
Meeting: Rail North Committee Consultation Call
Subject: East Coast Main Line Services and Infrastructure
Author: Jonathan Brown, Strategic Rail Lead
Sponsor: Darren Oldham, Rail and Roads Director
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1. Purpose of the Report:

- 1.1 This report provides an update on development work done by Transport for the North and Partners supported by consultants to update the “Blueprint” setting out development plans for the northern section of the East Coast Main Line.
- 1.2 The report also updates on other issues on the route and the HS2 to Leeds Study.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the updated East Coast Main Line Blueprint.
- 2.2 That the Committee discusses the future use of the Blueprint so that it achieves maximum value.
- 2.3 That the Committee notes the position on the Leeds HS2 Study and other East Coast Main Line issues.

3. Main Issues:

- 3.1 The East Coast Main Line (ECML) links the North with London and Scotland, providing intercity trains to main destinations as well as linking the North East to the North West and Midlands via York and Leeds. The ECML is an electrified route providing services with attractive journey times however some sections suffer capacity issues and poor reliability, and a lack of resilience can affect the route. Additionally, on some sections power supply limitations mean that new rolling stock cannot be used to its maximum effect. As a result, the train service provided is not as frequent as is desired, and some main centres have infrequent or no direct services to London or other major centres.
- 3.2 The ECML is the main route in the corridor serving the eastern side of the country however it is paralleled by other routes which complement the ECML, for example by providing routes for freight trains, and by feeding in connecting passengers to the ECML at hub stations. As a result, development of the ECML itself needs to have regard to the whole corridor and its development needs as well as the core ECML route itself.
- 3.3 As well as being an important route in its own right, the ECML north of York is also part of the proposed Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) Network and is also proposed as the route for HS2 trains to reach North East England. To effectively fulfil these roles, co-ordinated planning is essential so that the specific needs of all programmes can be considered. Transport for the North is a co-sponsor of NPR however only the sections between Liverpool and York currently fall within the remit of the NPR Sponsor Board.
- 3.4 To take a holistic view of the development needs for the ECML, Transport for the North developed with Partners a “Blueprint” setting out known programmes and issues with a focus on the northern section of the ECML which passes through the Transport for the North area. This was first reported to the Rail North Committee in May 2022. This work is based on a similar Blueprint developed for central

Manchester which has been useful to integrate service and infrastructure changes up to 2032.

- 3.5 The ECML Blueprint has now been updated to reflect changes that have happened, not least the impact of changes in train usage or expected demand for travel following the Covid pandemic, changes in government funding and also alignment with business planning cycles that are now in play for Network Rail for the next Control Period (CP7). The updated Blueprint also tries to present information in a clearer format so that the planned investment, service development and future needs are shown in a coherent manner. The revised Blueprint is included as Appendix 1.
- 3.6 Improvements to the ECML are being implemented including recent completion of a grade separated junction at Werrington north of Peterborough, a new track layout at King's Cross Station and the introduction of digital signalling on the route between London and south of Grantham over the next few years. There are also planned interventions on the northern part of the route including in the York area. Other locally led investments such as additional platforms at Darlington and Middlesbrough stations are underway.
- 3.7 The November 2021 Integrated Rail Plan included various investments on the ECML.
- Improvements at York;
 - Extending the current 4-track railway to end just north of Northallerton, rather than just south of the station as at present;
 - An additional through platform on the eastern side of Darlington station, with bays to reduce the number of local services that cross in front of fast trains, which is consistent with the existing proposals being developed by Network Rail with Tees Valley Combined Authority;
 - Upgrading the Stillington route to allow more freight use, and restoring a 3rd track north of Chester-le-Street and a former chord at Bensham to enable a greater degree of segregation between freight and fast passenger trains; and
 - Lengthening some of the bay platforms at Newcastle to enable NPR trains to terminate in the station.
- 3.8 Whilst this investment is welcome, there are outstanding needs on the ECML route itself and also on adjacent routes in the corridor. Transport North East, Transport for the North and Network Rail jointly funded a Strategic Outline Business Case for options which would provide capacity for 7 or 8 trains per hour on the section between York and Newcastle compared with the current 6. This has now been accepted by the DfT and Network Rail is now developing an Outline Business Case as part of the IRP Programme. This is due to conclude towards the end of 2023. Other constraints such as the Doncaster area, Newark Flat Crossing and station facilities remain unaddressed. In the longer term, other improvements such as reinstating the Leamside Line need to be considered.
- 3.9 Work is underway to identify future timetable scenarios for the route through an Event Steering Group process led by Network Rail. There is also other activity to plan in the shorter term for timetables following the abortive attempt to introduce a new timetable for the route in May 2023. Oversight of these process and agreement on end states could be achieved through an integrated programme board.
- 3.10 In the shorter term, there are aspirations for more direct London services to Bradford and Middlesbrough, together with the introduction of a direct services from Huddersfield and Cleethorpes. Extension of 6 additional LNER services from Leeds to Bradford Forster Square is dependent on infrastructure works at the

