

ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT CABINET PANEL

MONDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2018 AT 10.00AM

RAIL UPDATE

Report of the Chief Executive and Director of Environment

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform the Panel of recent and upcoming issues concerning rail services for Hertfordshire;
- 1.2 To seek the Panel's comments on the response to the Network Rail East Coast Route Study.

2. Summary

- 2.1 There are current and upcoming issues affecting all the main rail routes in Hertfordshire. Further details of the upcoming issues will be presented to Panel when further information arises.
- 2.2 The East Coast Route Study provides an opportunity for the county council to set out its infrastructure aspirations for this route. The deadline for responses is 16 March.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 The Panel is:
 - Asked to note the issues arising, and in particular the key events highlighted in Appendix 1.
 - Invited to comment on the draft response to the Network Rail East Coast Route Study, as set out in Appendix 3.

4. Background

4.1 This report provides a summary of current rail issues on a route by route basis. However, it should be noted that some franchise issues overlap routes.

4.2 Forthcoming events are highlighted throughout the report, and a summary of key dates in 2018 is set out in Appendix 1.

5. West Anglia Main Line

5.1 Greater Anglia 2019 Timetable

5.1.1 Greater Anglia is proposing to introduce a new timetable in 2019 as part its franchise commitments and to take full advantage of the new trains being introduced. The changes are expected to include the previously indicated increase from two to three trains per hour off-peak from Hertford East to London.

5.1.2 Consultation on the proposals is now expected to start in April.

5.2 Crossrail 2

5.2.1 The Department for Transport is undertaking “an independent review of funding and financing, to develop plans for an affordable scheme that is fair to the taxpayer, where London pays its share”. No further public consultation will take place until this review has been concluded, which is expected to be towards the end of 2018. It is also likely that there will be further exploration of how areas on the Crossrail 2 route outside of London might help pay for the scheme.

5.2.2 The current indicative timetable of a Hybrid Bill submission in 2019 may be affected by the review, but it is unlikely that any revision will be announced until the review is complete.

5.2.3 In the meantime, the Technical Planning Forum has been established, and meetings continue to be held with local authorities along the route.

5.3 Hertford East Community Rail Partnership

5.3.1 The Hertford East branch has been identified as a possible candidate for establishing a Community Rail Partnership. At present the only such partnership in Hertfordshire is the St Albans Abbey to Watford Junction Line.

5.3.2 Exploratory talks will be held with Greater Anglia, East Herts and Broxbourne to see how Community Rail Partnership might be developed.

6. East Coast Main Line

6.1 GTR 2018 Timetable

- 6.1.1 The completion this year of the Thameslink Programme (which has included a capacity increase to the St Pancras to Blackfriars tunnel and a re-build of London Bridge station) allows for the introduction of a completely revised timetable across the Govia Thameslink Rail (GTR) network.
- 6.1.2 Overall there are many benefits to Hertfordshire rail services, including:
- Increased service frequencies on the current Thameslink route through St Albans;
 - The linking of Great Northern services into the Thameslink network providing e.g. direct services between Stevenage and Brighton;
 - Enhanced frequency on the Hertford North to Moorgate service, with six trains an hour throughout the day Monday – Saturday.
- 6.1.3 There are some disbenefits, including;
- Loss of direct services between Welwyn Garden City and Peterborough;
 - A reduction in service frequency at Brookmans Park and Welham Green.
- 6.1.4 Responses to GTR's consultation have been considered through the Panel at its meeting in November 2016.
- 6.1.5 In addition to the disbenefits listed above, the postponement of the fifth platform scheme at Stevenage means that services between Watton at Stone and Stevenage will be replaced by bus services until such time as the scheme is implemented. The proposed date for introducing the bus replacement service has been put back from May to December 2018. However, there is also still no announcement on funding the Stevenage platform scheme, and hence completion is assumed to be 2021 at the earliest.
- 6.1.6 GTR has also announced that as from May 2018, the half-hourly peak service between Watton at Stone and Stevenage will be reduced to an hourly service. Discussions will take place as to whether a bus replacement should be introduced in May 2018 to cover this element of the service.
- 6.1.7 A recent DfT decision has been to increase the phasing-in period of the new timetable, such that the completion date will move back from December 2018 to December 2019. The implications for Hertfordshire include:
- Postponement of through trains between Welwyn Garden City to Sevenoaks until May 2019;
 - Postponement of through trains between Cambridge and Maidstone until December 2019;
 - The full increase to 6 trains per hour (tph) off-peak between Hertford North to Moorgate delayed until 2019 (but with 4tph introduced in May 2018 compared to current 3 tph).
- 6.1.8 A further recent development regarding GTR services on the Midland Main Line is covered in Section 7.1 below.

