



The Draft West Coast Mainline Rail Utilisation Strategy

Response of the Liverpool
Chamber of Commerce

Assumptions

Liverpool Chamber is concerned by the stated understanding that the “gaps, options, operational analysis and recommended strategy are reported recognising that there is an unusually high risk that the circumstances reported will change” (p113). This overarching caveat is a significant qualification which will have an impact upon the perception of the draft RUS’ proposals and presents challenges to its short-term acceptance and longer-term credibility.

If actual programme and project outcomes ultimately diverge from those anticipated (such as the Northern Hub, HS2, Rolling Stock improvement and the re-signalling project for Allerton and Speke) it is likely that serious issues for passengers, freight and the wider utilisation of the WCML route will arise and need to be addressed in ways unforeseen by this document.

The draft RUS establishes a strategic rail planning framework against which local transport and freight plans can be developed and implemented. Its credibility is therefore of fundamental importance to the Local Transport Plan and other Planning processes. The final RUS should aim to directly address as many of the current uncertainties as possible in order to secure maximum credibility for the strategy.

In light of the draft RUS’s sensitivity to outcomes which at present seem uncertain we would welcome an ongoing dialogue with Network Rail about the evolving programmes, projects and their anticipated outcomes, along with their implications for the RUS. The Chamber is supportive of the need to enhance the performance of the WCML and the implications of HS2 delivery (or its failure), and would wish to assist in the promotion of this project as a precondition of the ultimate successful realisation of the RUS.

Economic Growth Forecasts

On the basis that actual year-on-year growth exceeded the estimates used in both the Northwest and Merseyside RUS, we believe that passenger and freight growth forecasts underlying the draft WCML RUS are extremely conservative. We would welcome further clarity on the demographic and economic growth assumptions used in the draft strategy and an understanding of the sensitivity analysis employed – along with the implications of higher levels of growth being experienced within the lifetime of the RUS and/or HS2 not being delivered or being delayed. The following developments in particular represent significant sources of latent demand and should inform the final strategy in order to ensure the adequate provision of rolling stock and critical station infrastructure capacity beyond 2015:

1. SuperPort.



2. Liverpool and Wirral Waters.
3. The Irish Sea Offshore Wind Development.
4. Population Growth.
5. Economic recovery in Ireland.
6. Tourism and International Links – particularly in light of:
 - (i) New market strategies being explored by Vancouver Airport Services(VAS) for Liverpool John Lennon Airport’s growth, and;
 - (ii) Shared Visitor Economy priorities with the City of Edinburgh.

Growth estimates also have a significant bearing on the business case for additional services from Liverpool Lime Street to London Euston and we would urge a detailed re-assessment of the solutions proposed to address Regional Link Gap No. 9 (RL9).

We would also like to see a more consistent reporting of the cost-benefit assessments for the appraised options in order to permit a more transparent and comparable review of competing solutions.

RUS Integration

The extent to which the draft WCML RUS takes account of both the Northern and Merseyside RUS (and vice-versa) should be clarified. Improved, all-round freight and passenger links with other city-regions are key priorities for Merseyside. These specifically include Manchester and Leeds to the East; Preston, Cumbria and Scotland to the North; Birmingham and London to the South and Cheshire and Wales to the West. Since the draft WCML RUS does little to add to the information already available concerning east-west movements or those to the west of the WCML, a comprehensive illustration of these links is only possible through a piecemeal approach to the three separate RUS’ of differing provenance and date (completed over a 4 year period). The Chamber would therefore wish to see a clearer, more transparent and integrated set of strategies in order to inform business planning and investment decisions across the entire sub-region over the next twenty years.

Atlantic Rail Corridor for Freight (ATRCF – www.atrcf.com)

The ATRCF is a pan-European initiative which embraces the Atlantic Rail Corridor (ARC) project. The ARC seeks to maximise the connectivity of the Atlantic coastline states of the EU by using existing and improved rail infrastructure to provide economic alternatives to road-based and marine modes. It also provides opportunities for transshipment in instances where this is the most appropriate economic/environmental solution.

The development of both ATRCF and ARC are closely aligned with the redefining of the Trans-European Networks (TENs) by the European Commission and will be reflected in the forthcoming EU Transport White Paper.

Access to the UK’s Atlantic ports from central/northern Europe will necessitate use of the Channel Tunnel link via the WCML. The Chamber notes with some concern that the European rail freight aspects of these proposals do not receive any mention within the draft RUS. We would welcome some acknowledgement that the recasting



of TENs and the changes in freight distribution practise in Europe will add further demand to the forecast freight growth considered by the draft RUS.

