

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

Date **23 SEPTEMBER 2011**

Agenda item number

9

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 across local authority boundaries. The work of the two Councils, although separate, is complementary, and of mutual benefit.

Midland Main Line

2. On 24th November 2010, in response to a joint letter from Councillors Jackson and Urquhart, the Councils received a reply from the Minister of State for Transport, Theresa Villiers MP, which stated
"The recently announced Regional Growth Fund is a potential source of funding. Given the benefits you and your fellow local authorities have identified as linked to further investment in the Midland Main Line, I suggest you look initially to this fund for the £27million that you seek".

Whilst not being a commitment, this is the most positive on-the-record statement that has been made about this scheme by a Government Minister, and is extremely encouraging.

3. As a result of Ms Villiers' letter, intensive work was undertaken between Nottinghamshire County Council, East Midlands Councils, Network Rail, East Midlands Trains, and Nottingham Regeneration Ltd, to draw up a bid to round 2 of the Regional Growth Fund (RGF). On June 30th a bid for £20,650,000 was submitted by East Midlands Trains. The bid received strong endorsement from the D2N2 Local Economic Partnership.
4. In June 2010, in a joint letter from Councillors Jackson and Urquhart, the Councils had requested for funding works at 2 locations,
 - Realignment of the track at Market Harborough, to reduce curvature and so raise speeds from 60mph to 80mph or possibly 90mph, and
 - Provision of additional tracks ('freight loops') at Desborough to enable passenger trains to overtake freight trains.These works had been identified by Network Rail as part of the submission made by the County Council, East Midlands Trains and

Network Rail to the House of Commons Select Committee for the East Midlands in January 2010.

5. During the course of preparing the RGF bid Network Rail were engaged to update the assessment of the works required at Market Harborough and Desborough, and the costs. Network Rail completed that update by the end of June and established that the linespeed through Market Harborough could be raised from the current 60mph to 85mph. The works would require rebuilding of the station, which would be upgraded at the same time. The total cost would be £20.65million.
6. Unfortunately the update work by Network Rail cast some doubt on Network Rail's earlier assessment of the benefits of having freight loops at Desborough, and for this reason it was not possible to include that in the RGF bid. The Councils are continuing to discuss this issue urgently with Network Rail and East Midlands Trains, and have asked for further information, which will be reported verbally at the meeting.
7. A draft has been prepared of a letter from Councillors Jackson and Urquhart to the Minister (Ms Villiers) to be sent in September to say that we have followed her advice and submitted an RGF bid for this scheme.
8. In his budget speech on 23rd March, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, stated

Savings in the Transport Department mean that we can also afford £200 million of additional investment in our regional railways. We will go ahead with the £85 million Ordsall Chord scheme, linking Manchester's Victoria and Piccadilly stations and significantly reducing journey times between Liverpool and Leeds. We can commit to – and I know many Honourable Members have been calling for this – the Swindon to Kemble redoubling scheme. And this will complement our electrification of the Great Western Main Line to Wales.

9. The Swindon - Kemble line is related to but not a core part of the Great Western Main Line, of which it is a branch line. It is used by just two, relatively lightly loaded trains per hour, whereas the Midland Main Line at Market Harborough is used by 8 trains per hour and approximately ten times as many passengers.
10. Just like the bid for works at Market Harborough and Desborough, the scheme to redouble the Swindon - Kemble line originated as a late addition to the RFA programme in 2009. The Swindon - Kemble scheme had been costed by Network Rail at £32million in 2008, but DfT has now allocated £45million. Officers are trying to establish what is the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of the Swindon - Kemble scheme, though the preliminary information from DfT is that it is significantly lower than the BCR for the MML works at Market Harborough.

11. In his budget speech the Chancellor referred to the lobbying for the Swindon - Kemble scheme by 4 MPs. The MML has had no such effective lobbying by MPs.
12. £45million for the Swindon - Kemble double track scheme, plus £85million that has been allocated to the 'Ordsall Chord' scheme. This leaves £70million of the Chancellor's £200m which is so far unallocated, and which could be used for the Midland Main Line.

High Speed Rail

13. In February 2011, the Department for Transport (DfT) published a consultation document setting out its proposed strategy for a high-speed rail network for Britain. It has two main elements
 - A detailed proposed route between London and Birmingham, and
 - An in principle commitment to a network that includes two 'arms' north from Birmingham,
 - one to Manchester and the north west, and
 - one to the East Midlands, Sheffield, and Leeds, with connections onwards to Newcastle and Edinburgh, plus short sections connecting directly to Heathrow and to the Channel tunnel line to Paris, Belgium, Germany and beyond.

The consultation closed on 29th July 2011. Both Councils have made submissions, which are attached at Appendix A.
14. It is expected that the Minister will make an announcement of his decision around the end of the year.