6.1.9 GTR have been invited to the Panel meeting in July 2018 in give an update on services.

6.2 Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern Franchise

6.2.1 The Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern franchise, as currently operated by GTR, is due for renewal in 2021. The recent Government strategic vision for rail confirmed speculation that the franchise will not be renewed in its current format, with the Department intending “to review the future shape and size of the franchises that will replace the existing arrangements”. This will include working with TfL to “explore options for transferring selected services such as the West London line to TfL”.

6.2.2 Hertfordshire County Council has previously supported the devolution of the Moorgate services to TfL control.

6.3 East Coast Partnership

6.3.1 The Government’s strategic vision for rail published in November 2017 set out the DfT’s proposals to establish an East Coast Partnership to replace the current InterCity franchise agreement. The partnership “will be operated by a single management, under a single brand and overseen by a single leader. It will see the train operator actively collaborate with Network Rail to bring its expertise and a passenger view to the planning of infrastructure management”.

6.3.2 The partnership is expected to be in place in 2020, but details of what this will entail have still to be established. There are questions of whether local services will be included in the partnership as well as the intercity ones. It is not clear what this might mean for the current Great Northern services which will transfer to Thameslink from May.

6.4 East Coast Route Study

6.4.1 The draft Network Rail East Coast Route Study was published on 22 December, and is open for consultation until 16 March. Further details are covered in Section 10.

7. Midland Main Line

7.1 East Midlands Franchise

7.1.1 The East Midlands franchise covers Intercity services between London and cities such as Sheffield and Nottingham. Although the franchise, currently run by East Midlands Trains, does not directly serve Hertfordshire, there are local connections at Luton and Luton Airport Parkway.

- 7.1.2 The new franchise is due to start in August 2019. DfT consultation on the new specification suggested that there would be a major reduction in stops at Bedford and Luton, although with options to increase services at Luton Airport Parkway. The county council's response opposed the reduction as this would reduce access to Intercity services for Hertfordshire residents.
- 7.1.3 The franchise specification (known as the Invitation to Tender) is due to be published in April 2018. Further lobbying work may be required before this date regarding the proposed reduction in stops.
- 7.1.4 A recent development has been the announcement of changes to East Midlands Trains services from May 2018 until the Midland Main Line upgrade scheme is completed in 2020. Peak hour services will not stop at Bedford and Luton, which will be compensated by changes to the GTR timetable. The implications of the latter are that Harpenden (and to a lesser degree Radlett) will not see the increase in services set out in the consultation draft of the 2018 timetable, and will see a loss of one service in the morning peak and two services in the evening peak.
- 7.1.5 There are also concerns that this temporary change to East Midlands Trains services implements the permanent changes proposed in the East Midlands franchise consultation as mentioned above.

8. West Coast Main Line

8.1 West Midlands Franchise

- 8.1.1 The new West Midlands franchise commenced in December 2017, with local services through Watford Junction and Hemel Hempstead changing from the London Midland brand to London Northwestern Railway.

8.2 West Coast Partnership

- 8.2.1 The DfT is currently developing plans for the West Coast Partnership which will take over the existing Intercity West Coast franchise from April 2019, and which will also operate High Speed 2 services when the new line opens in 2026.
- 8.2.2 Talks are currently being held with the three bidders to identify aspirations and opportunities for Hertfordshire.
- 8.2.3 The specification for the franchise (the "Invitation to Tender") is expected to be published in February. However, this will not include the timetable proposals for the current West Coast Main Line after 2026, when the freed-up capacity generated by HS2 will provide opportunities for major recasts to the timetable. Such proposals will be developed by the West Coast Partnership once it has been established.

