

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport

promoting quality public transport.....

Regional Urban Market Study
RUS Planner
Network Rail
Kings Place
90 York Way
London N1 9AG

26th July 2013

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Regional Urban Market Study draft for consultation

TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in NW England. This brief response is in the context of the region that we cover i.e. North West England.

Our comments are related to passenger concerns that are current and the need to address these in the context of long term passenger growth and winning car users to rail to achieve the goals of the study.

In general, decades of underinvestment in trains, track and stations in our region mean that users face much poorer quality journeys than on other parts of the rail network. Life expired rolling stock and overcrowding are commonplace on trains and many stations are in need of improvement. More specific issues are listed below.

Trains –

Northern Rail's services comprise a fleet with some of the oldest and timeworn trains running on Britain's railway network. Northern has made valiant efforts to maintain its old trains and its standards but high levels of growth have put enormous pressures on this train operator which is in receipt of deep government subsidy. Currently it is severely restricted in financial terms from modernising and expanding its fleet to provide extra capacity to keep pace with demand.

There must be a strategy to remedy this situation. Ideally the North West of England should get **new** trains to replace the diesel fleet and **new** electric trains for the newly electrified services. Longer trains are needed for many peak services.

We endorse the planned electrification of the network. However this can have shortcomings in the medium term where sections of routes now carrying through diesel services are not wired. For example of great concern is the proposed reduction in through services between Barrow/ Windermere and Manchester especially Windermere which will come down to one through train a day. In the longer term the answer is to extend the wires to such places. The spread of electrification should be an intrinsic part of the study as it will encourage more rail use.

Stations –

Some have been improved but there is much more to be done. The excellent 'Better Stations' report by Chris Green and Professor Sir Peter Hall that was published by the DfT in November 2009 showed that the North West had a higher proportion of the most poorly rated stations than any other region. The provision of passenger information at many stations especially in the more rural areas is well below an acceptable standard. For example on the lines around the Cumbrian coast 29 of the 34 stations do not have electronic information displays, and a number are out of range of mobile phone signals.

Door to door journeys -

As well as train service improvements passengers have to get to and from the station. This is often frustrated by lack of car parking space and a deficiency of reliable integration with other modes especially bus. All measures to ameliorate these crucial aspects will help to win more passengers from the private car. Cyclists should be encouraged.

We support the goal to improve affordability. But also much can be done to improve the availability of integrated fares with other modes – e.g bus and light rail - to promote seamless journeys. Indeed light rail & tram/train should be seen as an intrinsic part of regional urban rail strategy, complementary to and closely integrated with heavy rail.

Improving the rail network -

30/40 years is a long horizon but has to be faced up to in terms of investment decisions. The way in which the current railway is structured may not be the best way for such decisions to be made but whatever the structure of the industry the key requirement is one of strategic long term planning and vision. The Northern Hub and other schemes will assist the process. We would also recommend that other schemes where rail could be an effective transport alternative to road such as re – linking the Burscough curves and the Bolton – Bury - Rochdale corridor are given consideration over the long planning horizon of this study.

HS2 -

The detail of the extension of HS2 to the North West and North East is now the subject of public consultation. It is essential that the study takes full account of the implications that HS2 will bring for journeys on the existing network, particularly in boosting connecting travel.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours faithfully,

John A Moorhouse

John Moorhouse
Company Secretary