

Transport for Lancashire Committee

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East Lancashire Rail Connectivity Study Conditional Output Statement

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Executive Summary

A key challenge for the East Lancashire Highways and Transport Masterplan is establishing the optimum balance between outward connectivity and internal accessibility to jobs, education and training. East Lancashire's rail network is relatively constrained in terms of connectivity, capacity, performance, journey quality, journey times and passenger facilities at many of the smaller stations. The network will continue to need significant investment if it is to support the local economy into the future; without such investment, the perception of East Lancashire as being poorly connected is likely to grow.

Over the past ten years, the County Council, the Community Rail Partnerships, local councils and others have supported a range of improvements to the rail network in East Lancashire that have resulted in increasing passenger numbers. Further improvements are planned, for example, infrastructure enhancements to facilitate provision of an all-day, half hourly service between Blackburn and Manchester and the new Northern franchise, which will deliver new and refurbished trains, improved services and better stations. However, in themselves, they will not address the fundamental issue of whether or how the rail network can contribute towards a transformational change in East Lancashire's economic fortunes.

The East Lancashire Rail Connectivity Study has examined this issue in depth, adopting a Conditional Outputs approach in accordance with standard rail industry practice and recognising that to deliver transformational change to East Lancashire's rail network will require the support of Network Rail, Rail North and the relevant Train Operating Companies. It has concluded that improving service frequency and journey times would deliver the greatest level of benefit, with electrification of the routes between Preston and Leeds / Colne and Clitheroe / Blackburn and Bolton / Manchester together with associated rolling stock improvements and enhanced service frequencies making the most significant contribution.

The Conditional Output Statement will strengthen Lancashire's case when engaging with the Department for Transport, Rail North, the wider rail industry and adjacent transport authorities to secure improvements to East Lancashire's rail network, in particular, with regard to the next rail industry investment period covering 2019 to 2024 ('Control Period 6').

Recommendation

The Committee is invited to note the contents of this report.

1. Background

- 1.1 East Lancashire is perceived as an area that is poorly connected with a transport network that hinders the efficient movement of both people and goods, and that this relative isolation has a negative impact on economic development and impedes regeneration. A key challenge for the East Lancashire Highways and Transport Masterplan is establishing the optimum balance between outward connectivity and internal accessibility to jobs, education and training.
- 1.2 Apart from the M65 and M66/A56 'Gateways' linking East Lancashire to the west and south respectively and which are of a reasonable standard, roads tend to follow historic routes dictated by the topography rather than travel demand; consequently, most are poorly aligned and unsuitable for carrying high volumes of traffic, particularly heavy goods vehicles. Main line rail links are likewise constrained, with resulting low line speeds having a significant impact on journey times, or as is the case with Rossendale, no longer exist. Although both road and rail routes continue across the Pennines into the Leeds City Region, they are of a much lower quality than those further south that link Liverpool and Manchester with Leeds, Sheffield and the Humber ports.
- 1.3 Journey times between East Lancashire and the growth centres of Manchester, Leeds and Preston are lengthy and for some require a change of train; rolling stock is generally of poor quality. Fast, frequent and reliable access by train to Manchester Airport is of critical importance for businesses across Lancashire, yet there are currently no through services from East Lancashire, resulting in many trips to the airport made by car. Of equal importance is access to other parts of the UK, including London, Birmingham and Glasgow, with improved interchange required at locations such as Preston.
- 1.4 Such factors all serve to heighten the sense of isolation and the perception of East Lancashire as an area of localised labour markets, narrow travel horizons and limited interaction with the adjacent economies of Manchester, Leeds and Central Lancashire. The Lancashire Strategic Economic Plan submitted to the Government in March 2014 by the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership makes it clear that for Lancashire to maintain its position as a national leader for advanced manufacturing, investment in East Lancashire's transport infrastructure will be vital to ensure the critical mass of businesses within the sector can continue to operate, invest, expand and grow, and that local people can easily access local job opportunities.
- 1.5 The East Lancashire Rail Connectivity Study identified a number of deficiencies with the current network, including:

- Slow journey times, especially on the 'Copy Pit' line between Burnley and Todmorden used by the train service between East Lancashire and Leeds and from May 2015, the new service between East Lancashire and Manchester Victoria via Rochdale;
- Poor reliability due to long, single-track sections, for example, between Burnley and Colne;
- Capacity constraints, with longer trains required to meet growing demand, in particular, on commuter services between Clitheroe and Manchester;
- Low service frequencies;
- Poor quality rolling stock; and
- A lack of facilities at many of the smaller stations, which will need to meet as a minimum the Station Quality Standards set out by Rail North.

All of the above make rail a less attractive mode of travel; consequently, use of the rail network in East Lancashire is relatively low compared to neighbouring areas. Furthermore, the percentage of individuals travelling to work by train is lower than the averages for both the North West and England and Wales.

- 1.6 A number of improvements to the rail network in East Lancashire have either been delivered or are programmed, including the recently completed upgrade to Burnley Manchester Road station and the introduction of a new direct train service between Blackburn, Accrington, Rose Grove, Burnley and Manchester Victoria via Todmorden and Rochdale from 17th May 2015. The County Council and Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council are also working with Network Rail to deliver a scheme to improve the reliability and frequency of rail services on the route between Clitheroe, Blackburn and Manchester Victoria. This is now a funded scheme within the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership's transport investment programme due for delivery in 2015/16. It will facilitate provision of an all-day, half hourly service between Blackburn and Manchester to be delivered through the new Northern franchise. At this stage, a firm date for the commencement of the additional off-peak services has not been finalised, but it will be no later than December 2017 utilising rolling stock made available through the North West electrification programme.
- 1.7 Whilst the above developments will bring about some improvement to the rail network in East Lancashire, they will not address the fundamental issue of whether or how the rail network can contribute towards a transformational change in East Lancashire's economic fortunes. The East Lancashire Rail Connectivity Study has examined this issue in depth, in particular, the importance of enhanced connectivity between East Lancashire and the growth centres of Manchester including Manchester Airport, Leeds and Preston and Central Lancashire.