Nottingham Station Hub scheme

15. Network Rail's appointed contractor for the multi-story car park contract, Vinci Plc, continues to make good progress and remains on course to complete by May 2012. Network Rail has also entered into preferred bidder stage with Vinci Plc for the main station works and anticipates reaching contract close by early October 2011. All work, including associated highways work, is programmed to be complete by November 2014 though prior to contract award Network Rail and East Midlands Trains will jointly be considering alternative programme options put forward by Vinci Plc which may offer a reduction in the overall programme duration

Nottingham - Birmingham journey time improvement

16. It was reported to this committee in December 2009 that Trent West junction is subject to a very severe speed restriction (10mph westbound and 15mph eastbound) because it is so sharply curved. Network Rail renewed the track at this location in August 2009, and as a result of extremely strong pressure from the Council Network Rail

agreed to do some further works here to raise speeds slightly (to 15mph westbound and 20mph eastbound). These works are finally planned for the weekend of 18th & 19th June 2011.

17. Train operator Cross Country had hoped that these works, together with previous works at Trent East Junction, would enable some modest reduction in the Nottingham - Birmingham journey times, but that has not proved possible in advance of the Nottingham resignalling. However, completion of these works at Trent West does mean that this element of the journey time reduction will be achievable once the Nottingham resignalling scheme has been completed in 2013.

Infrastructure improvements

18. In conjunction with Network Rail, work continues on the large range of schemes and studies reported previously, including:
 - a study into raising the speed on the Nottingham to Grantham line, so as to reduce journey times and enable a 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.Details will be reported to future joint committee meetings as work progresses.

Other service changes to local trains

19. The next timetable change will be as from 11th December 2011. As reported to the last joint committee meeting, there will be a couple of minor changes to services to/from Nottingham
 - The 06.45 Nottingham - Grantham - Skegness will depart 4 minutes earlier and call at Bingham. This is in response to a request from a member of the public made to Councillor Butler, to which East Midlands Trains has agreed; and
 - The 07 08 Lincoln - Newark - Nottingham - Leicester - London will depart 4 minutes earlier and call at Lowdham. This is the fulfilment of an undertaking made in 2008 by East Midlands Trains, to users from Lowdham that this train would call there as soon as it was possible to get a slightly earlier path for this train across the Newark flat crossing of the East Coast Main Line.

20. In addition, DfT has now agreed to fund East Midlands Trains to operate an additional train at 19.30 from Nottingham to Newark and Lincoln, calling at Carlton, Burton Joyce, Lowdham, and Fiskerton. It is believed that the cost of this is around £10,000 per annum.
21. East Midlands Trains had also requested that, as a consequence of changes to the East Coast Main Line timetable, DfT fund an additional train at 06.30 from Lincoln to Newark and Nottingham, calling at intermediate stations, but DfT declined to do so from its 'rail' budget. Nottinghamshire County Council therefore submitted a bid for £90,800 from round 1 of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) to run this train on weekdays. Unfortunately DfT did not approve that LSTF bid as part of round 1, but has effectively transferred the bid into round 2 and deferred a decision until further work has been undertaken. No date has yet been given for when a decision will be announced
22. The Councils continue to be involved in the Nottingham - Lincoln line Stakeholder board which has been established by East Midlands Trains (EMT).
23. Some new diesel trains are being built for services in the West Midlands. They will almost certainly be the last diesel trains ever built for Britain's railway system. They will displace about 60 older vehicles. On 10th August, DfT announced that 16 of these trains (= 32 vehicles) were being allocated to
"deliver additional seats into Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield and Newcastle from December 2011. The total cost of this investment is £16.7m. This covers the net cost of additional passenger services until the end of each franchise."
As can be seen, this DfT investment benefits every 'Core City' in England except Nottingham. Only Nottingham is left out.
24. Just two 3-car trains are now left unallocated. They are the only diesel trains that will be available between now and 2017, when electrification in Lancashire will displace some diesel trains. East Midlands Trains is seeking to hire these trains to enhance services into Nottingham and Derby, in particular by extending the Matlock - Nottingham service to Newark every hour. This would have the effect of doubling the frequency of service between Nottingham and Newark to a train every 30 minutes (currently it's a train every hour). This would require funding by DfT in the same way that it has just funded the equivalent service enhancements in every other Core City.
25. The County Council is co-ordinating a political lobby of the Minister of State for Transport, Theresa Villiers, to gain approval for the necessary funding. Letters of support have already been sent by Vernon Coaker MP (Gedling - which covers Carlton and Burton Joyce), Patrick Mercer MP (Newark - which also covers Lowdham, Thurgarton, Bleasby,

Fiskerton, Rolleston and Collingham), and Karl McCartney MP (Lincoln).

RECOMMENDATION

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

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