



18 October 2012

Agenda Item:11

REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR, HIGHWAYS

RAIL ISSUES UPDATE

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform Committee of developments on
 - The Midland Main Line, and
 - The East Coast main Line, and
2. To seek approval of the Council's submission to DfT re the Inter-City East Coast franchise

Information and Advice

Midland Main Line

3. Over the last 50 years, the Midland Main Line (MML), connecting Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield to London, has only received about 1% of the investment that has been made on England's 4 other Inter-City routes. This causes MML speeds to be lower than on any other Inter-City route. Although the MML has had 125mph trains since 1982, none of the track will allow 125mph – so every train has had to go at less than its top speed.
4. In 2008 the Council initiated a campaign to secure the investment to raise speeds and cut the Nottingham – London journey time to 90 minutes (1½ hours) from the current 1 hour 44 minutes.
5. The campaign grew to encompass stakeholders along the entire length of the MML and was supported by East Midlands Councils (EMC), other individual Councils, MPs, business bodies, passenger groups etc. The campaign steadily gained momentum and in February 2012 the Council and EMC gave a briefing to Nicky Morgan MP (Loughborough), who organised an adjournment debate in the House of Commons that was attended by 28 MPs as well as the Minister. The Council provided individual briefings for the majority of these MPs, and the Council's work was referred to in the debate.
6. In addition there were,
 - a series of letters to Ministers including from Cllr Jackson and the City's Cllr Urquhart, and from MPs, supported by briefings from the Council,

- several meetings with Ministers, including one on 25th June at which Cllr Cutts spoke, with briefings to most participants being provided by the Council, and
 - a second adjournment debate in parliament, again with briefings and MP speeches drafted by the Council.
7. A first phase of works to raise MML speeds at a number of locations, costing £69million, was approved in 2008 at the start of the Council's campaign, and is currently underway. It will be completed by 2014 and should reduce Nottingham – London journey times by 5 minutes.
8. In addition, in 2008 the Council secured approval for investment of £11.6million to upgrade the track and signalling in and around Nottingham station. This work will be done in summer 2013, and will slightly improve train speeds, perhaps saving 2 minutes minimum, with the main benefits of improved reliability and fewer delays.
9. To get the further reduction that would allow a Nottingham – London journey time of 90 minutes requires further works :-
- a second phase of linespeed works in particular at Market Harborough,
 - an upgrade of the layout at Leicester, similar to that which is to be done at Nottingham, to raise capacity, minimise delays, and allow trains to go faster.

Attracting funding for these works was the centrepiece of the campaign.

10. In addition an upgrade to capacity and speeds at Derby, similar to those at Nottingham and Leicester, was included in the campaign to improve journey times to/from London and Derby/Sheffield. Although a Derby upgrade will not benefit Nottingham – London services, it would be very beneficial to Nottingham – Birmingham services as it should enable their journey times to be reduced by at least 10 minutes.
11. On 16th July the Government announced :-
- the sum of money that it was approving for investment in railway enhancements for the period 2014 – 2019 was £9billion, and
 - a High Level Output Statement (HLOS) with a list of enhancements that it required to be delivered from that £9billion.
12. Crucially, one of the specified enhancements is that "opportunities should be pursued to speed journeys through efficient enhancements notably between Bedford and Corby and at Derby. The Secretary of State wishes to see sufficient capacity to provide for forecast freight flows through the electric spine at Leicester. The industry is to undertake further development work to confirm the full scope and requirements for the delivery of this scheme, which the Secretary of State believes is deliverable within the Statement of Funds Available."
13. Publication of the HLOS was followed that afternoon by a verbal statement given to the House of Commons by the Secretary of State for Transport, Justine Greening, with subsequent questions from MPs. At the Council's behest Paul Blomfield MP asked :

“I welcome the Secretary of State’s statement, but may I ask her for further clarification of her earlier answers about track improvements? In particular, will the programme include track improvements at all three bottlenecks on the midland main line—Derby, Leicester and Market Harborough —without which we will not get the targeted improvements in journey times?”

Justine Greening: “I will need to confirm that specific point, but I am certainly aware that track improvements will happen at Leicester. I believe that they will also happen at Derby, but I will need to find out about Market Harborough and write to the hon. Gentleman.”

