

This is the response of **West Coast Rail 250**. It is specifically about the West Coast Main Line Route Utilisation Study Draft for Consultation, December 2010.

## 1. West Coast Rail 250

**West Coast Rail 250** is a non-party political organisation, which has long-established and excellent working relationships with Network Rail, the relevant Train Operating Companies, and the Department for Transport, and:

***“campaigns for improved and environmentally sustainable rail services along the West Coast Main Line to support the economic development and social cohesion of communities along the WCML rail corridor.”***

These Aims are supported by the following key objectives:

1. Increased capacity for passenger and freight services
2. Faster and more frequent long distance services
3. Improved links between local and regional centres
4. Improved facilities for passengers

Our membership extends from London to Wales and Scotland, and includes large urban and rural local authorities, Integrated Transport Authorities, district councils, industry stakeholders and user groups / representatives.

We have members along the route of the WCML and also some distance from it and need to access it via the feeder services provided by other Franchisees.

We view the WCML as also an inter-regional and intra-regional railway providing for medium and short distance traffic where there is little alternative rail provision especially in Lancashire, Cumbria and South West Scotland, as well as long distance passenger and freight.

We are grateful for the interest and the support of Parliamentarians through the West Coast Main Line All Party Parliamentary Group.

## 2. Introduction

This RUS attempts to match available capacity with proposals generated by the industry based Stakeholder Management Group (SMG) for additional services. It aims to maximise benefit for freight and passengers across the network. Inevitably not all aspirations of SMG, and of non-members of SMG, can be accommodated

A BCR technique has been used to prioritise and recommend new services. The calculations rely heavily on key inputs such as demand (using forecasting deemed appropriate for the type of services being provided) and rules about the treatment of costs of necessary infrastructure. Constants include the continuation of track and regulatory authorities with responsibilities little changed from those existing currently, a specific list of ongoing and anticipated infrastructure investments and rolling stock additions, and a franchise regime similar to that used currently.

Without guessing the outcome of the current refranchise process including responsibilities on franchisees, and any fallout from the McNulty review, we merely note that these may not remain constants. It is known that Government wants to reduce the cost of the railway to the public purse.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft RUS for the West Coast Main Line. Our response is a high level comment on how we perceive the status quo and the RUS proposals combine to address the aim and objectives of WCR250. Individual members may have responded on behalf of their organisation.

In summary, our view is that following this RUS, the WCML will remain London focussed with an emphasis on journey times. We acknowledge that some progress has been made to address the concerns of our members who are all outside London about regaining and improving local and regional connectivity in England and Scotland in the relatively short term. There are still service gaps about which we are concerned in the short to medium term.

In addition we draw attention to the pedestrian pace at which changes to the timetable can be made using the planning regime that currently exists.

We support measures that will increase capacity and increase journey opportunities and improve their quality. We recognise that as well as delivery of investment in the WCML in CP4 and beyond, there are other important investments such as rolling stock and stations and a desire to achieve a seven-day railway, and offer our support for these.

In addition to some general comments, we offer comments under headings which reflect the principal concerns of our members:

1. Growth assumptions
2. London connectivity and long distance services
3. Local, Regional, Scottish and Welsh links
4. Freight



*General*

The RUS is attempting to deal with two broad problems that exist now and modelled to get significantly worse as the Control Periods advance: Capacity (e.g. including infrastructure and rolling stock) and Demand (e.g. including larger volumes of freight and passengers, and qualitatively, increasing expectations for the number and quality of services). Whilst Euston remains the predominant focus for the line's purpose, economic development is happening elsewhere in the UK causing changing demands on the WCML and thus a continuing re-evaluation of priorities for the use of its limited capacity. Later in this response we express some concerns about baseline figures and published forecasts.

The RUS is published shortly before the introduction of a new franchise regime (with a greater market led /operator risk-taking approach than hitherto), the McNulty Review to consider the costs of the railway operation, and the proposals for a new business focussed route structure for Network Rail. It may be that in the not too distant future, the railway will be provided in response more to market forces than to centralised planning that explicitly takes into account social, environmental and economic development objectives. Our comments represent to a large degree customer requirements having in mind these broad objectives. We hope that the industry will respond to these.

The RUS attempts to squeeze more capacity out of the railway including filling timetable gaps with newly acquired rolling stock. Although there is some evidence of innovation, such as the proposal to strengthen interchange and services at Milton Keynes and Watford for the West London Line thus avoiding crowded London terminus and tube network, it is not evident that thinking has extended beyond standard railway based solution particularly linking with other organisations to deal with congestion at the approaches to termini and major stations.

Notwithstanding the huge investment that has been made in the WCML over the last 10 years, nevertheless infrastructure constraints are hampering the franchisees' ability to provide fast services between some Core Cities. We would welcome a review of inter-regional services serving Scotland, North West and Midlands. We would remind the RUS team that the approach to Lime Street and Piccadilly's southern approach are significant constraints partly because of the volume of traffic seeking access. One tactic might be to release capacity by removing local traffic e.g. south of Piccadilly divert local traffic onto alternative routes, perhaps tramtrain; in cases where the Infrastructure Body and the TOCs benefit from easier, less congested, access to the terminus, they could be required to contribute to the cost of such a local transportation system.

