

Meeting **JOINT COMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC PLANNING AND TRANSPORT**

Date **12 MARCH 2010** Agenda item number

From **JOINT OFFICER STEERING GROUP**

## **RAIL ISSUES UPDATE**

### **Purpose of the report**

1. To update the Committee on key rail issues in and into the Greater Nottingham Local Transport Plan (LTP) area and rail services cross local authority boundaries. The work of the two Councils, although separate, is complementary, and of mutual benefit.

### **Midland Main Line upgrade**

#### Investment to raise current linespeeds and cut journey times

2. As previously reported, Network Rail is now working on the detailed design of a £69million scheme to achieve an 8 minute reduction in the Sheffield - London journey time. It is hoped that Network Rail will complete this design work and report back shortly, at which point the time saving between Nottingham and London will also be reported, but that is expected to be around 6 or 7 minutes.

#### East Midlands Parliamentary Select Committee

3. In autumn 2009 the House of Commons Select Committee for the East Midlands launched an inquiry into whether the East Midlands receives its fair share of funding. The Councils made submissions to this inquiry which set out in detail:
  - how the Midland Main Line (MML) has for decades had far, far less investment than other comparable inter-city rail routes, or the M1;
  - how this has resulted in the MML having the slowest speeds of any inter-city route;
  - how this puts the economy of the East Midlands at a disadvantage;
  - how, far from redressing the historic disadvantage, the sum allocated for investment in the MML for the coming 5 years (£69 million) is again far less than for any other inter-city rail route or the M1;
  - how the small sum allocated to the MML is excellent value for money; and
  - how there are other modest measures that could be undertaken on the MML that would be similarly excellent value for money.

4. As a result of the submissions, the Select Committee choose rail and the MML as one of the subjects to be considered in depth. The County Council, East Midlands Trains, Network Rail and Travelwatch East Midlands were summoned to attend a Select Committee hearing on 17 December 2009, at which the evidence was considered in depth. At the end of these considerations the Select Committee asked for a further paper to be submitted, setting out what further measures would be possible to improve journey times.
5. Following intensive work with Network Rail over the next 4 weeks, on 15 January 2010 a paper was submitted to the Select Committee. The paper set out the case for an additional £27½million investment. This would have two elements:
  - provision of additional tracks ('freight loops') at Desborough to enable passenger trains to overtake freight trains; and
  - realignment of the track at Market Harborough, to reduce curvature and so raise speeds from 60mph to 80mph or possibly 90mph.

#### Benefit of freight loops at Desborough

6. For most of its length the MML has separate freight tracks. But between Wigston and Kettering there are just two tracks which have to be shared by freight and passenger trains. At present it takes a freight train 20 minutes more than a passenger train to get from Wigston and Kettering. This means that there are long periods when MML passenger trains cannot run – 20 or 40 minutes each hour, depending on whether there are 1 or 2 freight trains that hour. This severely constrains the times at which passenger trains can be run.
7. This is the primary reason why Nottingham express trains call at Market Harborough. If they didn't then they would catch up with a freight train a few miles before Kettering and would be held up for 3 minutes, so instead that time is used up in making a call at Harborough. In fact if trains didn't call at Harborough they wouldn't be made to crawl the last few miles to Kettering, but would travel all the way from Wigston to Kettering at below top speed, so that the 3 minutes would be used up without passengers noticing. But whatever way it is done, it involves a 3 minute time penalty for Nottingham express trains.
8. The freight loops would allow passenger trains to overtake, and would reduce Nottingham to London journey times by 3 minutes, assuming that the Market Harborough call was omitted.

#### Benefit of realignment at Market Harborough

9. The section through Market Harborough is the most curved on the entire MML, with a series of s-bend curves (known as 'reverse curves') as the line snakes its way through. This imposes a string of speed restrictions over around 2 miles, so that the speed drops from 100mph to 75mph, then 60mph, then 85mph before finally returning to 100mph.

