



Strategic Transport Leadership Board

29 September 2023

Agenda Item 7: HS2 released capacity

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Board:

- a) **Considers the outcomes of the West Coast South Strategic Advice published in August 2023 outlined in this report and presented by Network Rail, highlighting any questions or queries on the work undertaken;**
- b) **Notes the relationship with EEH strategy and study work as outlined below;**
- c) **Endorses the continued need for engagement with the rail industry on maximising the benefits of any released capacity associated with delivery of HS2 phase 2a (London Euston to Crewe), including through the planned Wider South-East Rail Partnership; and,**
- d) **Considers and comments on priorities for possible further areas of EEH work outlined in section 7.**

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the Network Rail West Coast South Strategic Advice work, published July 2023, regarding opportunities from HS2 released capacity, providing context to Network Rail's presentation to the Strategic Transport Leadership Board.

2. Key points

- 2.1. The West Coast South Strategic Advice report is a substantive piece of work that looks in detail at how released capacity arising following delivery of HS2 (Euston to Birmingham and Crewe) could be utilised, based on a number of different train service scenarios prioritising different rail markets.
- 2.2. It identifies that there are important opportunities to service different rail markets, but that there will be trade-offs to be made, needing policy decisions about how any released capacity should be prioritised.
- 2.3. EEH, as the sub-national transport body for our region, has a key role in supporting further planning work and decisions regarding how the West Coast Main Line can best be utilised for the benefit of the region once the next stages of HS2 are delivered.

3. Context

- 3.1. Network Rail's West Coast South Strategic Advice is an important report in providing evidence on the opportunities associated with released capacity once HS2 has been delivered and the service improvement options that this could enable.

- 3.2. It has also helped identify where further detailed work should be focused to maximise these opportunities, including on planning for enhancements, and more detailed work on investment choices, for example for new stations.
- 3.3. The timescales for decisions on detail of timetabling associated with delivery of HS2 Phase 2A (Euston to Birmingham and Crewe is currently unknown, but will be led by West Coast Partnership Development, following the recent extension of the West Coast Partnership contract up to 2032. ¹It is understood that development of their service plans will be informed by the West Coast South Strategic Advice work, in particular the planning principles shown on the Network Rail presentation.
- 3.4. EEH has a significant role in rail policy and network development, and this is expected to develop further as rail industry reform comes forward. This includes the planned Wider South East Rail Partnership, the scope of which was endorsed by the Board in July 2023.
- 3.5. It is considered important that the Board and local authority partners continue to input to planning for the potential opportunities associated with HS2 released capacity on the West Coast Main Line, including through the partnership.

4. Report Methodology

- 4.1. The Network Rail West Coast South Strategic Advice looks in detail at the rail service opportunities that could arise from released capacity following delivery of HS2 phase 2A (Euston to Birmingham and Crewe), as well as how additional benefits associated with constructing HS2 onwards to Manchester could further support improvements.
- 4.2. The rail service opportunities identified are outlined in five different train service scenarios, which set out how released capacity could be used with a focus on different train market areas, namely a focus on:
 - Supporting freight movements
 - Supporting intermediate destinations (not served by HS2)
 - Supporting east-west connections (linked to delivery of East West Rail)
 - Serving new connections (including eight new stations)
 - Peak commuting into London.
- 4.3. Each of these five scenarios are supported by a number of identified 'planning principles,' which in turn informed a set of minimum train service requirements which were then incorporated into all five scenarios. These are set out on the Network Rail presentation, but in summary include the principle of supporting freight growth, developing Milton Keynes Central as a key rail service 'hub,' as well as a minimum service structure for Northampton (services operating via the Northampton loop).
- 4.4. The work then looked in detail at further train service specifications that could be developed to support each of the five scenarios, maximising use of released capacity. This was done based both on using existing infrastructure, but also reviewed where services could be further improved through the development of further targeted infrastructure enhancements.
- 4.5. A multi-criteria assessment of each scenario with and without further infrastructure enhancements was also undertaken based on a quantified measure linking with the five overall study objectives of:
 - Maximising revenue
 - Supporting development
 - Encouraging modal split
 - Stimulating new markets
 - Supporting freight growth.

