

Merseytravel Response to Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan for Control Period 4

1. Introduction

1.1 Merseytravel has reviewed the proposed Network Rail Strategic Business Plan (SBP) for Control Period 4. While, in the main it is supportive of the proposals outlined within the SBP there are a number of areas, which we feel it would be helpful to address.

2. Overall Strategy

2.1 Merseytravel understands that the basis for the Network Rail Business Plan is aimed at building on the success of the improvements made in Control period 3 (CP3) and dealing with the growth taking place on the railway. While much of the strategy is based on the work carried out by the Route Utilisation Strategies (RUS). There is a concern that the Plan is currently weak in those geographic areas where a RUS has yet to be completed. This is the case on Merseyside where the RUS has only recently commenced. The specific areas which concern merseytravel are detailed below and we would hope that the final determinations expected to be published by October 2008 incorporate recommendations coming out of the Merseyside RUS.

3. Performance Improvements

3.1 Merseytravel is disappointed that Network Rail does not believe it can achieve the performance target set out in the Governments High Level Output Statement (HLOS) without additional financial support. However, it is recognised that while Northern Rail services within Merseyside fail to achieve this target Merseyrail services consistently deliver above this benchmark. It is important, therefore, that if the suggestion from Network Rail that all services should be delivered above a PPM of 90% that there is no loss of performance on networks such as Merseyrail where this level of performance is consistently delivered.

3.2 Merseytravel already believes that a move to Vertical Integration would not only ensure this but would also lead to performance benefits which would assist in delivering a higher national PPM.

3.3 In discussion with other PTEs it has been recognised that the PPM assessment of performance is a coarse instrument with no differential between lightly used services and heavy peak loaded services. This is an issue that perhaps should be addressed.

4. **Capacity**

- 4.1 Merseytravel is extremely concerned about provision of capacity on the rail network and the lack of recognition of the potential patronage increases on the Merseyrail network.
- 4.2 The current HLOS estimate for Merseyrail is based on the assessment carried out as part of the Regional Planning Assessment which Merseytravel has serious concerns regarding its significant underestimate of potential future growth.
- 4.3 The work carried out as part of the North West RUS recognised this and adjusted the growth estimates accordingly. It is extremely likely that a similar situation will occur with the Merseyside RUS. Merseytravel would strongly argue that this element of the SBP should be modified in the light of any information, which is produced as part of the Merseyside RUS, which has only recently commenced. Only if this is carried out will an informed judgement be made regarding the possible need for additional electric multiple units on Merseyrail.

5. **Safety**

- 5.1 Merseytravel is supportive of any work aimed at not only ensuring the current high level of safety on the railway but any improvements which Network Rail can deliver. It is important that the confidence of the public is retained as the network is developed.

6. **Possessions Strategy/7-day Railway**

- 6.1 Merseytravel is keen to see the development and overhaul of the current restrictive possessions process. The proposed 7-day railway comes at a time when city centres across Britain are being developed and effectively expanding their hours of operation.

7. **Station Strategy**

- 7.1 Merseytravel welcomes the development of a stations strategy by Network Rail and the development of a National Station Improvement programme.
- 7.2 However, the provision of £150m appears to be woefully short of the money needed to make a real impact on the current standards of stations.
- 7.3 Additionally, Merseytravel is concerned t how the money has been allocated with train operators who have many low used stations achieving more favourable levels of investment than Merseyrail, which has a low number of stations which are well used. The need for investment in the underground stations in the city centre is of particular importance.

8. **Conclusions**

- 8.1 From Merseytravel perspective while a number of issues appear not be have been addressed, in particular the issue of future growth on Merseyrail and the low level of station investment to come through NSIP, the overall plan is very positive.
- 8.2 Merseytravel looks forward to working with both Network Rail and the ORR in delivering the outputs identified within the SBP through the CP4 period.