



meeting **CABINET**

date **23 JULY 2003**

agenda item no

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

SOUTH NOTTS RAIL NETWORK REVIEW : THE RECOMMENDED STRATEGY

Purpose of Report

1. To seek approval for the findings of the review of the South Notts Rail Network (SNRN) undertaken by Arup Consultants and to advise on the progression of the recommended strategy.

Background

The Existing SNRN Strategy

2. Both local and longer distance passenger rail services in the Greater Nottingham travel to work area were heavily affected during the Beeching era of the 1960s which saw the termination of a number of routes and the closure of many stations. The legacy of that era remains apparent today. The travel to work area is estimated to be the eighth largest in the UK outside London yet under 1% of commuting trips to the City Centre are by rail – a significantly lower proportion than in other major conurbation areas, where, typically, equivalent figures are between 10 and 20%. This reflects the relative dearth of routes, stations, and services to accommodate demands for travel within the Greater Nottingham area, and a lack of investment for upgrading rail facilities over many years. In addition Greater Nottingham's present regional links are poor with the possible exception of the London corridor.
3. The current SNRN strategy was formulated in the early 1990s when it was known as the Greater Nottingham Area Rail Development Strategy (GNARDS). The strategy (shown diagrammatically in Appendix 1) envisaged the provision of two new main routes, for cross-conurbation shuttle services:
 - Ilkeston – Nottingham Station (via the Trowell-Radford route) and thence to either Gedling (using the former colliery line) or Bingham;

- Sandiacre – Nottingham Station (via Long Eaton, Attenborough and Beeston) and thence to either Gedling or Bingham.
4. The strategy included the upgrading of the Gedling colliery line for passenger purposes and the possible reinstatement of a curve at Long Eaton.
 5. The network would be accessed by a number of new stations:
 - on the western side (ie of Nottingham Station), at Ilkeston, Trowell, Wollaton, Beechdale and Lenton; and also at Sandiacre/Stapleford and Long Eaton centre;
 - on the eastern side, at Gedling village and the Gedling colliery site
 6. In addition it was anticipated that there might be new park and ride facilities involving a possible relocation of Attenborough Station and the provision of a new station to the west of Bingham Station. Consideration would also be given to the potential roles of the colliery lines to Calverton and Cotgrave in the longer term.
 7. It was intended that the local service strategy would complement longer distance regional services traversing the Greater Nottingham area with Nottingham Station being the key interchange point. Good operational inter-relationships between the two networks were regarded as essential to optimise usage of each.
 8. The strategy was an important proposal in the Nottinghamshire Structure Plan Review of (1996) and was also promoted subsequently in the Greater Nottingham Local Transport Plan. In 2000 it achieved pre-qualification status from the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) further to an application to the SRA's Rail Passenger Partnership (RPP) Fund which had been established to encourage service development initiatives.

Lack of Progress

9. The strategy however has made little progress to implementation since its formulation a decade ago. This reflects a combination of local and national circumstances including:
 - the fragmentation of the rail industry as a result of privatisation and the consequent difficulties of achieving a co-ordinated response from the rail industry to progress projects;
 - the restrictive criteria applied by Government in the appraisal of rail projects particularly with regard to revenue funding;
 - the demands on local resources, especially those of this County Council, made by the implementation of the highly successful Robin Hood Line project.

Need for a Strategy Review

10. More recently other factors have emerged which have strengthened doubts about the wisdom of trying to progress the concept of a discrete cross-conurbation local service network. These include:
 - the capacity constraints at Nottingham Station and its western approaches and at other key points on the regional network. This has also heightened awareness of the potential conflicts between local and regional service development aspirations;
 - further restrictions on service development opportunities as a consequence of more stringent policies emanating from the SRA. These include an emphasis on costs control and value for money with regard to improvement schemes, service cut backs to improve operational performance by reducing pressure on the network, service prioritisation to achieve the most commercially effective utilisation of the network, and the suspension of the RPP Fund in January this year;
 - the recently completed M1 and A453 Multi-Modal Studies (MMSs) whose conclusions called into question the role of heavy rail in meeting short distance travel needs compared to longer distance regional demands in the context of capacity constraints and limited resources;
 - the progression of the NET proposals for a conurbation-wide light rail network to be developed on the basis of Line One, combined with indications from the SRA of views that light rail might well have greater potential than heavy rail in meeting future intra-conurbation travel requirements.
11. The recent commencement of a review of the Nottinghamshire Structure Plan, the A52 MMS, District Local Plan reviews and the SRA's Midland Mainline Route Utilisation Study (RUS) have also suggested that the time was appropriate for a full review of the SNRN strategy.