Generally we would support the view that the cost of capacity enhancements should be shared across all service improvements that they facilitate and not be charged to just one scheme.

Proposals to increase the frequency of the Pendolino services need to be considered in part against the impact on local timetabling. The change from a 30 minute interval to a 20 minute interval had serious implications for the pattern of local and regional services along the Manchester-Stockport corridor.

We support moves to replace diesel with electric traction especially where the necessary infrastructure exists, for example electric hauled freight, and from 2014, passenger services from Manchester and Liverpool to destinations in Scotland. Electrification should remove operational difficulties of mixing diesel and electric trains.

We made representations in July 2009 in response to the draft Network RUS in support of electrifying alternative / diversionary and infill sections. To reiterate and expand that response, we continue to advocate electrification schemes that will serve the needs of passengers and freight along the WCML:

- Nuneaton-Birmingham Proof House Junctions to provide an alternative route to Birmingham.
- Walsall-Rugeley (regarded in the West Midlands as a higher priority than Nuneaton-Birmingham) to provide a diversionary route for passenger and freight, also for local passenger services and to enable the proposed Birmingham-Manchester regional service to be routed via Walsall and Cannock to Stoke.
- Coventry-Nuneaton to provide for diversionary services and for enhanced local services following on from the proposed Coventry-Nuneaton major scheme upgrade.
- Crewe-Chester to replace diesel. This would also facilitate the extension of Merseyrail Wirral Line from Chester to Crewe, again replacing a diesel service. Also consider electrifying link between Chester and Acton Grange to provide a diversionary route.
- Oxenholme-Windermere to replace diesel and to allow through trains to the Lake District national park from e.g. Liverpool and Manchester.
- Carnforth-Barrow to replace diesel, and to retain current through services from Manchester.
- North Wales Coast to replace diesel and provide a through service from Euston to Holyhead.
- Extensions to freight terminals including Ditton and Grangemouth.

We foresee a risk that the electrification of some rather than all spurs off the WCML in Lancashire may result in fewer through trains north of Preston because of the difficulty prior to complete electrification of mixing diesel and electric.

The timescale of this RUS covers periods of major disruption to the railway from major infrastructure schemes including electrification, rebuilding of stations and HSR2. Amendments to timetables will likely be necessary. As well as being necessary to satisfy passenger demands for movement at these times, we would stress that it is also an opportunity to test passengers' responses to a, potentially very different, revised service pattern, and to provide a whole journey experience that integrates a number of modes, not just heavy rail.

## **1 Growth assumptions**

Correct baseline data and forecasts of growth in demand are important for preparing a heavily specified railway timetable.

Inappropriate or inaccurate figures could affect service proposals and infrastructure investment decisions as well as bids for franchises and the operation of services feeding into the HSR2 at Birmingham.

At the Manchester end of the London service, it is widely held that the published figures for Stockport and Piccadilly, whilst likely accurate in total, do not individually identify true flows.

We would like to understand better the future growth forecasts used particularly for regional flows and also, less so, into London where capacity constraints dampen demand.

We would especially appreciate publication of details relating to:

Liverpool-Birmingham

Glasgow / Edinburgh-Manchester

Glasgow / Edinburgh -Birmingham

Birmingham-Manchester

Birmingham-Euston

## **2 London Connectivity and Long Distance Services**

There is much in the document that our Members welcome and support, but inevitably compromise is required as not all can be fully satisfied.

Particular beneficiaries are stations between Northampton and Euston which gain additional capacity for commuter services. We welcome also proposals to lengthen London area trains; there is strong support for increasing Milton Keynes and Watford Junction to West London Line services to 8 car trains and increased peak period frequency. We are concerned that there is no cross-reference to the suggestion in the London and South East RUS of operating Northampton / Milton Keynes services via CrossRail / West London Line. This releases capacity at Euston and provides a direct service into a wider area of London to meet a need to accommodate an increase in demand from Clapham Junction to Watford and MK. We offer our support for the longer term aspiration to extend westbound CrossRail services on to the WCML to include MK / Tring stopping trains within the CrossRail future network. The opportunity for direct services to the City and beyond on this corridor would be highly valued. There are obvious benefits of providing for interchange north of Euston for those seeking dispersed destinations within London, who may find the increasingly congested Euston rail / tube interchange difficult, even before the reconstruction work necessary to accommodate HSR2.

There are no proposals to reverse the severe reduction in connectivity between Watford and stations to the north that was removed in December 2008. This is a severe example of an apparent trend to remove direct stopping services from the timetable to achieve small improvements in journey times. We are aware of good operational reasons for adopting this approach but a consequence is that inter regional connectivity continues to be degraded. For example, the proposed rejection of JT1.1 that would have provided an extra train every two hours at Watford Junction on the Preston/Glasgow service. It is important that renewed efforts be made to construct more fast Line platforms. Preston is a clear beneficiary of the accelerated Scottish service, but even here our support is conditional on the operation of an Express service calling additionally at Carlisle, Lancaster, Wigan, Warrington, Northampton and Milton Keynes.