14. As is clear from Justine Greening's answer the Government now requires the track upgrades at both Leicester and at Derby giving much more certainty that these improvements will be delivered. The enhancement at Market Harborough is not yet secure, and work is continuing to attract funding approval.
15. The Government also specified electrification of the MML. This is welcome as it produces benefits for the train operating companies, but it will not make the trains faster - it is the track enhancements that will allow Nottingham - London journey times to be reduced to 90 minutes. In fact electrification before the track has been upgraded, speed limits raised and capacity increased at Market Harborough, and Leicester and Derby would almost certainly remove the opportunity to resolve the current slow journeys and congestion and achieve the Nottingham – London 90 minute journey time aspiration.
16. It is further noted that the track upgrade that will bring the journey time reductions is cheaper than the electrification that will bring the operating costs/environmental benefits:-
 - The cost of the track upgrades is £220million
Market Harborough £30m, Leicester £120m, and Derby £70m.
This in addition to the £69million currently being invested in the first phase of linespeed works, making a total of nearly £290m.
This investment produces a double benefit - faster journeys, and increased capacity especially for more freight trains;
 - Electrification will cost a further £550million
This will reduce the operating costs of the MML by around £50million per annum.
It will also produce environmental benefits - a reduction in Co2 emitted and other pollutants, and electric trains are quieter.

East Coast Main Line

17. The East Coast Main Line (ECML) connects Newark and Retford to London and, northwards, to Leeds/Yorkshire&Humberside, Newcastle/the north east, and Scotland. Newark has 976,236 passengers per annum, of which approx. 600,000 are to/from London - the 8th biggest passenger flow on the ECML. Retford sees around 150,000 per annum. Patronage is growing strongly, by 5% per annum, even in the current economic climate.
18. The basic ECML service is provided under a franchise agreed by contract with the DfT. The franchise is being re-let as from December 2013, and DfT is currently consulting on this. In addition, open access operators are allowed to operate additional trains but only if there is

spare capacity for them to use. All services at Newark are operated by the franchisee, whereas services at Retford are a mixture of franchisee and open access operators.

19. The current service is:-

- Newark - 2 trains per hour to/from London; and 3 trains every 2 hours to/from the north
- Retford – 1 train per hour in each direction

This frequency is appropriate, but unfortunately the trains are not evenly spaced:-

- Newark trains are approximately every 40 & 20 minutes, but with significant variation leading to gaps of up to 60 minutes, whilst some other trains arrive just 5 minutes apart;
- at Retford southbound trains are spaced almost perfectly every 60 minutes all morning, but in the afternoon that slips to various intervals between 20 and 100 minutes, whilst throughout the day northbound trains are bunched but with long gaps.

20. An immediate 'win' could be easily achieved for both Newark and Retford. One train every 2 hours runs just between London and Newark, where it turns round. These trains could be extended to York, which would fill in some of the worst gaps to/from the north at both Newark and Retford.

21. As well as the irregularity, journey times are highly variable.

- The fastest time from London to Newark, 73 minutes, is achieved by just 12 trains. The other 20 northbound trains per day take between 5 and 15 minutes longer, whilst southbound trains generally take 15 – 20 minutes longer;
- The fastest time from London to Retford is 82 minutes, but most northbound trains take 10 – 15 minutes longer, whilst southbound trains generally take 15 – 25 minutes longer.

The number of stops at intermediate stations is part of the reason for this variability, but most trains could be made at least 10 – 15 minutes quicker.

22. A final problem is unreliability. 87% of trains run on time, meaning 13% are late (by more than 10 minutes). This compares to under 6% late on the Midland Main Line i.e. the ECML suffers more than twice the rate of delay suffered on the MML.

23. In summary the three problems are:-

- irregular frequency of service,
- variable/longer than necessary journey times, and
- a lack of reliability

Many of the causes of these problems relate to the ECML timetable.

24. The ECML is a busy and congested route. ECML tracks are crossed by or shared with various other regional and local services, and there are a number of very congested pinch points. So, many ECML trains have had chunks of spare time – called 'recovery time' – added into their schedules, and it is this that accounts for the range of journey times which in

turn is a primary cause of the trains being at irregular intervals. The congestion is compounded by the open access trains.

