

Your Ref:  
Our Ref:  
Date: 28<sup>th</sup> February 2015  
Enquiries to: Kerry Allen  
Tel: 01473 264429  
Email: [Kerry.allen@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:Kerry.allen@suffolk.gov.uk)



Improving Connectivity  
Network Rail (Group Strategy)  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Cottons Centre  
Cottons Lane  
London  
SE1 2QG

Dear Sir or Madam,

**Suffolk County Council Consultation Response to Improving Connectivity Consultation**

Thank you for providing the opportunity to respond to Network Rail's consultation on its new approach to planning rail services.

The county council supports an approach that focuses on local rail connections as opposed to mainline services and agrees that more cost effective methods should be used to improve track capacity and frequency of services. However, it is not a solution for all routes and infrastructure is required first to make the region's rail network more resilient and reliable. The proposals contained within Improving Connectivity seem to contradict the purpose of using more cost effective ways to improve rail links (the document cites that the infrastructure needed to support the new passenger rail service timetable will be circa £1 billion). A number of the proposals would require large investment in new stations or additional rail tracking.

Suffolk County Council seeks further information from Network Rail about how Improving Connectivity will feed into the Anglia Route Study (which is currently undergoing public consultation), and the East Anglia rail franchise (also open for consultation).

Improving Connectivity claims that changes to passenger rail service timetables (alongside the introduction of split and joining services, and cross-platform changes) will decrease some journey times. However, this will depend on the availability of good rolling stock and infrastructure. Diesel stock availability is currently limited across the UK and orders for new trains are few and far between. Journey times will become longer if connecting trains are delayed or cancelled, affecting all other services, and timetabling will become complicated for passengers - especially if they need to change trains more than once. The provision of understandable timetabling and ticketing information will be essential. Cross platform changes are not a suitable option for passengers with disabilities, or those travelling with small children or heavy luggage. Improving Connectivity does not take account of the passenger impact, as well as the poor access between platforms that exist at some stations.

In terms of whether the principles of Improving Connectivity are suitable for Suffolk, we make the following comments:

## **Ipswich to Peterborough**

Suffolk County Council and its partners have long been campaigning for a direct hourly service between Ipswich and Peterborough to be included in the new long-term franchise. This issue was raised by officers at the Anglia Route Study Workshops, held by Network Rail, and in our responses to the Market Studies. Suffolk County Council would not be supportive of a cross platform change for the Ipswich to Peterborough service. An hourly direct Ipswich – Peterborough passenger service will deliver over **£60m** in economic benefits for the Suffolk economy. It will support housing and jobs growth, greatly benefit business, and enable more access across Suffolk, to Stansted (via Ely), the Midlands, the North East, North West and Scotland. This will help to foster business development, open new markets and create jobs, as well as support growth locations in Ipswich, Stowmarket and Bury St Edmunds. It is therefore vital that the service attracts passengers. However, a cross-platform change would do much to deter passengers - making the car a more attractive and convenient choice for this type of journey.

The proposal to combine the Ipswich – Cambridge service and the Ipswich – Peterborough service could cause issues with seating capacity (especially during peak times) if additional carriages are not provided. This could be particularly problematic during Newmarket Race Days.

The consultation document claims that the new combined services could split at a reconstructed Newmarket Station. The existing station consists of a single platform. Both the station building and land behind it were sold. There is little land available for further platform development. It would therefore be useful to understand Network Rail's redevelopment plans and the land that would be required. We are very supportive of investment in Newmarket Station to improve connectivity to Cambridge, Ely, Peterborough and eventually the South West via the new East West Rail Link. However, such investment in the station must improve passenger facilities and simply must not be 'another platform', but a station facility that complements Newmarket. This will be particularly important if Newmarket's bid for Royal Status is granted.

The connection of Warren Hill Junction to Snailwail Junction will link to the busy Ely-Soham Line. It is imperative that additional track capacity is provided between Soham and Ely, and that level crossings are upgraded. Electrification of the line between Felixstowe and Birmingham, and between Ipswich and Cambridge will greatly improve line speeds.

Infrastructure constraints at Ely do not only affect rail services between Ipswich and Peterborough, but also the Great Eastern Mainline (as identified by the Anglia Route Study). The Improving Connectivity consultation document claims that '...good connections are the exception rather than the norm at Ely'. There is a desperate need to improve infrastructure at Ely to accommodate the 48 freight trains per day by 2019 that will travel from the expanding Port of Felixstowe (increasing to 60 trains per day by 2024). We are pleased that the Government has committed to upgrade the freight route between Felixstowe and Birmingham, using the Strategic Freight Network fund. However, we understand that work at Ely is in danger of slipping into CP6. Improvements to Ely North Junction are due to be delivered by May 2017, yet no date has been given for providing additional track capacity between Ely and Soham and there is a need to upgrade level crossings, which are presently entirely unfunded. It is important that infrastructure being delivered at Ely does not favour one service over another, and is mutually beneficial to all services.