Adopted Conditional Outputs

Connectivity

- Improve the frequency of the Blackpool South to Colne service
- Improve the frequency of the Clitheroe to Manchester service
- Improve the frequency of the Blackpool North to York service
- Improve the frequency of the Blackburn to Manchester (via Burnley) service

Capacity

- Relieve overcrowding in peak hours between Clitheroe and Manchester
- Ensure sufficient capacity to meet forecast rail passenger growth between Clitheroe and Manchester in the next ten years

Performance

- Improve the Blackpool South to Colne PPM to an overall level of at least 92.5% moving annual average by the end of CP5
- Improve the Clitheroe to Manchester Victoria service PPM to an overall level of at least 92.5% moving annual average by the end of CP5
- Improve the Blackpool North to York service PPM to an overall level of at least 92.5% moving annual average by the end of CP5

Journey Quality

- Improve the quality of rolling stock on the Blackpool South to Colne service
- Improve the quality of rolling stock on the Clitheroe to Manchester Victoria service
- Improve the quality of rolling stock on the Blackpool North to York service

Journey Times

- Reduce rail journey times between Preston and Colne to under an hour (currently 71 minutes)
- Reduce rail journey times between Clitheroe and Manchester to under an hour (currently 74 minutes)
- Reduce rail journey times between key core study area stations and central Manchester to the equivalent or better than the average off-peak period car journey
- Reduce rail journey times between key core study area stations and Manchester Airport to the equivalent or better than the average off-peak period car journey
- Reduce rail journey times between key core study area stations and West Yorkshire (Halifax and Bradford) to the equivalent or better than the average off-peak period car journey
- Reduce rail journey times between key core study area stations and Leeds to the equivalent or better than the average off-peak period car journey

- Reduce rail journey times between key core study area stations and national economic centres to the equivalent or better than the average off-peak period car journey

Passenger Facilities

- Improve station facilities within the core study area

- 1.8 The study has concluded that significant investment will be necessary in order to improve both the performance and attractiveness of East Lancashire's rail network, and that without such investment, the perception of East Lancashire as being poorly connected is likely to grow. Moreover, current and proposed investment in the rail network elsewhere across the North of England has the potential to widen the connectivity 'gap' between East Lancashire and key economic centres such as Manchester and Leeds. Failure to improve or replace existing rolling stock is likely to lead to further deterioration on the quality of the trains, potentially impacting on journey quality, capacity and performance. This could result in existing rail passengers seeking to use alternative modes of transport, placing additional pressure on an increasingly congested highway network.
- 1.9 The Rail Connectivity Study adopted a Conditional Outputs approach in accordance with standard rail industry practice and recognising that to deliver transformational change to East Lancashire's rail network will require as a minimum the support of Network Rail, Rail North and the relevant Train Operating Companies. The Conditional Output Statement is attached as Appendix 'A'. Conditional Outputs need to reflect established evidence and be complemented by bespoke analysis of associated transport benefits. It is accepted that realisation of each Conditional Output will be subject to an affordable and value for money solution being available, but they should nevertheless assist the rail industry and its partners in establishing proposals that best release the identified potential.
- 1.10 The study has identified that improving service frequency and journey times would deliver the greatest level of benefit, with electrification of the routes between Preston and Leeds / Colne and Clitheroe / Blackburn and Bolton / Manchester together with associated rolling stock improvements and enhanced service frequencies making the most significant contribution. In addition, station facilities across East Lancashire should be improved to meet Rail North's Station Quality Standard.
- 1.11 The full Calder Valley, which includes the route to Preston via Burnley, and the Bolton to Clitheroe route are included as Tier One schemes in the report of the North of England Electrification Task Force¹ with a recommendation for implementation in Control Period 6 (2019 to 2024). This would enable all services between East Lancashire and Leeds and Manchester (via Bolton and Todmorden/Rochdale) to be operated by electric powered rolling stock. There are, however, likely to be significant engineering challenges associated with

¹ Northern Sparks, Report of the North of England Electrification Task Force, March 2015

these proposals, in particular, installation of overhead electrification infrastructure.

- 1.12 In order to achieve the Conditional Outputs that would enhance connectivity between East Lancashire and Leeds, in particular, increased service frequency and improved journey times, the potential impact on the capacity of the Calder Valley line between Todmorden and Leeds will need to be assessed. Should future economic circumstances dictate that connectivity between East Lancashire and Leeds be enhanced to the point where capacity on the Calder Valley line becomes a constraining factor, consideration of alternative options between Burnley and Leeds such as reinstatement of the line between Colne and Skipton and associated upgrade of the existing Colne branch may become necessary. Any such alternative options would still need to demonstrate they would deliver value for money.
- 1.13 The Conditional Output Statement will strengthen Lancashire's case when engaging with the Department for Transport, Rail North, the wider rail industry and adjacent transport authorities to secure improvements to East Lancashire's rail network, in particular, with regard to the next rail industry investment period covering 2019 to 2024 ('Control Period 6').