25. But, perversely, there are now so many ECML trains with so much recovery time that it doesn't even make them reliable – in fact it contributes to their unreliability. Because trains have so much spare time they can arrive at a location a few minutes before or a few minutes after their ideal time. In theory the spare time allows trains to avoid conflicts. But if two trains are both running a few minutes after their ideal time they will still turn up at the pinch point at the same time, so the problem is not solved.

26. The real solution is to schedule trains to run precisely, and to ensure that they run on time so that they go through the pinch points in a disciplined, optimum order. There is thus a virtuous circle that would involve having a timetable in which:-

- all trains were operated to the 'fastest' time,
- enabling them to be spaced at even intervals, and
- because the timetable was precise, trains could be expected to run to time.

The question is how to break into that virtuous circle.

27. The network will always be busy on the approaches to London, but that can be accommodated if along the rest of the ECML trains can have an unhindered path. At many other places on the ECML Network Rail is investing in projects to ease congestion at pinch points, including at Kings Cross, Finsbury Park, Hitchin, Huntingdon, Peterborough, Doncaster, Shaftholm, and York. This investment is costing almost £1 billion, and should help facilitate a much better timetable.

28. In addition the Council is pressing for further investment in:-

- a flyover at Newark to eliminate conflicts with Nottingham – Newark - Lincoln trains; and
- a faster set of points at Grantham, which would be very cheap, to get Norwich – Nottingham trains off the ECML more quickly.

29. One notorious pinch-point will remain, at Welwyn. 58 of the 60 miles of the ECML at the London end has 4 tracks – 2 for non-stop Inter-City trains, and 2 for suburban trains that stop frequently. But for two miles through Welwyn, there is a long viaduct and two tunnels, and to save money only 2 tracks were ever built. These 2 tracks have to be used by all trains, and so are very intensively used. To make matters worse, there is a station on the 2 track section at Welwyn North. Some suburban trains call there, and each one that does so means a 5 minute slot in which no ECML train can be run. The problem increases in rush hour when Welwyn North gets extra trains meaning that no additional peak period trains can be run to anywhere on the ECML – even though ECML passengers in total generate around 100 times the revenue of passengers from Welwyn.

30. It would cost around £600 million to widen the viaduct and tunnels at Welwyn. There is no realistic prospect of the funding being made available for those works. The alternative is to reduce the service at Welwyn, particularly the extra trains in the peak periods, so as to free up more time for ECML trains.

Conclusions

31. It is therefore proposed that the Council should press for

- Immediate extension of the London – Newark terminating trains to York;
- Rationalisation of the service at Welwyn North so that extra paths are not needed for trains to stop there but rather those extra paths are made available to ECML trains;
- The ECML timetable to be redesigned so that all franchise trains operate to the ‘fastest’ time, enabling them to run in a standard repeating pattern, spaced at even intervals; and because the timetable is precise, trains could be expected to run to time:

And that there should be investment in

- a flyover at Newark to eliminate conflicts with Nottingham – Newark - Lincoln trains; and
- a faster set of points at Grantham, which would be very cheap, to get Norwich – Nottingham trains off the ECML more quickly.

Statutory and Policy Implications

32. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, and equal opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that Committee:

- a) Notes the success in securing investment in the Midland Main Line, and
- b) Approves the proposed approach to improvements on the East Coast Main Line set out in paragraph 31 and reflected in the submission to DfT.

Andrew Warrington
Service Director Highways

For any enquiries about this report please contact:
Jim Bamford, Rail Officer.

Constitutional Comments [SG 10/10/12]

33. The Committee is the appropriate body to decide on the issues set out in this Report. The Committee has responsibility for matters relating to the provision of passenger transport services, including rail initiatives (paragraph 51(a) of the Terms of Reference).

Financial Comments [MA 4.10.12]

34. There are no direct financial implications arising from the contents of this report.

Background Papers

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

DfT, InterCity East Coast Franchise Consultation, June 2012

County Council submission to the DfT in response to the June 2012 consultation.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All