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13 December 2007

Dear Mr McMahon

Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan.

Overall, we support much of the Plan, particularly its doubling of investment in improvements, compared to the previous comparable period. However, we would like to see further investment in infrastructure and rolling stock. We feel that the Plan concentrates much of its emphasis on problems into and around London and does not respond so effectively to the problems in places such as Norfolk. In order to meet the levels of jobs and housing growth expected in this part of the region, and to achieve the objectives of the Regional Spatial Plan and our own Local Transport Plan, we feel that further measures are needed, with further investment is needed in infrastructure and the service frequency and range of destinations.

Overall, we feel that the forecasting and analysis that underpins the Plan is London centric and may not robustly assess future demand and rail requirements in parts of the country such as Norfolk. The Business Plan itself recognises that some forecasts based on the forecasting model are too low. In particular, it states that demand within the major urban areas outside London has grown very strongly over the last 10 years, well in excess of what the model would have predicted, reflecting changes in the economic structure and employment patterns of the cities concerned. We understand that most of the work done for the RUSs (and hence Strategic Business Plan) is based on looking at demand into London, and that very little detailed work was done looking at demand out of places such

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as Norwich or King's Lynn. We feel that further work needs to be done in these areas to ensure that measures are targeted where required, and not just in the London arc.

As well as believing that current forecasting and analysis is London centric and may not robustly assess future demand and rail requirements in other parts of the country, we have three other main concerns:

- Replacement of rolling stock on the Norwich to London line
- The need to address capacity issues coming into Liverpool Street and the realism of the suggestion of a new line between Ongar and Chelmsford
- The need for additional capacity on the Bittern Line, noting that this should be given priority for new carriages targeted at rural lines.

Taking these in turn, we have commented previously on the issue about the rolling stock. Our views are that, whilst we would support replacement of the stock with new high quality, inter-city standard stock, and would support replacement of the current trains by such units at the earliest opportunity, we have serious reservations about the type of stock.

We are opposed to any rolling stock that would result in a diminution of the inter city status of the line. This would not only result in a worse perception and attractiveness of the rail service itself, but also reduce the perceived importance and status of destinations on the route, especially Norwich, increasing the perception of peripherality and making it harder to ensure the continuing economic success of this regional centre, or to deliver the levels of growth set out in the regional plan. We feel that it is vital that the intercity status of the route be maintained. To maintain this, we believe that new rolling stock needs to offer at least the same levels of service as at present: 2X1 seating in First Class and 2X2 in Standard, carriages with tables, a buffet car and ideally a restaurant carriage.

We have previously expressed concern about the apparent lack of long-term planning to address capacity issues on the Great Eastern Line, especially on the approaches to London Liverpool Street. We support the additional shorter-term measures in the Plan such as additional services and higher capacity rolling stock and longer trains. We also support the recognition that, in the longer-term, these alone will not accommodate the expected increase in passenger numbers, especially given the growth in places such as Norwich. We have previously made the point that longer term, major infrastructure south of Shenfield will be needed to accommodate the capacity and further help guarantee journey reliability. We therefore welcome that the Strategic Business Plan looks to address the issue, and is giving recognition to a new route from Chelmsford to Ongar. However, we

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would seek further re-assurances that this is a realistic, practical option and that it will be further investigated and developed so that it can be implemented before the situation becomes critical.

The Business Plan sets out where new rolling stock will be required on the main lines. It also notes that a small number (perhaps of the order of 20-30) of additional vehicles may be required during CP4 on routes away from the core inter-urban routes and main cities, for example to relieve crowding issues around other towns and cities, or for Community Rail lines. However, there are no details about where these will be deployed. The Norwich to Sheringham rail line has seen very high levels of growth in passenger numbers, due in part to the successful Bittern Line Community Rail Partnership. We would expect that growth will continue, and to ensure that the service remains attractive to passengers, additional capacity is needed.

This can be achieved through replacement, or additional, rolling stock, and therefore we would welcome some of the additional carriages identified in the Plan to be directed to this successful line.

Turning to more specific comments on the Plan:

- We welcome the gauge and capacity enhancement to enable routing of more freight traffic via Peterborough and Nuneaton. We also welcome removing restrictions on the Ely Curve. It is anticipated that this could bring improvements for freight services and improve performance of passenger services. However, we remain to be convinced that there will be sufficient freight paths for additional freight services from the Haven ports, especially given the competing passenger demands, which are also likely to increase
- Whilst the plan identifies some improvements in access to Stansted we feel these do not deliver the full extent of the improvements needed, particularly in relation to increasing the range of destinations served.
- East west rail links in the region are poor, and although the Plan identifies some service frequency enhancements and linespeed increases, it generally does little to improve east west links across, and out of, the region. Longer term, we support the East West Rail Consortium's project to re-establish an Oxford – Cambridge link.
- The County Council would support services every half an hour between Norwich and Cambridge (alluded to in the Plan) to link these centres of economic growth more strongly. Ideally, there should be onward links to Stansted airport. We also support improved frequencies between Norwich and Great Yarmouth / Lowestoft to support the

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latter's regeneration growth. We have been assessing the infrastructure requirements needed to achieve these aspirations. Our work shows that at least one additional platform at Norwich is required, together with track 'crossovers.' We would like to see these included in the Plan, and will continue to work with Network Rail to this end.

- The Plan identifies some linespeed improvements on rural lines. We feel that reliability of services such as Norwich to Cambridge and Sheringham could be improved by extending the turnarounds through linespeed increases on these lines.
- There is to be substantial growth at King's Lynn, and improved connections between this centre and Cambridge will continue to grow in importance. We feel that the power supply needs to be upgraded to accommodate future aspirations for the line. The levels of likely future growth may mean that double-tracking of the line is required at some point in the future.

I trust that these comments are helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish for any clarification.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DC', followed by a horizontal line.

David Cumming
Team Leader, Integrated Transport Strategy