



Response of the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee to the East Midlands Rail Franchise public consultation, 11th October 2017

Introduction

This response was agreed by the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee on the 14th September 2017. The Joint Planning Committee comprises members of the partner local planning authorities of Corby, East Northamptonshire, Kettering and Wellingborough, and Northamptonshire County Council (NCC). The partner local planning authorities are also responding individually to the consultation and East Midlands Councils have also drafted an extensive response.

We set out below the Joint Committees' responses to specific questions and other aspects of the consultation. The majority of our response relates to Question 4 of the consultation document relating to potential service changes.

We note that the consultation is titled "*Driving Growth in the East Midlands- Connectivity as a Driver for Social and Economic Prosperity*". North Northamptonshire has a strong record of housing delivery, well established joint working arrangements, and an up-to-date and ambitious Joint Core Strategy (part 1 Local Plan) which plans for 31,100 jobs and 35,000 homes between 2011 and 2031. Focused investment in infrastructure and economic development will unlock potential for still higher levels of housing delivery. This has been recognised through the Government's support for our Garden Communities and Garden Village, and through the provision of Large Sites Capacity funding. Ongoing infrastructure investment is vital to realising the strong growth ambitions of the North Northamptonshire local authorities.

The consultation proposes a number of changes to rail services and infrastructure that will have implications for North Northamptonshire, specifically for Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough but also settlements beyond this including the Growth Town of Rushden. The Joint Committee's response considers the implications of these changes and responds to the consultation and its impacts on North Northamptonshire at a strategic level, most notably how the changes relate to Policy 17 a) of the adopted Joint Core Strategy *North Northamptonshire's Strategic Connections* which identifies the priorities for further work and investment within North Northamptonshire in the period to 2031 in relation to rail. The relevant extract of Policy 17 is provided as Appendix A to this response.

It is within a positive approach to growth that the Joint Committee's response is made. We trust that these will be of assistance and will be happy to provide further information or clarification.

Rail Services:

Question 4:

Do you agree with our proposed approach, which could reduce journey times on long distance services and increase the likelihood of getting a seat?

- 1 The consultation document lacks necessary detail on the proposed approach. It talks vaguely about reduced peak time calls at some stations and increased off-peak ones at others, without making clear what actually is proposed. It can be deduced that the proposal is for a half-hourly St Pancras – Corby service using “high quality commuter trains”. However, it is unclear what the journey times of these trains from respective stations to London would be and what arrangements would be made for passengers using Kettering or Wellingborough stations during peak hours.
- 2 North Northamptonshire is planning for significant growth, as identified in the adopted JCS. The JCS identifies Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough and Rushden as Growth Towns, with each town planning for Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs). The Stations in North Northamptonshire serve a wide catchment area, and subsequently the impacts of proposals go beyond the immediate town. The quality and frequency of train services will be important in ensuring the attractiveness of North Northamptonshire to residents, businesses and visitors. In this context, the proposed Corby-London direct service is supported in accordance with JCS Policy 17. It would improve the Borough’s connectivity to London St Pancras station, and therefore rail connections to mainland Europe. The new service could also reduce Corby’s reliance on Kettering in terms of changing trains for onwards southbound journeys. Opportunities exist for redevelopment around Corby Station and it is considered that these proposals could have a positive effect upon the viability of redevelopment schemes in this area.
- 3 The impacts on services to and from Kettering are currently unclear but the Joint Committee has a number of concerns that should be raised in relation to the impact on the southern part of North Northamptonshire, notably Wellingborough. Wellingborough is a gateway station that serves a wider catchment, including settlements in the southern part of North Northamptonshire such as Rushden. The proposed changes will impact on passengers travelling to and from Wellingborough Station and do not meet the stated priorities identified in the document for improving the East Midlands franchise. Wellingborough is currently served by four trains per hour during peak times. If all intercity services no longer stop this will be reduced to just 2 per hour, a 50% decrease in peak time services. This is contrary to Policy 17 a ii) of the JCS which seeks the provision of additional capacity and improved frequency of services calling at Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough.
- 4 Wellingborough and Rushden (part of the Southern functional sub-area of North Northamptonshire) are planning for significant growth, including at SUEs. As outlined in the Borough Council of Wellingborough’s response, these developments, notably the Stanton Cross SUE (which sits adjacent to Wellingborough Station) are expected to attract commuters, particularly South

East/London commuters, with station proximity and access to fast and frequent services into London a key selling point. It is therefore critical for the success of this SUE in particular, and Wellingborough and the southern area of North Northamptonshire, that the train service remains as good as it can be, especially at peak times to serve a growing commuter market. The Joint Committee is significantly concerned that the proposals could undermine the delivery of growth in the southern part of North Northamptonshire, which is at complete odds with the title of the consultation document which refers to the proposals 'Driving Growth in the East Midlands'.

- 5 It will be essential that the journey times on the St Pancras – Corby trains are at least as quick as the current services stopping at Luton Airport/Luton, Bedford, Wellingborough and Kettering to mitigate the impacts on Wellingborough.