Long-term Capacity Constraints

Scenario-based Analysis

We feel that the 'global responsibility scenario' is the only sustainable option in the long term, although how long it takes for this to manifest itself will depend on a combination of policy changes and/or market forces. This scenario would relieve overcrowding and capacity constraints in London and the South-East, while securing balanced economic development across sub-national areas of the UK. Investment plans for the WCML should therefore prioritise sub-national route development as a key aim rather than seeking to service the alternative, London centric, 'Continued Profligacy' scenario. An explicit restatement of priorities in favour of the spatially balanced and equitable investment ('globally responsible') outcome would provide a timely corrective signal to planners, investors and service providers, and perhaps thereby increase the probability of averting the worst-case scenario for the UK.

London Euston

Mainline links to London from the North-West and Scotland are at considerable risk of long-term disruption from the scale and scope of remedial works which will soon become necessary at Euston station. This is already operating at a level which exceeds its commissioned capacity and we feel that the construction of HS2 will only serve to augment the risks of disruption and serious overcrowding from the convergence of WCML routes at this interchange. The RUS should therefore explore options to distribute commuter pressure more evenly across the network by reducing dependence on Euston station and investigating the feasibility of alternative routing and terminal arrangements. We would suggest that linking Northampton line suburban services with Crossrail provides valuable flexibility and should be considered for integration, possibly at Old Oak Common for onward links to Canary Wharf, Heathrow airport and the West End.

Liverpool Lime Street

The Liverpool Chamber Transport Committee is aware of and concerned about the station approach and platform capacity issues at Lime Street station and depot capacity at Edge Hill.

The increased numbers of services anticipated in the North West - arising as a consequence of electrification schemes and the extension/alteration of Liverpool-Midlands/London routes - will result in greater demands upon service infrastructure at Liverpool Lime Street. Electrification schemes currently include the Northern Triangle and the Chat-Moss Line to Manchester together with the Northern Hub and proposed direct services to Edinburgh. Additional platform capacity in order to service longer trains (11-car units for the Liverpool-London services) operating at increased frequencies will be required, along with operation capacity on the approaches to the Station.

Depot capacity and the availability of berthing facilities for new rolling stock is currently an issue for a number of train service providers across the North West. The existing Edge Hill depot and the potential facility at Allerton would seem to represent cost-effective holding locations but will require strategic investment in the longer term to ensure the provision of adequate sidings and gauge clearance. We would welcome involvement in the national consultation on the location and organisation of depot facilities across the rail network.



We are concerned about recent reports in the Liverpool Daily Post (2nd March 2011) on the rolling stock order reduction for the entire North of England from 224 to 100 carriages. This reduction will have a significant onward impact on the delivery of the full benefits of ongoing and proposed rail improvement schemes and on passenger crowding in general.

Route Capacity

The Chamber Transport Committee understands that the key bottlenecks on the rail network affecting the sub-national area and strategic services lie mainly outside Merseyside and the North-West. From an 'all-day' passenger movement perspective, route capacity constraints are evident between Crewe and Stafford (particularly between Stafford and Norton Bridge), and Stoke-on-Trent to Cheadle Hulme.

There is probably suppressed demand for services linking Liverpool to Winsford, Hartford and Acton Bridge stations, such that an hourly service could be justified. The factors influencing this suppression are (i) a lack of parking capacity: car parks currently reach full capacity by around 7:00am each morning, and; (ii) poor public transport links: scheduled services and/or potential shuttle services providing alternative modes of access. These, combined with the levels of congestion and delay experienced on the existing road link to Liverpool via the Runcorn Bridge all serve to discourage access to Liverpool and John Lennon Airport from Cheshire. As such, this reduces the overall competitiveness of the City Region.

Elsewhere on the WCML there are capacity constraints immediately to the south of Nuneaton and all the way to London south of Northampton.

Services from London Euston to Scotland experience severe overcrowding immediately prior to the weekend and at the end of it, i.e. Friday and Sunday afternoon-evening periods.

Finally, the Office of the Rail Regulator's (ORR) recent announcement on Track Access Rights appears to recognise that the two-track railway north of Weaver Junction (the branch off to Runcorn and Liverpool) is at capacity and that the available diversionary routes are not appropriate for regular use. This requires an assessment of options for quadrupling Weaver Junction to Acton Grange Junction (just south of Warrington) and Winwick Junction (north of Warrington) and onwards towards the 4-track section south of Preston as a matter of some urgency.

