

SOUTHERN RAIL ACCESS TO HEATHROW STUDY: TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background

As part of the ongoing consideration of airport capacity in south east England, the Government is supporting a study into options for southern rail access to Heathrow. This is in response to one of the recommendations in the Airports Commission's interim report of December 2013.

The study was announced in the December refresh of the National Infrastructure Plan. It was confirmed by the Chancellor at the 2013 Autumn Statement, with a commitment that it would deliver findings during 2015.

It is intended that the report will be produced by Network Rail and sponsored by the Department for Transport (DfT). Input from other government departments and the Airports Commission will be channelled via DfT. Network Rail will consult and seek input from key stakeholders (ie the Heathrow aviation industry, other parts of the rail industry, local authorities).

The study will feed into separate (but potentially relevant) route studies Network Rail is undertaking in relation to the Wessex, Great Western and Sussex networks, during 2014/15. It will also align to the study Network Rail is undertaking for the Airports Commission on rail access issues for the options shortlisted in its December 2013 interim report.

Previous work on southern rail access was undertaken by BAA under the banner of "Airtrack". This was abandoned in 2011 due to local opposition to the impact of extended closure of roads at level crossings along the route and the high costs of mitigations. Wandsworth Council recently commissioned a study into rail access to Heathrow from south London. DfT would anticipate Network Rail building on this previous work and the issues identified, although not bound by the original concepts.

A steering group comprising DfT and Network Rail will meet on a monthly basis to monitor progress. A representative of Heathrow Airport Ltd will be invited to attend in an observer role.

Approach

The Department envisages a two stage approach to this study:

1. A market study – this will identify potential markets for southern rail access, as well as a set of conditional outputs. It will report to DfT in November 2014.
2. An engineering/ option short listing study – this will develop a short list of options capable of delivering the conditional outputs. It will report to DfT in June 2015.

All elements of the study will consider three potential scenarios in terms of the aviation capacity at Heathrow airport:

- A two runway airport, with limited potential for air passenger growth (ie the status quo)
- A three runway airport (ie one of the Airports Commission's shortlisted options)
- A two runway airport, with an extension of the northern runway to the west (ie one of the Airports Commission's shortlisted options)

At this stage, the study won't consider the eventuality that Heathrow would be closed following the construction of an entirely new airport in the Thames estuary. The Commission has indicated that this option will be given further consideration and a decision on its formal short listing will be made later in 2014. If this option is formally short listed, the terms of reference for the study will be amended accordingly.

Market study

The market study will identify the existing and potential future markets for southern rail access to Heathrow (for both air passengers and the airport work force). Sources of data may include (but will not necessarily be limited to):

- Rail passenger demand data held by DfT, Network Rail and train operating companies
- Work force travel data held by Heathrow
- Air passenger travel data held by Heathrow
- Motorway travel data held by the Highways Agency
- London transport data held by Transport for London and London boroughs
- Local transport data held by local authorities outside London
- Greater London Authority and local authority land use planning strategies

The market study will identify the conditional outputs necessary to make rail an attractive means to access Heathrow from the south. These may include (but will not necessarily be limited to):

- Service frequencies
- Journey times
- Service capacity
- Journey start / interchange points

Engineering/ option short listing study

On the basis of the findings of the market study, DfT may wish to alter the terms of reference for the engineering/ option short listing study.

However, we would envisage Network Rail proposing a range of solutions which would demonstrably meet the conditional outputs identified in the market study.

For each solution or option, we would expect:

- An analysis of the likely impacts on existing rail services and infrastructure (where relevant)
- An analysis of the likely interactions with funded rail schemes (eg Crossrail 1 and western rail access to Heathrow) with particular reference to Heathrow's own rail infrastructure
- An analysis of the likely interactions with potential/ unfunded rail schemes (eg Crossrail 2, HS2 spur, Heathrow Rail Hub)
- An indication of the likely capital and operational costs, as well as early cost/ benefit analysis
- Any relevant assumptions on rolling stock requirements
- An indicative timescale for construction
- Analysis of the possible impact on surrounding areas (eg level crossings, land take)

Capital funding

No capital funding for the construction of a potential southern rail link to Heathrow is currently identified. If the study identifies a viable scheme, Government will work with Network Rail; the Heathrow aviation industry and other stakeholders to develop a funding package.