The Arup Study

12. Arup Consultants were appointed to undertake the review in January 2003 by this County Council in conjunction with the City Council and Derbyshire County Council.
13. The primary objectives set for the commission were to review the existing strategy and route prioritisation and to formulate a new recommended strategy. Emphasis was put on the need for this to be cost effective, robust and deliverable. The detail of the technical appraisals was to accord with Network Rail Level 2, thereby being commensurate with that required for any preliminary funding bid to the SRA. (The more detailed second stage bidding required by the SRA for a development project would involve substantial additional technical work.)

14. A Steering Group for the project was established which met with the Consultants every 3 weeks. The membership of the Group included representatives of the 3 funding Authorities, the SRA, Central Trains, Midland Mainline, Network Rail, EMDA, GOEM and the Greater Nottingham Transport Partnership.
15. The programme undertaken by the Consultants involved a series of inter-related stages, the findings of which have been included in a series of working papers produced sequentially on existing conditions and strategy development, infrastructure assessment, model development and schemes appraisal, and study recommendations. These papers support a Summary Report which has recently been finalised.
16. The Consultants' approach involved the identification and evaluation, in financial and economic cost- benefit terms, of a series of possible rail development strategy options devised with regard to the need for better regional and local services, taking into account capacity constraints at Nottingham Station and elsewhere on the network. The Consultants were also mindful of work being undertaken on a number of related studies including Nottingham Station Masterplan, Trent Resignalling, the Midland Mainline RUS and the A52 and East- West Midlands MMSs.
17. The review of the existing SNRN strategy concluded that the concept of discrete cross-conurbation shuttle services was not a realistic one to progress, at least during the next decade, for a number of reasons including:
 - the capacity constraints at Nottingham Station and between Trent Junction and the station;
 - the competition for limited capacity on the Radford-Trowell and Lower Erewash Valley lines between proposals for new local and regional services;
 - the low coverage of potential operating costs by revenue, estimated at only 35% for the SNRN strategy.

The Recommended Strategy

18. The Study proposals cover two time periods: short to medium term (up to 10 years) and longer term. They also cover local and regional service developments. These are summarised below.

(a) Local Services : Short to Medium Term

- new services to be provided at Bingham by up to 3 trains per hour. Two services per hour could be available by an operational extension of RHL services from Nottingham, which would require an additional train set. This would be supplemented by extra calls on the Crewe-Skegness service which the Consultants consider may be possible as a consequence of the implementation of the proposed Allington chord at Grantham. These proposals would require new turnback/layover facilities at Bingham and make

possible the development of a new park and ride station to the west of the town near the A46/A52 junction as proposed in the original SNRN strategy. They would also enhance service provision at Radcliffe and Netherfield commensurately. It might be noted that the feasibility of providing local services to/from the Gedling colliery site and Lowdham was investigated but the Consultants consider that both would generate significantly less patronage and revenue than Bingham.

- a new station at Ilkeston with half hourly services provided by hourly Liverpool – Norwich trains (calling at Ilkeston instead of Langley Mill as at present) and by an additional new hourly service from Nottingham to Sheffield. (The Ilkeston proposal has already achieved pre-qualification RPP approval from the SRA but its progression has been impeded by capacity and service uncertainties).
- improvements on the Trent corridor west of Nottingham affecting Beeston and Attenborough to achieve a better spread of existing services (currently provided by 4 trains per hour in each direction which have paths concentrated in a period of about 15 minutes each hour) through timetabling revisions and Trent Junction and Resignalling improvements.

(b) Regional Services: Short to Medium Term

- a new direct fast hourly service from Nottingham to Leeds calling only at Chesterfield, Sheffield and Barnsley to be provided by an extension of an hourly Midland Mainline service from London using new Meridian trains to be introduced in 2004/05.
- a new hourly semi-fast service from Nottingham to Sheffield calling at Ilkeston, Langley Mill, Alfreton and Dronfield.
- improved rolling stock provision and timetabling (where possible) on existing Manchester/Liverpool and Birmingham services.

(c) Complementary Improvements

The Consultants recommend that a wide ranging programme of complementary policies and measures should be undertaken to back up the successful implementation of their proposals, and to enhance the attraction of heavy rail as a mode. These include:

- better station facilities and access including park and ride, live information, and better platform accommodation;
- better rolling stock;
- integration with complementary modes including bus-rail links and inter-modal ticketing (as planned for the Robin Hood Line and NET Line One);

- integration with major land use developments; and
- progression of road travel demand management policies.

(d) Infrastructure Dependence

The Consultants indicate that their recommended service strategy is dependent on the implementation of a number of infrastructure improvements including;

- Trent Resignalling;
- Trent Junction improvements;
- Allington chord (near Grantham);
- capacity improvements elsewhere including Dore Junction, Sheffield Station and access to Leeds;
- the new station at Ilkeston; and
- the creation of a turnback/layover facility at Bingham and a new park and ride station adjacent to the A46/A52 junction.