## **Great Eastern Mainline**

The county council is supportive of a London Liverpool Street service stopping at Needham Market, however further work is required at Needham Market station platforms to accommodate the mainline service. This is not mentioned in the Improving Connectivity consultation document.

The Improving Connectivity consultation document does not contain details about the work of the Great Eastern Mainline (GEML) Taskforce. A number of interventions are required to create capacity on the GEML to cope with demand. Improving Connectivity should contain the details of the Taskforce's recommendations for the GEML. This includes: remodelling Bow Junction (as identified in Network Rail's CP5 Delivery Plan); addressing level crossing issues; replacing overhead power lines between Norwich and Chelmsford; upgrading signals, and providing additional track capacity between Chelmsford and Witham. Improvements on the cross-country route, such as enhancing track capacity at Ely (as previously mentioned) and Haughley Junction, and enabling headway reductions on the Bury St Edmunds Line provide a high value for money return.

We know that such improvements, alongside new rolling stock, will deliver £4.5bn in economic benefits for the East Anglia region for investment of £476m in improving infrastructure.

Suffolk County Council is not supportive of any proposals that involve skipping Suffolk stations. At the same time, a balance is also required to ensure that connectivity is not at the cost of journey time improvements. 'Improving Connectivity' suggests a longer journey between London Liverpool Street and Colchester and also between the other population centres on the mainline route to the detriment of Ipswich, Colchester and Chelmsford. This proposal is contradictory to the work of the GEML Taskforce, which seeks to improve journey times between Norwich, Suffolk, Essex and London Liverpool Street. The recommendations from a report commissioned by the Taskforce are included in the Anglia Route Study. It is imperative that the importance of reducing journey times from Suffolk stations is deemed just as important as reducing journey times from Norfolk stations.

The county council is supportive of proposals to timetable services at Marks Tey station so that they provide better connections with mainline services in each direction. However, Improving Connectivity makes no mention of the infrastructure improvements that will be required at Marks Tey to improve cross-platform connectivity. Further interventions are required at Marks Tey station, which is in desperate need of a new or improved bridge with lifts or an underpass to enable disabled passengers, cyclists and passengers with heavy bags or children to cross between platforms to catch connecting trains to Sudbury.

## **East Suffolk Line**

Suffolk County Council is supportive of a direct service between Ipswich and Great Yarmouth via Lowestoft provided that issues with the Oulton Broad North level crossing are addressed, which currently causes a number of delays to road traffic. Infrastructure would also be required to increase line speeds and provide additional track capacity, this includes the implementation of additional tracking between Saxmundham and Woodbridge, and between Lowestoft and Oulton Broad North. Capacity at Westerfield junction should also be assessed to ensure that it can cope with an increase in freight and passenger services. The opportunity for investment in additional tracking between Woodbridge and Saxmundham could be delivered as part of the proposed Sizewell C development; however the delivery of the infrastructure should not be solely dependent on the development of Sizewell C. Electrification of the line between Lowestoft and Ipswich will help to increase line speeds and provide additional capacity.

Improving Connectivity contains proposals for the Felixstowe Branch Line to connect with a new rail/road tram. Further details are required about the highways route the tram would follow. Due to the limited availability of road space in Ipswich and the safety issues a new tram line

would create, it is unlikely that such a scheme would be possible. One of the key reasons for underuse of the passenger train between Felixstowe and Ipswich is due to its unreliability, the passenger train is often delayed or cancelled as a result of late running or broken down freight trains. To overcome this, additional tracking would be required to provide passing provision on the single track Felixstowe Branch Line. Electrification of the line would also do much to increase track capacity.

### **Ipswich to Cambridge Line**

The county council is supportive of a half-hourly Ipswich - Cambridge service; however, we would be opposed to a service skipping Ipswich and stopping at Stowmarket. It is important that Ipswich is properly served by a half-hourly service to Cambridge. Passengers would be deterred from using services if they are required to change trains or wait for services to join. Such proposals would encourage more car use and create more demand on the A14. It would also provide a disruptive journey for passengers using the new East West rail service.

Suffolk County Council expects electrification of the line between Ipswich and Cambridge, which would tie in with the electrification of the line between Felixstowe and Birmingham.

The County Council welcomes future involvement in helping to better connect local services. However, the county council feels that the new approach should further explore current rail infrastructure needs and capability of the rail network (as being promoted by the Anglia Route Study) to ensure that the proposals set out in Improving Connectivity are not contradictory to new rail infrastructure and franchise plans. The concept of changing trains should also be tested against Passenger Focus research.

Yours faithfully

**Graham L. Newman (Cllr)**  
**Member for Felixstowe Coastal Division**  
**Cabinet Member for Roads, Transport and Planning**