

# Agenda Item

**Executive Board**

**14 December 2005**

**JFM**



## **South West Main Line: Route Utilisation Strategy – Draft for Consultation**

### **Summary**

1. A draft Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) for the South West main line has now been published and responses are required by 6 January 2006. The South West Trains franchise is to be re-tendered in 2006 and the RUS will inform the franchise specification. The draft RUS provides an opportunity for the Council to restate its support for the Salisbury to Exeter Lineside Consortium's (SELCA) aspirations for the introduction of an hourly Waterloo/Exeter service and half hourly Exeter to Axminster and to inform Network Rail of the current position with regard to developments in East Devon that strengthen the case for improvements to the line.

### **Recommendation**

1. That Network Rail be informed that the Council strongly supports Option 9.2 in the draft RUS for the South West main line providing additional passing loops to allow the introduction of an hourly Waterloo/Exeter service and half hourly Exeter to Axminster service.
2. That Network Rail be informed of the current position with regard to Cranbrook, the Intermodal Interchange and Skypark and the proposals in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy, which will result in the enlargement of the new community, that strengthen the case for improvements to the line.
3. That Devon County Council be informed of the Council's strong support for improvements to the Exeter to Salisbury railway line and members consider whether to make a financial contribution to the development of the business case for the provision of extra passing loops.

#### **a) Reasons for Recommendation**

To ensure Network Rail are aware of the Council's support for the Salisbury to Exeter Lineside Consortium's (SELCA's) aspirations for the introduction of an hourly Waterloo/Exeter service and half hourly Exeter to Axminster service and for the provision of passing loops to achieve this. Also to draw to Network Rail's attention the developments proposed in East Devon to the east of Exeter which strengthen the case for improvements to the line.

#### **b) Alternative Options**

The council could support Option 9.1 for double-tracking the entire west of England line but at a projected cost of considerably more than £125 million this is considered to be unrealistic.

**c) Risk Considerations**

N/A.

**d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations**

The Council is member of SELCA and supports its aims for improvements to the line to deliver an hourly Waterloo/Exeter service and half hourly Exeter to Axminster. There are no budgetary implications.

**e) Date for Review of Decision**

N/A

**1.0 Introduction and Background**

- 1.1 At its meeting on 19 October 2005 the Executive Board considered a report about the Exeter to Salisbury railway line and supported the Exeter to Salisbury Lineside Consortium of Authorities (SELCA) proposal for a business case assessment of proposed improvements to the line to deliver an hourly Waterloo/Exeter service and half hourly Exeter to Axminster service. Members were informed that the South West Trains franchise is to be re-tendered in 2006 and before the franchise specification is prepared a Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) was being conducted by Network Rail. It was also pointed out that the challenge will be to ensure that the RUS acknowledges the importance of improvements between Exeter and Salisbury, particularly as there will be pressure from London authorities for the focus to be on improvements for commuters from the London suburbs. As part of this the importance of the route as a diversionary route for the Great Western line needs to be emphasised.
- 1.2 Network rail has now published a Draft for Consultation Document for the South West Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS). A RUS collates and sets out existing network capacity, service provision, and usage for both passenger and freight services. It traces recent demand change and takes into account future change based on wider spatial and planning considerations as well as wider stakeholder commitments and aspirations. A RUS identifies present and future problems and opportunities for change. It evaluates these opportunities, putting forward for formal consultation those that offer the best value for money. The outcome of a RUS provides an input into the High Level Output Specification (HLOS) which sets out the Government's view of the levels of capacity and reliability it wants railways to provide from the public funding available for the railways.
- 1.3 The consultation document has been produced in collaboration with rail industry partners and it seeks constructive contributions to provide relevant information on regional and local issues. The consultation document sets out the options for change to meet the growing requirements of all rail users within the relevant constraints and it will inform the development of the specification for the South Western franchise replacement scheduled for February 2007. The document examines issues and forecast changes affecting the line and identifies eleven significant gaps between what is currently deliverable and what is required to meet future demand and aspirations. One of these is:

“Insufficient capacity on the West of England line to provide the level of service aspired to.”

There is a list of 13 areas of further work required to explore and refine the key options available to address these gaps. This work will provide the information necessary to inform the appraisal process. Included in these recommendations is the following:

“West of England Line Infrastructure Enhancement – identifying the infrastructure upgrade necessary to meet the stakeholder aspirations for an hourly Waterloo to Exeter service and a further hourly Axminster to Exeter service.”