¹ <https://newsdesk.avantiwestcoast.co.uk/news/new-national-rail-contract-agreed-for-the-west-coast-partnership>

5. Report conclusions

- 5.1. The report notes that there are policy choices to be made about how released capacity is used, for example the appropriate balance between use of capacity for freight and passenger services, and how far new services should provide access to new markets, linking to other planned investment such as East West Rail.
- 5.2. It concludes that delivery of new stations in the West Northamptonshire area could significantly impact on route capability and performance, and that further detailed work on station needs in this area should be undertaken prior to any particular station proposals being developed in more detail.
- 5.3. The reports states that opportunities will be maximised by delivering HS2 all the way to Manchester (through phase 2b, Crewe to Manchester), as well as the priority for developing enhancements of the route section between Bletchley and Milton Keynes to enable maximisation of released capacity benefits, should funding be made available.
- 5.4. Further pieces of strategic analysis are recommended to be considered for progression based on the analysis undertaken, including looking at enhancement options within the Milton Keynes area, a West Northamptonshire area local stations need assessment, and a wider freight routing study.
- 5.5. Network Rail has now commenced a more detailed study for the Milton Keynes area. The West Northamptonshire area local stations need assessment is seen as needed to support development of any further new stations in the area such as Daventry or South Northamptonshire, but is not being progressed by any parties at present.

6. Relationship with EEH policy

- 6.1. EEH has developed policy and evidence base work that specifically relates to the analysis within the West Coast South Strategic Advice Report. Key priorities for rail were set out in the Strategic Rail Objectives report endorsed at the Board in July 2023, which in turn built on both the EEH Transport Strategy and Passenger Rail Study. These are set out in full in Annex 1.
- 6.2. The strategic objectives for the West Coast Mainline route outlines the importance of using HS2 released capacity to support both passenger services connecting key hubs along the West Coast Main Line, as well as freight services that support the economy and help reduce overall HGV movements. There are also a number of objectives associated with the use and development of the West Coast Mainline and other routes that are important. This includes linking in connectivity and interchange with East West Rail at Bletchley/ Milton Keynes, and enabling delivery of associated new services such as from Aylesbury to Milton Keynes. It will be important that these objectives guide EEH input to further more detailed rail industry work, including that on post HS2 rail service timetabling.
- 6.3. Another key evidence piece which will guide EEH input to future work will be the Thames Valley to Northampton Connectivity Study currently being undertaken. It is expected that the conclusions of this study will be presented back to Board in early 2024.

7. Next steps

- 7.1. The following further areas of work are set out for board consideration:
 - Inputting to further priority detailed studies, including the area study for the Milton Keynes/ Bletchley area currently being progressed by Network Rail.
 - Considering support for further collaborate study work- for example the proposed West Northamptonshire area local stations needs assessment.
 - Further engaging with train operators such as Avanti/ West Coast Partnership on any more detailed service timetabling work associated with HS2 delivery.

The work outlined above would be supported by current and future EEH evidence base, including further connectivity studies as they delivered. The board will also continue to be updated as further more detailed work is developed.

James Gagg
Project Lead
29 September 2023

List of Annexes

1. Relevant extracts from the EEH Transport Strategy, 2021, and Strategic Rail Objectives report, 2023
2. Network Rail presentation on the West Coast South Strategic Advice

Annex 1: Extracts from the EEH Transport Strategy, 2021 and Strategic Rail Objectives Report, 2023 (full reports available at: <https://www.englandseconomicheartland.com/publications-and-responses/>)

EEH Transport Strategy, February 2021:

Key relevant policies:

Policy 11: We will work with partners, the East West Railway Company and Network Rail to ensure that where the East West Main Line intersects existing main lines the opportunity is taken to establish regionally significant transport hubs. Priority will be given to developing proposals in the following locations:

- Oxford Stations
- Bicester Stations
- Aylesbury Station
- Milton Keynes/Bletchley Stations
- Bedford Midland Station
- East West Rail/East Coast Main Line
- Cambridge/ Cambridge South Stations.

Policy 16: We will work with Network Rail, Government and adjoining Sub-national Transport Bodies to maximise the allocation of released capacity on the classic network as a result of HS2 to benefit connectivity within the region.

EEH Rail Strategic Objectives Report, July 2023:

Most Relevant Strategic Objectives by route:

Chiltern Main Line:

Medium term (5-20 years):

Improve regional connectivity for local people to Oxford, Bicester, Aylesbury, Bletchley and Milton Keynes enabling direct interchange with East West Main Line services.

West Coast Main line:

Medium term (5- 20 years)

Enhance the rail passenger service offering through efficient use of HS2 released capacity enabling improved connectivity between the north, Birmingham, Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes, Hertfordshire and London

Improve regional connectivity to Bletchley and Milton Keynes, enabling direct interchange with East West Main Line services.

Improve connectivity for local people between Northampton, Milton Keynes, Bletchley, Oxford and Watford enabling improved journeys across Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Hertfordshire regions.

Long term (20 years+)

Enhance the rail freight offering to the Midlands and the North through efficient use of HS2 additional released capacity enabling improvement in the movement of goods and reducing HGV volumes across the strategic road network.

East West Mainline:

Medium term (5-20 years)

Improve connectivity between Bedford, Bletchley and Milton Keynes to the South West and South Wales enabling improved journeys between the regions.

Improve connectivity between Aylesbury, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, and Northampton enabling improved journeys between these locations.