Carriage Declassification

One readily available option to reduce overcrowding and increase passenger capacity would be to more often declassify first-class carriages particularly during peak periods. This would provide a relatively cost-effective intermediate solution without any immediate requirement for investment in rolling stock or other changes to operating costs. It would also complement any timetable changes and increased service frequencies.

Station Access

Convenient access to stations is widely recognised as a core planning issue and serves as an important influence on user decisions when considering the suitability of rail over alternative modes of transport. We welcome the draft RUS's attention to this issue and its identification of specific car parking developments to be delivered through the National Stations Improvement Programme (NSIP). However a number of key stations along both the WCML and local feeder services remain unaccounted for and we believe that these should be considered for improvement in addition to those already identified in the draft strategy. The experience of our members and the wider business community particularly highlights the



importance of Hartford, Winsford and Acton Bridge as stations which would benefit from additional car parking and bicycle storage facilities over the next five years.

Gaps and Options

Journey Time (JT) Option 3.1: London Euston to Crewe Interurban Service

The Chamber welcomes the extension of the Euston-Crewe semi-fast services to Liverpool and their diversion away from Stoke. While the revised option provides new links to Milton Keynes and the Trent Valley towns, we do not believe that it should be delivered at the expense of the half-hourly Birmingham service that Merseyside now enjoys. We feel that Preston/Wigan/Warrington would best be served by the proposed London-North West intercity service rather than by diverting a Birmingham-Liverpool service to Preston.

Regional Link Option (RL) 8.2: Links with Edinburgh

We welcome proposals to introduce a direct service from Liverpool to Edinburgh Waverley attaching to the Manchester service at Preston. However the draft RUS appraisal assumes that intermediate services between Liverpool-Wigan increase to four trains per hour in keeping with Northern Hub proposals – even though funding for this remains uncommitted. If increased connectivity with Wigan is viewed as pre-conditional to the provision of a direct link between Liverpool and Edinburgh, we are concerned that the business case for this essential connection will be weakened if insufficient funding is available and/or planning and delivery delays fail to improve the intermediate links with Wigan. One option for addressing this potential constraint might focus upon re-diverting the Liverpool-Blackpool service in order to serve the direct link to Edinburgh.

HS2

Liverpool Chamber supports the HS2 programme. We believe that High-Speed Rail between London and the North will be essential for creating new network capacity for both passengers and freight in the longer term. It is a crucial catalyst for change and facilitates the evolution of the network. At the same time we believe that if HS2 is to realise its full potential – and that of the WCML, it must serve as an effective alternative for existing passengers. The importance of improving and integrating links between the conventional network - particularly between Liverpool and other cities of the North-West, and the HS2 hub - cannot be overstated.

By enhancing freight and passenger capacity and links to Merseyside, High Speed Rail will serve the interests of Liverpool City-Region in the context of the SuperPort expansion and the growing Offshore Wind investment.

Our preferred route option would see the convergence of HS2 in the Warrington area (with an option to continue northwards), branching to the west and east to provide links to Liverpool and Manchester connections respectively. This would also provide the perfect interchange opportunities for an HS1-style route operating Javelin-style trains between the two cities.



Freight

The draft RUS forecasts an increase in freight to/from Royal Seaforth Docks, ABP Garston and the intermodal terminal at Ditton. There is an assumption of 6 days per week operation with longer trains (ultimately of up to 775 metres in length), although there are limitations at both the ports which will constrain these. Seaforth has a 400m train length limitation and ABP Garston much less. A doubling of volumes/boxes moved is therefore likely to result in a disproportionate increase in the number of paths required to do so.

It is important for the draft RUS to take account of the development of the proposed post-Panamax ship berths at Seaforth. These berths will be able to accommodate vessels of upto 13,000 TEU capacity thereby increasing the volume and intensity of freight movements. The current forecasts for rail-handled Port traffic is in the order of 10-20% of this volume. Additional freight paths on the WCML will clearly be necessary. We are currently unsure of what the implications for these might be on the City Line beyond Olive Mount.

It will be important to ensure that adequate power supply infrastructure is in place to support the predicted rise in rail freight transit.

Conclusion

The Liverpool Chamber Transport Committee broadly welcomes the content of the draft WCML RUS. It would also welcome the opportunity to remain engaged as a key stakeholder in the finalisation processes for the WCML RUS and to be involved with the development of the HLOS interim strategic business plan. As it currently stands, the draft RUS does not, however, demonstrate that appropriate consideration has been given to the provision of the necessary service/infrastructure enhancements to meet the anticipated demands of Liverpool City-Region's business community. This is essential to support the city-region's continued prosperity.

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