

*promoting quality public transport.....*

13th May 2011

## **A HIGH SPEED LINE TO THE NORTH WEST OF ENGLAND**

### ***A Revised Position Statement***

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1 TravelWatch North West published its initial statement on the proposal for a high speed railway to the North West of England, now known as HS2, in October 2009. With the government now having produced proposals for a specific route and commenced a period of consultations it is appropriate that TravelWatch North West reviews its position then stated. The original statement is appended hereto.

#### **2. A Review of our original Statement**

2.1 The original statement welcomed the discussion on the concept for a new high speed railway between London and the North West, seeing an urgent need to address the problem of increasing pressure on capacity on the existing West Coast Main Line. The effects of continuing recession may have slowed the growth of traffic on the line, but not set it into decline, and it is as vital now, as in 2009, to plan ahead to provide additional route capacity for when the health of the national economy improves.

2.2 Despite forecasts that the development and increasing use of information technology would reduce the demand for travel, this has not been borne out by the evidence in passenger numbers throughout the British rail system. Increasing congestion of roads and motorways, coupled with rapidly increasing fuel costs and a growing environmental awareness, have done, and will continue, to drive more passengers – and freight – onto the railways.

2.3 All these factors create a demand for more trains – local, inter-regional, high speed passenger and freight. Intensively used railways also have a high demand for maintenance and collectively all these factors produce an incompatibility on existing lines which severely limits their capacity, especially if a 7-day a week service is provided. Substantial sections of the West Coast Main Line are already very near capacity, with very strong constraints on some factors of demand, especially freight (this already being the most

heavily used freight route in the country) and on local and inter-regional services due to their incompatibility with the dominant high speed services running on the same lines.

2.4 Experience in the on-line upgrading of the West Coast route, the main works of which were extended over a period of ten years up to 2007, is not one which users of the line would wish to see repeated with the extensive disruptions to services and unreliability they endured during that time. Provision of additional route capacity would repeat this – and also impact severely on communities along the line. The only effective answer is the construction of a new high speed railway.

### **3. Strategic Design Criteria**

3.1 The earlier paper put forward a number of criteria for the design of a new line to the North West. These were within a generally stated criteria that –

*any proposals are seen as logical parts of a much longer term strategy for the provision of a network of new lines to connect the various nations and regions of the UK with London and each other.*

This, unfortunately, has not been the case. Apart from a proposal to develop a “Y” of lines to link London with Manchester and Leeds, no further strategy has been published, with no indication of how a high speed network would be extended to serve the further parts of northern England or into Scotland, let alone whether other regions may enjoy the benefits of such a network. The lack of a longer-term and wider strategy could well lead to costly white elephants as has resulted with the concentration of HS1 services at St Pancras International leaving the expensive development of Waterloo station and its connections now abandoned after a life of little more than a decade. Questions needing to be answered now include that of whether Manchester should be served by a terminus station or a through station which would allow trains to proceed onwards to Scotland.

3.2 Within this network context four main design criteria were put forward by TravelWatch North West -

(a) Route to be oriented from London to serve Manchester as the primary north west destination, but also to serve the West Midlands en route.

This has clearly been met with the project for a line initially to Birmingham with planned extensions to Manchester and West Yorkshire.

(b) Route to approach Manchester from the south westerly quarter to facilitate a westward link to Liverpool and onward over classic lines to Preston, Cumbria and Scotland – also as a jumping off point for extending the high speed line itself to Scotland.

The answer to this is as yet unknown but with the lack of a national strategy there is no guidance on this point.

(c) The approach to Manchester was discussed in terms of permitting an extension of the line over the Pennines.

This has been overtaken by the proposal for a “Y” formation with to permit the eastern arm to serve Yorkshire from a junction in the Midlands.

(d) In its original position paper TravelWatch North West saw only a limited case for a line to the North West serving Heathrow airport, suggesting it would impose significant additional capital expense and environmental impact . . . for the direct benefit of a relatively small proportion of passengers using the route, while recognising the problems of connectivity between Heathrow and the WCML and advocating other measures to provide a link from a new line. Concerns with serving Heathrow – or now to run within reasonable distance of it for the eventual construction of a spur line – has led to the line being promoted through the Chilterns AONB on an entirely new line of communication rather than along an existing transport corridor as was suggested in the original TWNW statement, and as with HS1 on much of its route across Kent, close to either the M2 and M20. We said that such action “will only result in much increased opposition to any proposals.” Such has indeed been the case.

We now recognize that high speed ground transport to the Midlands, North and Scotland should be provided at Heathrow at some stage to help reduce internal flights.

#### **4. Other Concerns**

4.1 TravelWatch North West re-iterates other concerns from its original statement – viz. the need for close integration with the classic rail network, and the need for continuing high levels of investment in the existing system.

4.2 In relation to the former, TWNW has some concern that new stations may be built to accommodate new high speed services rather than incorporate them into existing facilities. This will tend to negate some of the time advantages of high speed travel by the additional time taken to access existing rail services in the main regional centres. If HS train length is an issue with station location/design consideration could be given to double-deck trains which would obviate the need for very long platforms and hence stations by almost providing a full train capacity in just over half the length. However, double deck trains would not currently be able to run onto the rest of the network (an important consideration following the initial completion of stage 1) and more work needs to be done in this complex area.

4.3 Recent announcements by the government for further major rail investment in the classic network, including route electrification in the north west, seem to belie concerns about diversion of investment into a high speed project. This is at a time when major investment is being poured into Crossrail, with HS2 expected to follow on.

4.4 TWNW also suggests that selective park-and-ride stations should be an integral part of the planning of a high-speed network of railways to serve Britain with minimal effects on journey times. The lack of these on the West Coast Main Line, and other trunk routes, already affects personal decisions about travel mode, especially when the alternative may be a relatively long suburban rail journey and cross-city transfer, which would very significantly

add to overall journey times. Park-and-ride should be seen as an essential part of attracting the widest possible market to a high speed rail network.

## **5. Summary**

5.1 Despite some disappointments in the planning of the present scheme for HS2, TravelWatch North West is unvarying with its support for the concept of a high speed railway to connect London with the North West of England. The strongest component of the case for this is the projected critical crunch on capacity on the present line within the next ten years or so.

5.2 Given this, TOWNW expresses its strong concern over the lack of a national-wide strategy for a high speed rail network to provide a context for decisions which will be being taken in the next few years. The government is urged to work toward a 25-30 year strategy for this network as soon as possible.

***Author: Peter Robinson***