We accept that the deployment of the new Class 390 rolling stock will be a decision for the new franchisee (and we assume that it takes all that is available). We support greater capacity / frequency of service for Lancashire and Merseyside particularly. We would wish to avoid a franchisee diverting or removing services from Stafford in order to release capacity for the North West, although we accept that in order to give Liverpool especially a service commensurate with its status as a Core City, these remain options.

We note that there is emphasis on the Glasgow-Euston service, and Lockerbie is not well served. This town is the key transport hub for south west Scotland. We request that in consultation with the Scottish and UK Governments, reconsideration is given to the needs of Lockerbie, where there has been significant growth in passenger numbers. At Lockerbie, there are no local services and the current inadequate rail service is constraining economic development. We would like more direct and stopping services along the WCML, a stopping pattern that suits passengers and efforts made by the rail industry to provide sufficient parking to meet suppressed demand.

On a general point relating to Scotland's railway, we perceive a need for a joint approach by both governments with Network Rail to address the problems of rail investment, subsidies and routes at the Border, and to align the Scotland RUS with the WCML RUS.

### **3 Local, Regional and Scottish Links**

The WCML is often the local railway for our members, as well as providing inter-regional and national business and cultural links. We support proposals that do not result in reductions to current frequencies.

We offer particular support for:

- Retention of the half-hourly services between Liverpool and Birmingham;
- Consideration of alternative routes to the constrained Wolverhampton-Birmingham corridor to improve journey times between Birmingham and Manchester, which are typically half the speed of national routes into London;
- Investment that provides capacity for additional services for stations along the line, for example, the Stafford area improvements that provide capacity for an additional Birmingham-Manchester service, providing also direct links for Potteries-Birmingham. However, we doubt though that this service would attract more Birmingham-Manchester traffic on the basis of speed as the journey would be considerably slower than currently, but a higher frequency service may be attractive;
- Improved connectivity between south Midlands stations (including Milton Keynes) with the North West and stations in Scotland;
- Introduction of a direct Liverpool-Glasgow / Edinburgh service (if necessary substituting Liverpool-Edinburgh for the current Liverpool-Blackpool service), and improvements to Birmingham- Glasgow / Edinburgh and Manchester- Glasgow /

Edinburgh services, preferably all electrified. This is tempered by a concern that a consequence of improved frequencies of Preston- Glasgow / Edinburgh services should not be to reduce local services such as Preston-Bolton-Manchester and Barrow / Windermere to Preston and Manchester. We acknowledge that Preston has the potential to develop further as an interchange station. Preston is a possible station at which to combine trains, and perhaps thought could be given to again using Carstairs where trains could be split for Scottish destinations.

We express concern, particularly:

- That no path has been found to provide fast AM peak services from BNS to MK
- At the potential loss of a fast direct Stoke-Stockport XC service as Stoke is now in the Stockport / Greater Manchester economic influence and labour catchment areas
- At the proposed reduction in the frequency of Birmingham to Liverpool LM service. Centro and Merseytravel both regard the retention of the 2tph service on this route to represent better use of capacity compared to running one of these trains from Birmingham to Preston instead. TravelWatch NorthWest suggest use of Pendolinos on the Birmingham-Scotland services would provide the necessary extra capacity.
- That there are no proposals to enhance the status of Lockerbie and Carlisle which are significant transport hubs in their respective areas and complement each other. We support greater importance being accorded to Carlisle as a major transport hub for the south-west of Scotland and Northern England. Carlisle is a hub for five railway lines.
- That this RUS is broadly about daytime Monday to Friday services. There is significant overcrowding between Rugby and Crewe, on LM services on Sundays and at each end of other days. We suggest that filling these gaps is unfinished work and urge the SMG to tackle it in the near future, and suggest hourly services north of Rugby to provide connections to/from the Trent Valley for Crewe and the North West.

Some of our members have queried whether the suggestions from other RUSs and rail projects have been fed into this RUS, and indeed how compatible it is with other RUSs. The proposal for a service linking stations on the WCML with stations within south London is a case in point.

Another proposal for which we would request the SMG's consideration is for an hourly train path north of Bletchley for the proposed Southampton – Oxford – MK – Trent Valley – Manchester XC service from the East West Rail Project. We concur with the view of Buckingham County Council which leads the consortium of local authorities promoting East

West Rail that this will be an important orbital feeder service for the WCML, and therefore deserves a higher profile in that RUS.

#### **4 Freight**

WCR250 offers support for increasing the proportion of electrically hauled freight and recommends investment in infill electrification schemes to facilitate this. We would encourage the industry to support the development of appropriate gauge routes to serve especially new port developments such as the planned development *Liverpool Harbour* at Bootle.

#### **5 HSR2**

West Coast Rail 250 is a strong advocate of new High Speed Rail Line services between London, the West Midlands, North West England and Scotland.

Such a new High Speed Line, with trains operating at up to 350kph, could not only provide faster and more frequent inter city services, but would also free up significant capacity on the classic West Coast Main Line for additional freight trains and enhanced local and regional passenger services.