Strategic Business Plan for Control Period 5 (2014-19)
published by Network Rail in January 2013-02-11**

Introduction

1. Walsall Council welcomes the publication of the rail industry's Strategic Business Plan and the proposed investment in the West Midlands regional rail network during Control Period 5
2. In particular, we strongly support the inclusion of the Walsall to Rugeley electrification in the CP5 programme which should help support economic growth through improved connectivity and provide some of the additional rail capacity required to meet continuing demand
3. We would like to draw to your attention the additional value which can be added to the scheme by extending the electrification a short distance to Aldridge enabling the reinstatement of a station with services to Walsall, Birmingham and beyond. The North East of Walsall is poorly served by rail and this addition to the CP5 program could support significant modal shift.
4. Walsall Council also supports other schemes which have been included for the West Midlands area:
 - Coventry – Leamington Spa Capacity Enhancements
 - Electric Spine (Nuneaton – Coventry – Leamington Spa – Oxford)
 - Stafford Area Capacity Enhancements
5. However, the Council would like to express its support for Centro ITA in its disappointment that the Water Orton Corridor Capacity Enhancement / Kingsbury Freight Access scheme was dropped from the program.
6. Walsall Council remains extremely concerned about how the lack of rail investment in the West Midlands Travel to Work area in comparison to other regions will:
 - fail to provide the required improvements in rail connectivity for passengers
 - not connect the intermodal freight terminals at Hams Hall, Lawley St and Birch Coppice to the expanding electrified rail freight network
 - provide insufficient capacity for continuing growth in both passenger and rail freight markets
 - lead to severe overcrowding on the West Midlands rail network and force passengers on to other, less sustainable transport modesand act as a barrier to future economic growth and job creation.
7. Many of the above concerns were initially raised in some detail in Centro and the Black Country LEP's responses in November 2011 to the Rail Industry's **2011 Initial Industry Plan**. We supported both of those responses and fully support Centro's response to this consultation into the SBP.

Walsall – Rugeley Electrification (with Aldridge)

8. This scheme was strongly promoted by Walsall Council, Cannock Chase DC, Centro, the West Midlands Regional Rail Forum, the Local Enterprise Partnerships and other local stakeholders.
9. It allows full electric operation of a service which is currently operated by an inefficient mix of diesel and electric trains, facilitates additional, faster local rail services and provides a second electrified route for both passenger and freight services between the West Midlands and the northern section of the West Coast Main Line.
10. It also frees up diesel rolling stock which can be used to provide additional capacity elsewhere on the network.
11. However, in order to fully maximise the benefits of the electrification proposal, Walsall Council would wish to see the rail industry extend all platforms on this route to accommodate 4 car electric trains.
12. In the longer term, electrification of this route could allow improved connectivity from Cannock and Walsall to Stafford, Stoke and the North West and across Birmingham to Birmingham International, Coventry and even facilitate through semi-fast services to London.
13. As previously mentioned, Walsall wishes to highlight the fact that there is also potential for considerable synergy between this electrification project and the proposal being developed to open a new station on the Sutton Park freight line for the local population centre at Aldridge.
14. The Aldridge proposal could bring substantial economic and connectivity benefits to an area with relatively poor transport links if taken forward in addition to the base electrification scheme.
15. The Aldridge scheme involves a new single platform station with turnback facility and the electrification of approximately 3 miles of double track between Aldridge and Ryecroft Junction on the Walsall-Rugeley route.
16. A GRIP2 stage report into this scheme was completed in January 2013 and Walsall Council is working with Centro and Network Rail to determine whether the short extension of electrification to Aldridge could form an option for the main Walsall - Rugeley scheme.

Franchise Devolution

17. Walsall Council supports devolving the control of local services to local people. Centro, on behalf of the regional Rail forum of which Walsall Council is a member, is working with the Department for Transport to develop a proposition for a locally managed and locally specified rail franchise for the West Midlands from September 2015.
18. As part of this it is likely that Centro (or local franchising authority) would look to take over revenue risk for local rail services and thus have a far greater interest in the commercial and performance aspects of the relationship between Network Rail and the West Midlands TOC.
19. In particular, there will be a need during CP5 to recognise the requirement for a closer relationship between Network Rail and Centro in respect of the operation and management of the West Midlands rail network.

20. Centro will need to work closely with Network Rail in relation to costs, performance regimes, funding and investment and that consideration of these issues needs to be in the context of the devolved West Midlands franchise area (see above point about Network Rail Route remapping).
21. Similarly when alliancing proposals for the West Midlands are developed, these will need to involve Centro as the future service specifier and holder of revenue risk for local services.
22. Walsall Council sees this as a step in the right direction towards delivering other important rail links for Walsall including reinstating a rail service between the strategic centres of Walsall and Wolverhampton which if direct takes 14 minutes rather than the 1hr+ link via Birmingham New Street which has replaced it.

LNW Route Asset Management

23. Given the strong potential for reopening the disused Stourbridge – Walsall rail line, and its extension to Lichfield to Facilitate a Freight bypass of the conurbation and importantly local passenger services, Walsall Council would wish to see this asset managed on a more proactive basis by Network Rail during CP5, rather than the infrastructure owner continuing with a policy of simply reacting to failures.

Schedule 8 and Capacity Charge

24. The SBP should show the Schedule 8 and Capacity Charge funding together so that the net Schedule 8 costs are transparent.
25. Walsall Council supports Centro in its ongoing discussions regarding their concerns in respect of the potential negative impacts of the Capacity Charge regime for CP5 with both the Office of Rail Regulation and Network Rail in order to try and reach an acceptable solution, on a case by case basis if necessary. This specifically affect services north of Walsall which are extremely important in improving sustainable transport links into Walsall Borough.

Level Crossing Fund

26. Walsall Council welcomes the allocation of funding for improved safety at level crossings. The Council is currently working with Network Rail to look at options for the closure of Bloxwich Level crossing on the Walsall to Rugeley Trent Valley Line due to the increased usage following line speed upgrades, re-signalling and electrification. We encourage further funding to be allocated for level crossing closures to ensure that essential mitigation measures, including surrounding highway improvements, can be delivered where crossings are to be closed.

Summary

27. In summary, Walsall Council broadly welcomes the Strategic Business Plan as a comprehensive blueprint for the management and development of the national rail network during Control Period 5.
28. In particular, there are some significant economic, connectivity and capacity benefits from schemes proposed for the West Midlands.
29. There are also significant additional benefits to be realised if schemes such as new stations at Aldridge and Kenilworth can be progressed in parallel with the SBP plans.
30. However, whilst welcoming the proposed investment Walsall Council remains concerned about:

- the comparative lack of rail investment in the West Midlands in CP5 which is in contrast to the major investment in the North of England with Northern Hub and Transpennine electrification.
- the dropping from the SBP of the IIP and HLOS scheme to provide additional passenger and freight capacity on the Water Orton corridor
- the low level of additional peak time capacity proposed for the West Midlands which will be incapable of meeting the background level of growth
- and the potential impact of this lack of capacity on the economic competitiveness of the West Midlands region.

31. We will support Centro and the West Midlands Regional Rail Members Group in continuing to engage with ORR, Department for Transport Network Rail, Passenger and Freight Operators and wider stakeholders in order to address these concerns via both the CP5 planning process and other appropriate channels and funding streams.