Through services:

- 6 We have significant concerns about this proposal and the loss of through services from Wellingborough, which is contrary to the requirements of Policy 17 a) iii of the JCS which seeks the continuation of through services to Leicester, Derby and Nottingham and connecting with HS2 for onwards northbound travel. The proposal to create a commuter specific line from Corby to London implies that Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough are entirely commuter towns for London. It is important to recognise the significant number of passengers who travel northwards from within our area, notably to Leicester.
- 7 Travel north from all three Northamptonshire MML stations (Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough) is crucial as Leicester is an important destination for employment, health, leisure, education and retail purposes. Following the loss of the previous half-hourly through service with the introduction of the current franchise, NCC worked with EMT to ensure additional stops were inserted in the planned calling pattern at Wellingborough and Kettering in northbound morning peak trains and southbound evening peak trains. The through service needs to be retained.
- 8 If there is no through service from Wellingborough (and other stations southwards) to Leicester and beyond, then it is not clear how passengers will 'potentially' have to change trains at Kettering. There will be no alternative unless passengers drive to an alternative station, or just as possibly all the way to their destination, which could increase congestion on roads. It is recognised that increased patronage at Kettering Station could support regeneration proposals planned for the Station Quarter area of Kettering. It is, however, unclear at present whether the implications of the proposed changes on Kettering Station i.e. potential additional traffic congestion in the approaches to the station, increased inter-urban traffic flows at peak times and increased demand for car parking have been considered in the proposals.
- 9 We have significant concerns that the loss of through services from Wellingborough could impact on the delivery of planned growth in the southern

part of North Northamptonshire, and would re-emphasise our previous comments regarding the impact on the SUEs, notably at Stanton Cross.

- 10 If the through service between Wellingborough and Leicester is to be severed despite our opposition, then there needs to be very good connections at Kettering to a half-hourly service to Leicester. This service should also offer a good connection for passengers between Corby and Leicester. This will require the operator to intelligently schedule services so that passengers north do not find themselves waiting for long periods at Kettering for a connection.

Off-peak services:

- 11 There is little within the document regarding off-peak services. Clarification is sought on page 29 of the consultation document where reference is made to off peak services increasing to Kettering and Corby but there is no mention of Wellingborough. It is essential that any additional services to and from Kettering and Corby would also serve Wellingborough.

East-West rail links:

- 12 The desire to increase East to West services involving the East Midlands route is supported. At present there are very few viable ways of transferring between the East Coast Mainline, the Midland Mainline and the West Coast Mainline. An increase in services and a lowering of journey times on East to West routes would be welcomed and could potentially reduce over-crowding on London bound trains.

Thameslink:

- 13 The document sets out that consultation is ongoing with Thameslink to potentially include some of 'East Midlands' lines. It is possible that this could potentially include at least Wellingborough if not Kettering or Corby. This could act as an alternative service to East Midlands trains and potentially reduce overcrowding and lead to lower fares at peak times. It would also potentially offer direct routes through to London Gatwick Airport and a variety of other destinations. However, it is equally possible that the outcome could be that Thameslink could take over the proposed St Pancras – Corby service in its entirety, as these would be the only entirely electrically-operated services in the new East Midlands franchise. If this is the case, and the Corby service became an extension of existing Thameslink services, there is a significant risk that the outcome would be a slower journey time to London in trains that are significantly less comfortable than those used at present, since they have seating optimised for shorter-distance commuter journeys. Were Thameslink to be the sole operator (at Wellingborough and Corby) there would be no obligation (or commercial incentive) for them to offer lower fares. The proposed extension of Thameslink to Wellingborough and beyond therefore needs to be treated with some caution. The Joint Committee would only support the extension of Thameslink if it operated alongside existing rail services that serve North Northamptonshire.

Electrification:

- 14 The Joint Committee opposes the decision to abandon electrification of the Midland Mainline between Kettering and Sheffield. Policy 17a) i of the JCS identifies electrification northbound as a priority and the proposals are contrary to this.
- 15 It is understood that Electrification is essential to the long term vision of the East Midlands Councils for rail services post HS2, making the most of the current programme of line speed improvements and improving reliability. Intercity services also pass through a number of Air Quality Management Areas in the wider East Midlands within which diesel has been shown to produce pollution detrimental to people's health. Alongside other initiatives to reduce pollution levels (for example through car engine design and access strategies) rail needs to do its part, and Government should show leadership through non-diesel train specification now. It is also unclear whether the line speed south of Bedford will be upgraded to 125mph speeds.

Question 5:

What are your suggestions about how to mitigate the potential loss of some direct services between Oakham, Melton Mowbray and London?

- 16 It is considered that the potential loss of services between Corby, Oakham and Melton Mowbray needs to be mitigated through either exploring electrification beyond Corby or upgrading current services to more efficient bi-mode train models, as suggested by East Midlands Council response. It is understood that both options are supported by Corby Borough Council.

Ticket Pricing:

Question 24:

What changes to the fare structure would be of benefit to you?

- 17 Measures to reduce prices for commuters would be strongly supported as set out in our comments at para 13 regarding Thameslink. However, this should not be at the detriment of service provision which is a key concern raised in our comments to other questions in the consultation. At present prices at peak times are very expensive for commuters. For example, ticket prices from Bedford are significantly cheaper than from Wellingborough.

Appendix A: Extract of Policy 17 a) of the adopted North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031

POLICY 17 – NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE'S STRATEGIC CONNECTIONS

North Northamptonshire's strategic connections with surrounding areas will be strengthened and enhanced by managing development and investment to ensure that they are to the standard necessary to fulfil the role expected of them. New development that would prejudice their role will not be permitted.

The priorities for further work and investment within North Northamptonshire in the period to 2031 are:

- a) **Rail (Midland Main Line)** Upgrading of the rail infrastructure to increase capacity for passengers and rail freight, including:
 - i. Electrification and line speed improvements northbound, including from Corby, and southbound from all stations to London St Pancras International and Europe;
 - ii. Station improvements, the provision of additional capacity and improved frequency of services calling at Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough;
 - iii. Ensuring continuation of through services to Leicester, Derby and Nottingham and connecting with HS2 for onwards northbound travel; and
 - iv. Investigation of the longer term potential for railway stations at Irchester (to serve Irchester, Higham Ferrers and Rushden) and Desborough (to serve Desborough and Rothwell).