

**Submission to the Infrastructure Commission  
“Connecting Northern Cities”**

**INTRODUCTION**

Railfuture is an independent, national organisation that campaigns for a modern, efficient and accessible passenger and freight railway in Great Britain.

The North East Branch of Railfuture is one of fourteen in GB, and serves an area south from the Scottish Border and East of the Pennines to the Tees Basin: plus part of North Yorkshire.

The Branch welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Infrastructure Commission since it wishes to help contribute to the planning for the future transport infrastructure of the North of England, and the North East in particular.

Together with major Local Authorities in the North East, the think tank IPPR (North), the North East LEP, the North East Chamber of Commerce along with several respected special interest groups, Railfuture North East is very aware of the relative low level of investment in transport infrastructure in the area since 1990 as compared with, for instance, London and the South East. We say, therefore, that the North East starts from a low base and for that reason requires special resource consideration if its transport network, rail in particular, is to deliver the economic regeneration the area so badly requires.

This response from Railfuture North East concentrates on how improvements to the rail infrastructure could help the city regions of Newcastle/Sunderland/Teesside/Darlington to develop their social, economic and cultural potential. It does not, incidentally, make any proposals with regard to new infrastructure requirements for the Tyne and Wear Metro system since it is understood that NEXUS/DB Regio will be submitting its own proposals in this regard.

Historically, the North East railways initially came about primarily for the transport of coal. Then other goods and passengers were carried. With the decline of the coal, steel and chemical industries many of the freight lines were abandoned. Conversely considerable investment was made in respect of the East

Coast Main Line (ECML) particularly during the electrification programme 1986-91.

So far as the local (secondary) heavy rail routes are concerned basically any infrastructure improvements have been mostly piecemeal with small signalling and track upgrades here and there. But the overall impression gained from travelling today on, say, the Durham Coast or the Tyne Valley Lines is of an “old fashioned” railway with several notable “pinch points”. Patently the local network in the North East is not fit for purpose. And certainly its potential to transit large numbers of people into the main conurbations, the contribution that it might make to the growth of tourism and the development of a healthy market for freight are just not currently being realised. We note too that several significant centres of population are not currently served by rail at all, notably Washington (pop 55,000), Consett (pop 27,000 ) and Guisborough (pop 18,000).

Line speed increases for the secondary railways was never really an option as most were subject to various severe speed restrictions because deep coal mining caused track subsidence.

The top speed of rolling stock using the lines, first generation Diesel Multiple Units, was 70mph These have now been replaced by Sprinters and Pacers with a top speed of only 75mph.

With the advent of the new Northern and TransPennine franchises in April 2016, new and faster rolling stock will eventually become available for use on the system, which would justify line speed increase and faster journey times.

## **QUESTIONS**

**Q1. To what extent are weaknesses in transport connectivity holding back Northern city regions specifically in terms of jobs, enterprise creation and growth and housing.**

As heavy industry has contracted so more people in the region have had to travel further to work and to places of education. Many of the former mining areas have no rail services at all, so there is heavy car usage causing peak time road congestion to and from employment areas. . There is only limited space for housing in city centres so people commute from out lying areas where new housing is being built. Railfuture contends they should be able to do this by rail as well as road wherever that makes economic and environmental good sense.

Tourism makes a significant contribution to the North East economy. The tourist base is being successfully increased. But we say the expansion of tourism

could be given a large boost if there were a better rail system with more stations in key locations.

**Q2. What cost-effective infrastructure investment in city to city connectivity could address these weaknesses? We are interested in all modes of transport.**

***Here follows a list of suggested rail infrastructure improvements on a line by line basis.***

**East Coast Main Line South To North - Northallerton to Berwick upon Tweed**

- East Cowton - reinstate loops to increase route capacity.
- Darlington - reinstate south facing junction from ECML to Darlington-Saltburn - line and double track existing north junction.
- Ferryhill - new station on ECML and Leamside lines
- Ferryhill - reinstate down loop to save on conflicting movements to refuge trains at present.
- Chester –Le- Street - lengthen platforms. Cricket events demand longer trains to call here
- Ouston junction - reinstate slow line to Tyne Yard to remove conflict and slow entry/exit into and from yard at Birtley junction
- Reinstate double track from King Edward bridge south junction to King Edward bridge east junction, to give operational flexibility.
- Newcastle Central - provide new bay platform 0 next to platform 1 for Ashington service..
- Killingworth - new station at 6 ½ mp to serve town and new housing development plus park and ride traffic from A189 Spine Road
- Belford - new station and footbridge on both loop lines plus bus interchange.

**Newcastle to Carlisle – East to West**

- Investigate track geometry and signalling and improve present top line speed of 65/60 mph to 90 mph to compete with journey times provide by A69 road.
- Plenmeller - former coal loading siding bring back into use for refuging slower trains add another loop here on Newcastle bound line.
- Whitchester tunnel - enlarge bore to cater for freight containers and overhead wires.
- Gisland - provide new station with direct access to Hadrians Wall.

- Approach to Carlisle station platforms - reinstate double track on approach to platforms presently used as a head shunt.

