



South West Regional Assembly

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Dear Mr McMahon

Consultation on Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan

Summary

1. This response is made by the South West Regional Assembly Secretariat officers on behalf of the Assembly (SWRA) and the South West Regional Development Agency (South West RDA) and has been prepared taking account of the views of local transport authorities in the region.
2. The SWRA and the South West RDA, alongside local authority partners, wish to ensure the rail network and rail services are more capable than at present of meeting the needs of people, places and businesses in the South West. This is vital, not only to support continued economic, population and housing growth – the South West being proportionately the fastest growing of all regions – but also to help manage growth within environmental limits. With that in mind the headline issues raised in this response are:
 - Broad support for Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan (SBP), particularly those elements which will contribute to the five strategic objectives for rail identified by the region which are set out in Annex 1;
 - That action should be taken over and above the current draft SBP to address three key gaps, namely:
 1. Provision for improved cross Bristol services (Route 13), which will support the continued economic and housing growth in the sub-region for which regional and local partners are seeking to deliver in the most sustainable way. We strongly urge the rail industry's engagement with the sub-regional Rail Project Group to identify requirements to facilitate all day half hourly cross Bristol services.
 2. Provision for improved services in the Exeter sub-region in order to meet the requirements set out in spatial and economic plans, in particular improvements to the Axminster to Exeter route to

support development and growth on this corridor within the timeframe of the SBP.

3. Greater investment in station improvements in the South West to benefit tourism. This will complement efforts within the region to cater for the current volume of rail tourism visits as well as the strategy for encouraging more sustainable, year round tourism.

- That future capacity for freight movements to and from Bristol Port are taken into account by future rail industry plans, to make the best use out of previous investments to provide two rail heads in support of the continuing growth of the Port.
- That future rail industry plans take account of the need for improved access to Heathrow Airport from the west, which will provide critical links to the UK's key international hub airport of importance to the South West as well as UK plc productivity and competitiveness.
- That consideration is given to the implications for urban and Inter-City services of moving to ERTMS once the current signalling programme is completed.

Introduction

3. The region welcomes the opportunity to respond to the ORR's consultation on Network Rail's strategic business plan (SBP). The issues raised in this response focus on the extent to which the SBP is a realistic and efficient plan to meet the needs of the South West region through CP4 and beyond.
4. The region wishes to ensure that the rail network and rail services are more capable than at present of meeting the needs of people, places and businesses in the South West. This is vital, not only to support continued economic, population and housing growth – the South West being proportionately the fastest growing of all regions – but also to help manage growth within environmental limits. These broad aims are captured in the South West Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSS / RES). The region's rail priorities to help deliver the RSS and RES have been agreed by key partners and can be expressed most succinctly in the five "strategic objectives" identified in Annex 1.
5. Whilst the region broadly welcomes the strategy set out in the SBP, in order to make the most constructive and helpful response to the consultation this letter identifies a number of key changes to the SBP which are essential for meeting the rail priorities identified in Annex 1.

Improving capacity on cross Bristol corridors, over and above the improvements identified in the SBP

6. The SBP contains proposals within Route 13 Great Western Main Line for the introduction of additional vehicles for an enhanced half hourly cross Bristol service by December 2009.
7. This is to be welcomed as a first step towards meeting the West of England Joint Local Transport Plan's Rail Vision for half hourly cross Bristol services.

8. Nonetheless the proposal is only for the three hour peak where half hourly services throughout the day are required. Rail provides an important alternative to travelling by car along the Weston-super-Mare to Bristol to Yate, Severn Beach line and South Wales to Bristol to Bath corridors.
9. Along these corridors several CLG “Growth Points” have been identified that have the potential to be served by rail, further highlighting the need for half hourly cross Bristol services. The need to improve cross Bristol services is essential to deliver this national development policy. Our rail prospectus highlights the role of rail in coordinating delivery of national policies for housing development in the region.
10. A Rail Project Group, including the four West of England councils, Network Rail and First Great Western is actively looking at schemes to provide an all day half hourly North – South cross Bristol service.
11. Network Rail’s Strategic Business Plan should as a priority place greater emphasis on half hourly cross Bristol services.

Exeter services

12. Improvements on the Exeter – Waterloo corridor have been secured by way of the South West Trains franchise, following representations from the region and is fully supported through the rail prospectus. However significant levels of growth have been identified in the Exeter sub-region in order to meet the overall development requirements set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy. The region has identified the potential of rail corridors in serving the Exeter sub-region and in particular the need for improvements to the Axminster to Exeter route to achieve modal shift targets for the sub-region, which should be reflected in the SBP.
13. The passing loop to facilitate a half-hourly service is essential to meet growth aspirations for the city-region which have been agreed as part of the region’s contribution to the CLG Growth Point initiative.