10. This poor alignment is a result of historical factors. For over 100 years from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, Market Harborough was a junction between the MML and two other lines. At Market Harborough station the MML had to bend eastwards to make room for a line from Northampton. A mile to the north of the MML was originally on an almost straight route but was subsequently diverted onto a long bend to allow a line from Peterborough to pass underneath it.
11. However both those lines have now closed. The Peterborough line was closed by Beeching in 1966, but he didn't reinstate the MML over its original straight route, and for the last 46 years MML trains have had to slow down to travel over a curve to avoid another line that no longer exists.
12. The Northampton line was closed in 1981, so freeing up the land that would allow a gentler curve and a higher speed through the station. In anticipation of just such realignment, when British Rail (BR) rebuilt Market Harborough station in 1978 it put the new buildings in the revised place necessary to allow the track to be moved to the better alignment. Unfortunately, this piece of admirable forward planning by BR was thwarted because by 1982, when the Northampton line had closed, BR's budget had been severely cut and there was no money to move the track. In a sense, the realignment of the track through Market Harborough is a job that was started in 1978 but has remained unfinished for 32 years.
13. It would now be possible to realign the track over a couple of miles to give a much straighter and faster route through both former junctions. This would reduce the length over which any speed reduction was necessary, and raise the minimum speed from 60mph to at least 80mph. It has several big advantages that make it cheaper than work elsewhere:
  - it involves old railway land that is already suitable for railway track; and
  - because much of the work will be 20 to 50 metres away from the existing track, it can be done without the disruption to trains that was so problematic on the West Coast upgrade - this will make the construction easier and cheaper, and minimise compensation costs and minimise disruption to passengers.
14. This low-cost approach is entirely consistent with the innovative approach that has made the MML linespeed scheme as a whole so exceptionally cheap for the benefits it will produce.

#### Nottingham in 90

15. The outcome of the additional £27 million works to complement the £69 million scheme should mean that, if Nottingham trains called only at Leicester, the Nottingham - London journey time could be cut from the current 1¾ hours to 90 minutes as from 2014.
16. The £69 million Network Rail scheme is due to be completed by 2014. Fortuitously 2014 is the date when the franchise to operate the MML is

renewed. To realise the 90 minute Nottingham – London journey time it will be necessary for the Department for Transport (DfT) to specify that in the post 2014 franchise that Nottingham express trains have a limited number of intermediate calls.

17. Thus the steps needed to achieve a standard Nottingham – London journey time of 90 minutes are;
  - the Network Rail £69 million scheme – which is now fully funded, and is included in the Network Rail business plan for completion by 2014 (and which date is guaranteed by the oversight of the Office of Rail Regulation);
  - the £11.6 million enhancements to the track and signalling around Nottingham station – which is also now fully funded and is included in the Network Rail business plan for completion in 2012;
  - the additional £27½ million works at Desborough and Harborough; and
  - agreement from DfT to specify the required express stopping pattern in the post 2014 franchise. This will need to be negotiated with DfT in 2012 (when consultation for the next franchise takes place).

#### Electrification

18. Electrification would cut journey times by around a further 2 or 3 minutes, primarily from faster acceleration away from station stops and speed restrictions.
19. As previously reported to the Committee, the MML has the best business case for its electrification of any line in Britain. However, the July 2009 DfT White Paper ‘Rail Electrification’ announced that electrification will proceed on the Great Western Main Line (London to Bristol, Cardiff and Swansea) and from Liverpool to Manchester.
20. The White Paper stated that ‘the Government will carefully consider the costs and benefits of wider electrification, with particular reference to the Midland Main Line between London and Derby, Nottingham and Sheffield, as well as the routes between Manchester and Preston, and Liverpool and Preston’. Subsequently DfT has announced the electrification of the 2 Lancashire routes, but there have been no further announcements about the MML.
21. On 15 February 2010, the House of Commons Transport Select Committee published a report ‘Priorities for investment in the railways’. One of its main recommendations is that ‘further electrification of the network, particularly the Midland Main Line between London and Sheffield, should also be given top priority’.

#### High Speed Rail (HSR)

22. A direct London – Nottingham high-speed line should allow the journey time to be reduced to between 45 and 50 minutes.

23. In March, the Government is expected to publish its White Paper on developing high-speed rail services. It will be crucial for the local economy, and indeed the regional economy, that greater Nottingham is included in plans for a high-speed rail network.

