LONDONASSEMBLY

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Dear Ms Shaw,

Network Rail shape and financing

I am writing on behalf of the London Assembly Transport Committee to set out our views on the future shape and financing of Network Rail, in order to inform your final report. The Transport Committee's role is to scrutinise London's transport system on behalf of Londoners. Primarily we hold the Mayor and Transport for London to account, but have also scrutinised the work of Network Rail extensively in recent years. Many of the key findings of our recent work relate to the questions posed in your consultation document, and form the basis of this submission.

The need to upgrade the rail infrastructure in and around London is pressing, with the capital's population set to grow to over 10 million by 2036.[1] Major projects such as Crossrail and Thameslink are very welcome and will add much-needed capacity to the network. As they near completion the next generation of major projects should be getting underway. This includes Crossrail 2, which still does not have approval to proceed. We also need to see sustained investment in upgrading the existing infrastructure serving London's suburbs to enable the development of metro-style services with increased frequency and capacity.

We note the recommendations of your report are expected to be implemented from 2019 onwards, which is the beginning of Control Period 6. A number of significant projects, such as capacity upgrades at East Croydon, have been planned for CP6 by Network Rail following public consultation. It is important that the Government and Network Rail make clear what the status of these plans is in light of your report.

Structure of Network Rail

During our recent investigation into the potential devolution of National Rail services to the Mayor and Transport for London, the Committee considered a number of ways in which infrastructure management and ownership could be reformed. We believe that devolving rail passenger services to London has proven a great success to date. The Silverlink franchise was devolved to London in order to create the London Overground network, recently extended with

[1] https://files.datapress.com/london/dataset/2014-round-population-projections/update-03-2015-2014rnd-trend-proj-results.pdf

routes from the Greater Anglia franchise, and it has become one of the best-performing rail services in the country.

We advocate further devolution of rail services, with the South Eastern franchise being an initial priority when its term comes to an end 2018. The Committee believes that the delivery of locally-commissioned passenger services relies on a coherent underpinning infrastructure provider across Greater London. Any proposal to break up infrastructure provision between different organisations risks management becoming disjointed and reduced economies of scale.

Planning of rail upgrades

The Committee believes Network Rail needs to alter the geographical divisions in its process for planning and delivering upgrades. Currently, London's rail network is separated into six different 'routes', for which separate route studies are produced. The lack of an overall plan for London means that some key challenges facing the city's rail network may be missed. For instance, there is huge unmet demand for rail services in London's suburbs, especially in South London, and also a need for more orbital rail transport around London. We would advocate the creation of a single, unified plan for London's rail network. This should be produced in partnership with Transport for London to ensure close alignment between the priorities of the two organisations and synchronicity in upgrade programmes.

Delivery of rail upgrades

The severe problems on services using London Bridge station during Network Rail's ongoing Thameslink programme have highlighted problems in the delivery of major upgrades. Passengers were subject to lengthy delays and cancellations, and dangerous overcrowding at London Bridge. The modelling of a reduced timetable proved to be inadequate, with further services removed from the timetable on a number of occasions. Compounding this was a lack of up-to-date, integrated information for passengers, either online or at the station. In the future, it would be beneficial for TfL to be have greater involvement in the delivery of major rail upgrades in London, perhaps as a co-sponsor. This would enable greater access to TfL's expertise and experience, while also helping to ensure an integrated approach to handling any disruptions that occur.

Network Rail functions

It may be considered that the management of train stations could be transferred from Network Rail to another body. In London, it would be reasonable to suggest that Transport for London could take over the 10 stations currently managed by Network Rail in London, each of which is already co-located with a London Underground station managed by TfL. Advantages would be that TfL services tend to have higher standards of customer service, such as the provision of information to passengers, and there could be greater integration with other transport modes in London. A potential downside of this is that it would create a new interface between organisations, including between TfL and long-distance rail operators. These issues would need to be explored if any changes to station management are being considered.

Accountability

Finally, we would like to highlight the role played by the London Assembly in holding Network Rail to account. On many occasions in recent years, Network Rail has provided information to the Transport Committee and appeared at a number of both formal and informal meetings. For instance, senior Network Rail executives appeared at Committee hearings in January and March 2015 to answer questions about the causes of the Thameslink disruptions, and steps Network Rail

was taking to address them. This is an important way in which Network Rail has been accountable to Londoners, and it is vital that this continues.

I hope that you find this submission to be useful as you consider the future of Network Rail. Your review is of vital importance, and we hope it leads to more effective ways of managing London's rail infrastructure and supports the ongoing delivery of much-needed upgrades. If you would like to discuss the Committee's views further, we would be happy to do so.

Yours sincerely,

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM
Chair, Transport Committee