(e) Longer Term Proposals

The Consultants consider that the cost and complexity of certain possible improvements mean that they could only be deliverable in the longer term. They state that the following outline proposals are worthy of further investigation or support in due course with regard to the envisaged timescale constraints:

- the diversion of Nottingham – Birmingham trains via the Sheet Stores – Stenson Junctions freight line (near Castle Donington) by –passing Derby and reducing journey times from 75 minutes to about 60 minutes. The Consultants recognise however that this raises a number of important issues including the reduction of services to Derby, potential conflict with freight traffic, and the substantial infrastructure upgrading required;
- Central Railways’ proposals for a Lille-Liverpool freight line including a freight terminal at Toton; and
- a possible new High Speed Line from London to Northern England and Scotland which might traverse the East Midlands; this is currently under investigation by the SRA.

They also point out that in the longer term, if the capacity issues at Nottingham Station can be resolved and additional funding for new schemes be made available then the SNRN or the Western Orbital proposals (the latter of which would require a new curve at Trowell) could play a vital role in developing the local network.

(f) Additional Proposals – Recommended for Further Review

- possible extension of the Matlock – Derby service to Nottingham/Bingham which would require two extra train sets. The Consultants indicate that this might be necessary if the diversion of Nottingham – Birmingham trains via Castle Donington should occur.
- a possible station at Lenton offering interchange links for access to/from the Queens Medical Centre and the University.

Public Consultation

19. A consultation exercise was undertaken by officers of the commissioning Authorities in conjunction with the Consultants at Nottingham Station and the Victoria Centre between 15 and 18 April with a follow up at the Angel Row Library. The public responses were generally favourable to the local and regional service development ideas that were emerging as components of the Consultants' strategy and exhibited as part of the consultation procedures.

Next Steps

20. Subject to the approval of the commissioning Authorities, it is intended to seek the views of the SRA and the interested rail bodies (including Network Rail, Midland Mainline and Central Trains) and to discuss the formulation of an outline programme to take the recommended strategy forward, with the proposals prioritised in terms of possible implementation timescales with due regard to consideration of infrastructure, rolling stock, timetabling and funding issues.
21. With these objectives in mind a meeting of the Steering Group representatives with the SRA has been arranged for 21 July 2003. It is intended that an oral report on the outcome of this meeting will be made to the Cabinet.
22. Looking ahead it is envisaged that further reports will be submitted to advise on progress and to seek approvals as appropriate, including any funding requirements. In addition it is planned that a countywide rail development strategy be prepared by County Officers by early next year as part of ongoing LTP work, and be reported to the County Council.
23. It may be noted from the Consultants' appraisals that whilst there is opportunity, given appropriate investment, for heavy rail to play a more important role in the future as a travel mode in the Greater Nottingham area than at present, the scope for improvements is limited by rail infrastructure as well as funding constraints. This limited scope especially for the accommodation of intra-conurbation travel needs, emphasises the case for complementary investment in bus services and in the NET light rail network as the key innovatory component of the Local Authorities' public transport strategies to foster the continued development of the City Centre, conurbation and travel to work area in a sustainable manner.

24. There is also a concern that any proposal to extend Robin Hood Line operations to Bingham must not adversely affect the reliability of services on the line, bearing in mind in particular the constraint of the single line sections and the NET infrastructure.

Statutory and Policy Implications

25. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, personnel, crime and disorder and users. Where such implications are material, they have been brought out in the text of the report. Attention is, however, drawn to specifics as follows:

Financial Implications

26. The basic cost of the 18 week commission was £54,500 with half met by Nottinghamshire and half split equally between the City Council and Derbyshire County Council.

Personnel Implications

27. It is envisaged that the work programme can be progressed within existing staff resources but consultancy assistance on relevant technical matters may well be necessary.

Equal Opportunities Implications

28. The improvement of heavy rail services and facilities in the Greater Nottingham conurbation and travel to work area will confer wider social, economic and environmental benefits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 29 It is RECOMMENDED that:
- (a) the Consultants' recommended rail development strategy for the Greater Nottingham area be approved;
 - (b) the Director of Environment be requested to submit future reports on the progression of the strategy including any funding proposals, as appropriate.

COUNCILLOR TERRY BUTLER
Cabinet Member for Environment

Head of Legal Services' Comments

Cabinet has power to decide the recommendation, [SHB 2.7.03]

Director of Resources' Financial Comments

The financial implications are as set out in the report. [KRP 1.7.03]

Background Papers available for Inspection

South Nottinghamshire Rail Network Review Summary Report and Working Papers
(Arup consultancy)

Electoral Divisions Affected

All.

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