- 1.4 There are a number of references in the “Baseline” and “Drivers of Change” sections of the RUS which are relevant to the Council’s concerns as follows:
- 1.4.1 “The SWML is also used as a diversionary route for First Great Western services when parts of the Great Western Main Line are closed” (page 18)
- 1.4.2 “... there are also significant flows into ...Exeter .. and important tourist and leisure markets to and from the south coast and Salisbury.” (page 19)
- 1.4.3 “For the main operator South West Trains the number of passenger journeys per year increased from 118 million in 1997/98 to 144 million in 2003/04 growth of around 22% in six years” (page 19).
- 1.4.4 On the Waterloo to Exeter route at peak times there are 293 (on six trains) passengers without seats in the morning time period. South West Trains are currently removing some seats to allow larger standing areas (pages 21 and 35).
- 1.4.5 “Although there are relatively few services on the west of England branch, the single line and long block sections along this stretch of line result in a correspondingly high occupancy level for the number of services.”
- 1.4.6 In a section listing seven gaps identified from analysis of the baseline data includes, “The West of England line does not have the network capacity necessary to provide the level of service aspired to”. (page 29).
- 1.4.7 “Increasing demand on an already busy network cannot be accommodated Indefinitely”. (page 31). Table K identifies areas of highest unconstrained growth in a.m. peak trips to London growth and “West of Yeovil” is fifth in the table with 38%.
- 1.4.8 One of the eleven gaps identified between what the network services and facilities currently provide and that which is required in the future is Gap 9 “ There is not enough capacity on the West of England Line to provide the level of service aspired to.” Three options are put forward to address this gap :

9:1 Double-tracking the entire west of England line

9:2 Additional passing loops.

9.3 Timetable change.

Option 9:1 has a guesstimate of considerably over £100 million. The RUS conclusion on this option is that, “with approximately 70 miles of double-tracking required, the additional performance and capacity benefits are not expected to provide an adequate return on this significant investment, and as option 9.2 is also expected to provide adequate capacity for additional services, this option will not be analysed further.”

Option 9:2 has a guesstimate of £25 million. The RUS conclusion on this option is that, “This option would provide the capacity necessary to provide the proposed service enhancement with a total of 8 miles of additional track. Clearly, this is a more cost-effective

means of providing the necessary capacity for service improvements than option 9.1 and as the timetable implications have already been analysed, and the additional services could be robustly pathed with this additional infrastructure it will be examined further. The option could also provide provision for the building of a new station at Cranbrook mentioned in Appendix B.”

Option 9:3 The timetable exercise demonstrated that there is no capacity for additional services without infrastructure enhancement.

1.4.9 There is a reference to the new station proposal at Cranbrook in an Appendix listing Stakeholder Proposals which states “ Cranbrook : East Devon. A proposed new station on the West of England line, between Whimble and Pinhoe. This is the location of a possible new area of housing, and is also close to Exeter Airport.” It is recommended that Network Rail be informed of the current position with regard to the new community proposal (and the deletion of the word “possible”) and other developments to the east of Exeter.

1.5 In a section of the consultation document titled “Stakeholder consultation” the document states that constructive contributions are welcome to assist Network Rail in developing each RUS by providing information on regional and local issues, within a number of key factors and two of these are particularly relevant namely new housing developments and growth areas of employment, both of which are relevant to the South West Main line in East Devon.

## **2.0 Devon County Council Request for Support for Improvements to the Exeter to Salisbury Railway Line**

2.1 The previous report to the Executive Board referred to the fact that Devon County Council Executive had agreed to put £15,000 towards a business case assessment (expected to cost in the region £30,000 to £50,000) of the proposed improvements to the line. Further that Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire County were to consider making contributions and there was a possibility that Districts may be asked to contribute. Subsequently a letter was received from the Deputy County Environment Director stating that the full County Council had endorsed the Executive conclusions and agreed that the County Council should seek support from other Local Authorities, the Regional Development Agency, Regional Assembly and Salisbury to Exeter Lineside Consortium of Authorities. He continues that such support includes the seeking of financial contributions from partners, and urging Network Rail to support provision of passing loops in the impending Route Utilisation Strategy for the South West Mainline network from Exeter. He concludes by requesting that this matter be brought to the attention of District Council members and hopes that the District will be able to confirm support for improvements to this important transport route.

2.2 Clearly the Council can confirm its support for improvements to the Exeter to Salisbury railway line. With regard to a possible financial contribution to the business case assessment, as noted above the draft RUS states that the option for additional passing loops “will be examined further”, and this could mean that Network Rail will itself fund the required work. However, members will need to consider whether the Council is able to make a financial contribution to the development of the business case for the provision of extra passing loops in the event that Network Rail do not carry out this work.

## **3.0 Conclusions**

3.1 The draft RUS clearly acknowledges the Council's and SELCA's aspirations for the introduction of an hourly Waterloo/Exeter service and half hourly Exeter to Axminster and this is to be welcomed. The proposal to examine further Option 9.2 to provide additional passing loops is strongly supported.

- 3.2 A meeting of SELCA is to be held on 14 December when the draft RUS will be discussed. Any recommendations made at this meeting will be reported verbally to the Executive Board.

### **Legal Implications**

No legal implications to report.

### **Financial Implications**

No detailed financial implications are included at the present time.

### **Background Papers**

- ❑ South West Main Line: Route Utilisation Strategy, Draft for Consultation. Network Rail
- ❑ Pre-Feasibility Report for Exeter to Waterloo line, Devon and Somerset Loop Lines- Parsons Brinkerhoff
- ❑ Westcountry-Waterloo : The Real Alternative. June 2005. Rail Passengers Committee Western England.
- ❑ Report to Executive Board 19 October 2005 – Exeter to Salisbury railway Line.
- ❑ Letter from Deputy County Environment Director to Mark Williams

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Executive Board  
14 December 2005