### **Northallerton to Newcastle – South to North via Durham Coast**

- Investigate track geometry and signalling and improve top line speeds of 60/70 mph to 90 mph to compete with journey times by road.
- Eaglescliffe - to east of station provide up passing loop.
- Provide new station at Roseworth north of Stockton at bridge over A1027 road.
- Hartlepool - reinstate up (southbound) platform.
- Clavering for Hart - provide new station for surrounding community, also allows people access to Durham coastal path.
- Horden for Peterlee - provide new station and bus interchange.
- Seaham - provide passing loops for slower trains.
- Ryhope - new station for surrounding community and access to Durham coastal path.
- Sunderland south tunnel - investigate need for 20 mph speed restriction, should be raised for passenger trains.
- West of Fellgate - B1306 road bridge, Red Barns Farm - make new junction to link into old NCB route to Wardley to link into reopened Leamside line. To take rail traffic to and from Port of Tyne.
- Reinstate double junction at Park Lane Gateshead.
- Electrify Northallerton to Teesport container terminal and via Norton to Ferryhill.

### **Leamside Line – South to North**

- Reinstate from Tursdale junction to Pelaw.
- New double junction at Tursdale.
- New station at Ferryhill with platforms on all four lines to act as an interchange.
- New station at Belmont Park and Ride.
- New station at Fencehouses.
- New station at Penshaw with an interchange for an extended Metro line from South Hylton.
- New double track bridge over the River Wear. Existing Victoria viaduct may be suitable for use by an extended Metro system to Washington.
- New station at Washington.
- New freight link to Nissan complex.

- New freight facility at Wardley (possibly regional freight interchange location?) plus link to Tyne Dock.
- Line to be electrified as a diversionary route for ECML. This diversionary capacity an essential element in helping enhance the (climate) resilience of the ECML.

### **Darlington to Saltburn – West to East**

- Investigate track geometry and signalling to improve present line speed of 60 mph to 90 mph.
- Darlington - reinstate double junction on exit to route from station.
- Thornaby station - make an additional link to freight lines serving Tees Yard.
- Electrify line Darlington to Eaglescliffe to link in with Northallerton - Teesport electrification.

### **Whitby Branch**

- Investigate track geometry and signalling to increase present line speeds of
  - 50 mph Middlesborough to Battersby
  - 45 mph Battersby to Grosmont
  - 35 mph Grosmont to Whitby
- Sleights - install passing loop to allow additional train paths between Grosmont and Whitby for joint running with North Yorkshire Moors Railway.

### **Stockton to Ferryhill**

- Investigate track geometry and signalling to improve present line speed of 50 mph to 90 mph and electrify with a view to direct Middlesborough to Newcastle passenger service. This proposed service would benefit from a flyover across the ECML to avoid conflict of northbound trains from Teesside crossing the path of southbound ECML trains at Tursdale Junction

### **Blyth & Tyne – South to North**

- Investigate track geometry and signalling to improve present line speeds of 45 mph and 40 mph Bedlington to Ashington to 70 mph.
- Provide long passing loop between Seaton Delaval and Hartley to increase line capacity.

- Extend line to Newbiggin by the sea from Woodhorn single line one mile with terminus station.
- As per all SENRUG's (South East Northumberland Rail Users' Group) proposals.

### **Darlington to Bishop Auckland – East to West**

- Investigate track geometry and signalling to improve present line speed of 45 mph to 70mph
- Electrify line initially from Darlington to Hitachi factory at Heighington, then to Bishop Auckland. This line could then be used as a test track by Hitachi when no service trains are scheduled.

### **Qu 3. Which city to city corridors should be the priority for early phase of investment.**

- A). Newcastle to Leeds/Manchester/Sheffield & Liverpool
- B). Newcastle to Middlesbrough via Norton & Ferryhill
- C). Newcastle to Carlisle

### **Qu 4 . What are the key international connectivity needs likely to be in the next 20-30 years in the North of England (with a focus on ports & airports)? What is the most effective way to meet these needs and what constraints on delivery are anticipated?**

Some growth at Newcastle International Airport is anticipated particularly if the new direct service to the US proves popular and if some direct flights to the Far East can be established. It has, in our view, the potential to be a regional hub, so it should be served by heavy rail links from the ECML at Killingworth, with north and south facing junctions, and a new 5 mile line from here to the airport while there is room to do it on undeveloped land. Conversely, Railfuture sees little opportunity for any substantive traffic growth at Durham Tees Valley Airport.

The North East ports will have increasing container traffic and rail routes should, as a matter of urgency, be gauge enhanced to take the largest of boxes. Constraints on delivery may be limited by track possession times to carry out this work.

**Qu 5. What form of governance would most effectively deliver transformative infrastructure in the north, how should this be funded and by whom, including appropriate local contributions?**

More locally devolved government with its own budget control.

Organisations like Rail North should be given increased powers to raise cash such as through infrastructure contributions from new development of say 10% of project value.

We suggest that Rail North, together with Transport for the North, when fully operative, working in close conjunction with Network Rail, should hold the effective control over the planning and delivery of railway infrastructure rather than just the DfT.

The funding that continues to come from a central (Government) pot should be assessed on a fairer formula than the present Barnett one.

This submission has been compiled by Trevor Watson, Chairman Railfuture North East Branch.

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