### **Other Infrastructure schemes**

#### East Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy

24. On 26 February 2010, Network Rail published its Route Utilisation Strategy for the East Midlands (RUS), which will set out comprehensive proposals for the development of the region's rail network over the coming ten years to cater for the expected levels of growth in rail travel, and to make any other improvements that may be justified and have a good business case. Once the RUS is received, a synopsis of the RUS' key recommendations will be provided for the committee.
25. Work continues on the large range of schemes and studies reported previous Joint Committee meetings, including:
- a study into raising the speed on the Nottingham to Grantham line, so as to reduce journey times and enable a very substantial increase in service to Aslockton, Radcliffe and Netherfield;
  - a scheme to transform the Nottingham - Newark - Lincoln line, with speeds raised to 90mph;
  - a scheme to raise speeds on the Nottingham - Leeds line and reduce journey times by 25 minutes;
  - a scheme to raise speeds on a section of the Nottingham - Manchester line and reduce journey times by 2 minutes, as the first stage of a much bigger reduction in journey times;
  - a study of raising speeds on the northern section of the Robin Hood Line; and
  - a study of whether it might be possible to reduce the costs of re-opening the Robin Hood Line to Ollerton.

Progress on these schemes will be reported to the next Joint Committee

### **Nottingham Station Hub scheme**

26. Funding Agreements are currently being finalised between Nottingham City Council and Network Rail and emda respectively. East Midlands Trains has sought formal approval of the Office of Rail Regulator for the scheme and the statutory Station Stage consultation process is due to commence shortly. The target for completion for the above activity remains June 2010, which would then allow Network Rail to appoint a contractor for the delivery of the new multi storey car park, which is the first stage of the main station works. Public realm works to Station Street and the adjacent milk dock cycle facility are ongoing and due for completion by the end of March 2010.

## **Service changes from May 2010**

27. The next timetable change will be in May 2010. The Councils had requested a number of changes. East Midlands Trains has now confirmed that the service from Beeston to Loughborough and Leicester will be doubled from a train every hour to a train every 30 minutes.
28. It has not yet been confirmed whether the Nottingham - Birmingham journey time will be reduced by 6 minutes, as Cross Country has requested. This would take advantage of the additional track capacity that was installed at Trent junction in January 2010, and the consequent reduction in train delays from congestion.
29. Several of the Councils' requests have not been agreed for implementation:
  - all Sunday trains to call at Bulwell;
  - an additional train at 07.00 from Newark, Fiskerton, Lowdham and Carlton to Nottingham;
  - an additional train at 19.30 from Nottingham to Carlton, Lowdham, and Fiskerton to Newark and Lincoln;
  - a reduction of around 4 or 5 minutes in Sunday journey times to/from London; and
  - the 09.31 Lincoln to Nottingham to call at Collingham.

The Councils are extremely disappointed and will continue to press strongly for these.

## **Nottingham - Newark**

30. At the initiative of Councillors from Nottinghamshire and Newark and Sherwood Councils, a Trentside Villages Rail Users Group has been set up to promote the interests of rail passengers on the Nottingham - Newark line. There is already a Friends of Collingham Station group.
31. East Midlands Trains (EMT) has established a Stakeholders group for the Nottingham - Newark - Lincoln line. Both Councils are represented, along with EMRA, emda, Lincolnshire, Lincoln City and Newark and Sherwood Councils, Newark Business Club, and the two users' groups. This group is chaired by the Managing Director of EMT, which is an extremely encouraging indication of the commitment of EMT to this line.
32. The Stakeholders Group is considering how the issue of an enhanced level of service on this line might be taken forward. Three possibilities in particular are being explored:
  - a marketing campaign, funded by Nottinghamshire County Council, to raise patronage and revenue, thereby strengthening the revenue side of the business case for additional services;
  - whether emda would provide interim financial support for selected additional services, particularly an 07.00 Newark - Nottingham and a 19.30 Nottingham - Newark; and

- what use might best be made of a small amount of 'spare time' that one train set will have when some of its Lincoln - Newark trips are replaced by the new direct Lincoln - Newark - London service which starts operation in May 2011 - on which subject the DfT has the final say.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

25. It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of the report.

## **Background Papers**

26. 'Britain's Transport Infrastructure - Rail Electrification', DfT, July 2009  
'Priorities for investment in the railways', House of Commons Transport Select Committee. 15 February 2010

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