Greater investment in station improvements to benefits all rail users, but particularly tourists

14. The region is the number one UK holiday destination amongst people who live in the UK. It brings in more than £ 5 billion annually to the region’s economy. There are over 20 million visits lasting one night or more, generating employment for around 300,000 people, with more than 10,000 businesses providing accommodation and tourist attractions.
15. The regional tourism strategy is based on extending the length of stay, encouraging more short breaks and visits out of the traditional season as well as reducing the overall carbon footprint by encouraging trips to and in the region by public transport. 1.6 million visitors holidaying in the region each year travel by train and contribute over £300 million to our economy.
16. The region places a strong focus on maintaining direct rail services to key tourism areas, such as Weston Super Mare, Bristol and Bath in the north of the region, Bournemouth, Poole and Weymouth in the South Eastern part of the region and key towns in Devon and Cornwall to the far South West. In this context we were

disappointed at the loss of direct services from the North West in the current Cross Country franchise agreement.

17. Where direct services are not achievable better interchange services are needed with appropriate facilities to support this. Integral to both these aspects is the quality of the experience of rail users through the stations.
18. Stations are the primary interface between the rail system and the general public and the first impression rail visitors have of an area. Improvement of stations is important in all parts of the UK but in the South West they are particularly important as the region strives to encourage as many people as possible to use rail for tourism purposes. It is important to view stations from a visitor perspective and provide the information, facilities and services visitors need (benefiting all customers) and we strongly urge the SBP to reflect this for the South West.

Bristol Port

19. Improved capacity for freight movements to and from Bristol Port is a key requirement. Bristol Port is the most largest port in the South West and of regional and national importance economically. It is important that the rail industry supports the Port in making best use of past investments to provide two rail heads (on each side of the estuary), to facilitate the continuing future growth of the Port, including the proposed Container Terminal. The Port has the potential to have a major impact on freight distribution by way of its relatively good access to major markets in the UK, thereby reducing road freight mileage, although it will be critical to ensure capacity and train paths in the Bristol area reflect this.
20. Improved capacity for freight movements, including those serving the Port, should not conflict with the delivery of the half hourly cross Bristol services referred to in Paragraphs 6 and 7 above.

Heathrow

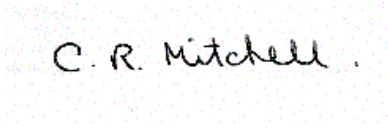
21. The Government have recently published a consultation on the expansion of Heathrow Airport. Strategic Objective 3 in the rail prospectus articulates the region's need for a future West facing access to Heathrow from the Great Western Main Line. Access to Heathrow from the region is critically important for flyers from the South West, particularly given that over half of all South West air passengers fly from outside the region, with the largest proportion of these using Heathrow. Whilst the growth of regional airports will help reduce the leakage of visitors, Heathrow will continue to have an significant draw for passengers and businesses. Improving rail access must be part of the wider strategy to improve connectivity with foreign markets and harness the wider economic benefits of this major international hub airport.

ERTMS

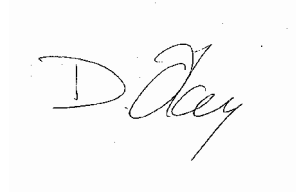
22. It is unclear from the SBP what the implications are, for urban and Inter-City services, of moving to ERTMS once the current signalling programme is completed. ORR may wish to satisfy themselves on the implications for the network of the move to ERTMS given that no further resignalling schemes are planned in the interim.

23. We trust that these comments will be given serious consideration in ORR's response to the SBP.

Yours sincerely

Handwritten signature of Chris Mitchell in black ink on a light blue background.

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ANNEX A

Strategic Objectives identified in the South West Rail Prospectus Technical Document¹

Strategic Objective 1:

Improve connectivity to and between SSCTs² in the South West (particularly West of England, Swindon, Bournemouth / Poole, Exeter, Plymouth, Cheltenham / Gloucester, Taunton, Torbay and the five Cornish towns comprising Truro, Camborne, Pool, Redruth and Falmouth/Penryn), especially from those places to London / South East and Birmingham / Midlands.

Strategic Objective 2:

Strengthen the position of SSCTs identified in the RSS (particularly West of England, Swindon, Bournemouth / Poole, Exeter, Plymouth Gloucester / Cheltenham) as focal points for growth and regeneration through provision of efficient and reliable transport systems, tackling congestion and supporting delivery of economic growth.

Strategic Objective 3:

Improve public transport access to airports (including Bristol, Bournemouth, Exeter, Southampton, Birmingham and London airports), through better public transport interchange, to Bristol, Bournemouth and Exeter airports.

Strategic Objective 4:

Facilitate the growth and success of Bristol Port, encourage sustainable distribution and safeguard the potential for improved rail traffic to/from Poole, Plymouth and other South West ports.

Strategic Objective 5:

Support growth in key regional business sectors, particularly tourism, providing increased opportunities for people to travel and within the South West and to the regions by non-car modes.

¹ The full text of the document is available on the Assembly's website at:

http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk/media/SWRA/Regional%20Transport%20Board/29th%20November%202007/Final_Rail_Prospetus_Document_for_Website_-_30_Nov_2007.pdf

² Strategically Significant Cities and Towns identified in the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West (draft RSS), which are as follows:

Barnstaple; Bath; Bournemouth; Bridgwater; Bristol; Camborne/Pool/Redruth, Falmouth-Penryn, Truro; Cheltenham; Chippenham; Dorchester; Exeter; Gloucester; Plymouth; Poole; Salisbury; Swindon; Taunton; Torbay; Trowbridge; Weston-super-Mare; Weymouth; Yeovil.