8.2.4 The county council is currently working with West Coast Rail 250, a group of local authorities covering the whole route, to develop post 2026 ideas. Whilst increased local services would be welcomed, there are also aspirations to increase long-distance services calling at Watford Junction.

8.3 InterCity West Coast Franchise

8.3.1 The development of the West Coast Partnership concept has delayed the renewal of the InterCity West Coast franchise from 2018 to 2019. Therefore an extension to the contract (a “direct award franchise”) will be issued. This may specify additional services within the 12 month period.

9. Other Rail Issues

9.1 Metropolitan Line Extension (MLX)

9.1 The current funding gap for this scheme is currently the subject of a Housing Infrastructure Fund bid.

9.2 East West Rail

9.2.1 The Autumn Budget Statement announced plans to accelerate the delivery of this scheme. In particular, the potential completion date of the Central Section between Bedford and Cambridge has been brought forward from the mid 2030s to the late 2020s.

9.3 Station Usage

9.3.1 Figures published by the Office of Rail and Road show that passenger use at Hertfordshire stations has grown by 1.5% over the year 2015/16 to 2016/17.

9.4 Rail Strategy

9.4.1 The county council’s Rail Strategy is currently being updated to take into account recent developments in the rail industry. It is expected that a draft version will be presented to Panel in Autumn 2018.

9.5 Rail Upgrade Plan

9.5.1 The Government’s process for programming enhancements to the rail network has been changed, such that these schemes have now been separated from the five year planning cycle for Network Rail. Whilst the full details of the process are not yet known, it is expected that enhancements will be considered on a rolling annual basis. A statement is expected in February in the form of a Rail Upgrade Plan.

10. East Coast Route Study

- 10.1 The draft Network Rail East Coast Route Study was published on 22 December, and is open for consultation until 16 March.
- 10.2 The document sets out options for investment that “can keep the East Coast Main Line (ECML) growing to the 2040s and beyond”. Delivery of any option will be through the Network Rail or other funding programmes.
- 10.3 Further details are included in Appendix 1 to this report, but the key issues to note are:
- The Stevenage turn back platform is included as an “immediate investment priority”;
 - Digital signalling is proposed as the solution to capacity constraints on the two-track section through the Welwyn area;
 - The possibility of increased long-distance services from Stevenage when High Speed 2 Phase 3 is completed is noted.
- 10.4 A draft response to the consultation is set out in Appendix 3.
- 10.5 Recent discussions with GTR have indicated that new train services at locations such as Welwyn Garden City are restricted due to the local infrastructure. Details have been requested from GTR such that this can be included as appropriate in the response.

11. Next Steps

- 11.1 Information on the forthcoming issues will be reported to Panel as appropriate. However, it should be noted that some issues have short timescales for response, and therefore may not fit with the Panel cycle.
- 11.2 The response to the East Coast Route Study will be submitted to Network Rail by the deadline of 16 March. Any further changes arising subsequent to the Panel meeting will be discussed with the Executive Member.

12. Financial Implications

- 12.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

13. Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA)

- 13.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered, the equality implications of the decision that they are making.
- 13.2. Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council’s statutory obligations under the

Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.

13.3. The Equality Act 2010 requires the County Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

13.4 No EqIA was undertaken in relation to this report

Background documents referred to and used in writing this report:

East Coast Route Study – Railway Investment Choices – Network Rail (December 2017), available at: <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/East-Coast-Main-Line-Route-Study.pdf>

Appendix 1 Key Dates in 2018

February 2018	GTR “2018” timetable published
February 2018	West Coast Partnership ITT published
March 2018	East Coast Route Study consultation closes
April 2018	East Midlands ITT published
April 2018	Greater Anglia 2019 timetable consultation
May 2018	Phased start to GTR 2018 timetable
Dec 2018	Bus replacement commences Hertford to Stevenage
Late 2018 / early 2019	Consultation on Crossrail 2

Appendix 2 Network Rail East Coast Route Study

The East Coast Route Study notes the following with regard to the route through Hertfordshire:

“Adjusting the stopping patterns of long distance services to support outer suburban markets [which include Stevenage, Peterborough and Cambridge] is therefore a cost effective way of remedying possible overcrowding on these services, albeit with a potential impact on journey times”.