latter station which are awaiting a decision to design. Transport for the North and Partners have stressed to the Department for Transport (DfT) the need for this work to be completed well in time for Bradford being the UK Capital of Culture in 2025.

- 3.11 Separate from the ECML programme though linked to it, the proposed study into how HS2 trains would reach Leeds has yet to be commenced and Terms of Reference are yet to be issued. This is due to the implications of the 2022 Autumn Statement still being worked through. The HS2 study could take 18-24 months and will look at a range of options for accessing Leeds. Some reports have suggested that HS2 could reach Leeds using the ECML corridor between Newark and Leeds, so it is important there is appropriate visibility of the ECML and HS2 Study programmes.
- 3.12 The Blueprint attempts to show all issues in the corridor can be integrated. The Blueprint is however a snapshot at the time of development and issues can and will change. To have value, it is therefore important that the Blueprint is maintained and owned by key players. That may be through a Programme Board or other similar body. The similar Manchester Blueprint is now overseen by the Manchester Task Force which includes the DfT, Network Rail and Transport for the North. The DfT has suggested that the ECML Programme Board will continue to be the main officer level governance and that Transport for the North should be able to participate in it. Following the November Rail North Committee, the Chief Executive wrote to the DfT requesting confirmation of Transport for the North participation.

4. Corporate Considerations

Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications for Transport for the North as a result of this report.

Resource Implications

- 4.2 There are no direct resourcing implications as a result of this report.

Legal Implications

- 4.3 Transport for the North is a co-sponsor of the NPR Programme and will need to enter into a formal agreement with the DfT for this purpose. Approval to enter into this agreement will be sought from the Board in the near future. The NPR programme does not include the ECML and there are no legal implications as a direct result of this report.

Risk Management and Key Issues

- 4.4 This paper does not require a risk assessment, however, risks relating to the delivery of infrastructure will be identified, assessed, managed and monitored by Network Rail. A risk is included on the Transport for the North Corporate Risk Register in relation to future timetable changes.

Environmental Implications

- 4.5 This report does not constitute or influence a plan or programme which sets the framework for future development consents of projects listed in the EIA Directive and therefore does stimulate the need for SEA or EIA. Any infrastructure proposals to improve the capacity and reliability of the system will be subject to EIA Screening, conducted by Network Rail as part of the consenting process for those projects.

- 4.6 Delivery of the blueprint will encourage growth of travel by rail services and contribute to environmental targets through reduction in journeys by road.
- 4.7 Any specific environmental issues will be picked up in the development and delivery of individual infrastructure interventions.

Equality and Diversity

- 4.8 A full impact assessment has not been carried out because it is not relevant to the type of work referenced.

Consultations

- 4.9 The updated ECML Blueprint has been developed by consultants working on behalf of Transport for the North. Transport for the North Partner authorities have been involved in this work and their views have been incorporated. The consultants have also discussed the work informally with various rail industry contacts.

5. Background Papers

- 5.1 There are no background papers.

6. Appendices

- 6.1 Appendix 1 - Updated ECML (North) Blueprint.

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used (*if applicable*)

a) TfN	Transport for the North
b) ECML	East Coast Main Line
c) NPR	Northern Powerhouse Rail
d) CP7	Control Period 7 (i.e., 2024-2029)
e) DfT	Department for Transport
f) LNER	London North Eastern Railway
g) HS2	High Speed 2