“Although long distance seating capacity is forecast to keep ahead of demand, continued economic growth will require an increase in journey opportunities for passengers. This can be seen in terms of a demand for better connectivity – more opportunities to travel between more destinations”.

Regarding the two-track section through the Welwyn area, the study notes that “building infrastructure solutions to fix this constraint is an extremely costly undertaking. However, by employing digital signalling, headways could be reduced, allowing more trains to run through the section”.

“Alongside this technological intervention, it would also be possible to unlock line capacity by changing the stopping patterns at intermediate stations such as Welwyn North”.

There are two strategic priorities on this section of route:

- Providing enough suburban passenger capacity into and out of London.
- Supporting growth in the long distance market by enabling better connectivity, and more opportunities to travel.

“For services using the Moorgate branch, the most cost-effective way to provide more passenger capacity will be to increase the frequency of trains” due to stations in tunnels.

“Providing the capability for suburban trains to turn round at Stevenage is also a priority for managing growth in this market”.

In terms of specific scheme options in Hertfordshire, this translates to:

Immediate Investment Priorities

	Benefits	Cost
Stevenage turn back platform	Enables capacity for 2 additional hourly services between London and Stevenage; reduces delay risk by separating commuter and mainline services.	Medium (£20m to £200m)
Power Supply Upgrade	Upgrades the power	Part of wider programme

	supply for electric trains on the Moorgate and Hertford Loop branches,	for whole route.
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Medium Term Recommendations

	Benefits	Cost
Moorgate capacity	This intervention will allow up to 3 additional peak hour Moorgate trains to operate, providing the capacity to meet demand to the mid-2020s (2 additional services) and the 2030s (3 additional)	Medium (£20m to £200m)
Digital signalling for the ECML	By replacing trains with digital technology, more trains can be safely controlled through the two-track sections in the Welwyn area.	High (£200m to £1000m)

The report also notes that the capacity released by HS2 could provide additional connectivity, including “more connections between intermediate ECML locations served less frequently now: Peterborough – Stevenage – Grantham – Newark – Retford – Doncaster”.

Appendix 3 Draft Response to East Coast Route Study

The county council welcomes the publication of the East Coast Main Line Route Study for consultation.

The East Coast Main Line is a key rail corridor for Hertfordshire, providing a mix of commuting services to London, local trips within the county and to other neighbouring authorities, and long-distance services. All of these services are vital to Hertfordshire's economy.

The county council welcomes the fact that the Stevenage turn back platform is listed as an immediate investment priority. The postponement of this scheme for the CP5 funding period (2014 – 2019) following the Hendy review is resulting in the replacement of train services by buses for several years as from December 2018. It is therefore essential that this scheme is delivered as soon as possible.

Stevenage is also the main hub station within Hertfordshire on the East Coast route, providing connections to InterCity services with local services on the main line, Cambridge branch and Hertford Loop. Office of Rail and Road figures show that Stevenage is the eighth busiest principal station on the entire route (including the London termini at Kings Cross and Moorgate) with 4.8 million passengers in 2016/17. The county council, in conjunction with Stevenage Borough Council, the Hertfordshire LEP and GTR, has developed plans for a major enhancement to the station, providing for future growth and complementing a wider regeneration of the town centre. The county council would therefore like to see the regeneration of Stevenage station included within the Route Study.

The county council welcomes the scheme options for power supply upgrades on the Moorgate and Hertford Loop branches, Moorgate capacity improvements, and digital signalling.

The study states that digital signalling will provide additional capacity on the two-track section in the Welwyn area (which includes the Digswell viaduct and the Welwyn north and south tunnels). However, no indication is given of whether this solution will provide sufficient capacity in period up to "the 2040s and beyond" covered by the study. It would be useful if this information could be included in the final version of the study.