

HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL TRANSPORT BODY

19 January 2017

RAIL ISSUES PAPER

Authors: Trevor Mason – Hertfordshire County Council
Ashley Stower – Network Rail

This paper is for information only, setting out a brief update on current rail issues that are of relevance to Hertfordshire.

1. NETWORK RAIL PROJECTS

East Coast Route Study

The East Coast Route study is currently being developed, with consultation expected in Spring 2017.

The current emerging priorities relating to Hertfordshire are:

- Stevenage turnback (fifth platform)
- Hertford Loop turnback and power supply.

The Stevenage turnback is of particular importance as without facility Govia Thameslink Railway is unable to introduce the full 2018 timetable changes.

It is expected that capacity issues on the Welwyn viaduct will be addressed through improved signalling.

Anglia Level Crossings

A new round of consultation has taken place on the proposed level crossing closures along the West Anglia main line.

A paper will be taken to the March meeting of the Environment, Transport and Planning Cabinet Panel.

Freight Network Study

The Network Rail Freight Network Study makes reference to possible longer-term intervention of grade separation at Harpenden Junction (500 m south of Harpenden station). No further details have been published.

2. FRANCHISES

East Anglia Franchise

(includes services from Liverpool Street to Broxbourne, Hertford East and Bishop's Stortford)

The new East Anglia franchise began on 16 October, with formal launch events on the following day. Highlights for Hertfordshire include increased services to Hertford East from May 2019, total fleet replacement by December 2020, and major upgrades to Broxbourne and Cheshunt stations.

West Midlands Franchise

(includes services through Watford Junction and Hemel Hempstead, and to St Albans Abbey)

The bidding process closed on 29 November, with the winner expected to be announced in June 2017.

The franchise will run from October 2017 until April 2026.

InterCity West Coast Franchise

(includes long-distance trains calling at Watford Junction)

The DfT announced on 4 November that the new InterCity West Coast franchise (to be known as the West Coast Partnership) will also run the first few years of HS2 services. This is a change to the proposals set out in the franchise consultation in 2016, which assumed that post-HS2 services would be in the following franchise period.

There is thus now a need to feed Hertfordshire's post-HS2 aspirations for the West Coast Main Line into the franchise process.

An industry bidder information day will be held on 25 January. The Invitation to Tender is expected to be published in October / November 2017, with the new franchise scheduled to start on 1 April 2019.

East Midlands Franchise

(includes long-distance trains passing through St Albans)

The DfT published the East Midlands Franchise Prospectus in November. The next stage is consultation on the development of the franchise specification. The consultation was due to begin in December, but is currently still awaited.

The franchise will be one of the first to incorporate the Secretary of State's new direction on increased "vertical integration", with partnership working between the franchisee and Network Rail.

3. TRAIN OPERATING COMPANIES

Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR)

Consultation on the 2018 timetable proposals closed on 8 December, with a second round expected in late spring / early summer.

The key issue remains the proposed bus substitution between Watton at Stone and Stevenage from May 2018 until such time as a fifth platform is built at Stevenage. The focus has been on lobbying the Department for Transport to bring forward the platform scheme, including setting up a UK Parliament petition (<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/172054>).

GTR attended the county council's Environment, Transport & Planning Cabinet Panel on 7 December to give an update on current train performance, and will further update the Panel in spring.

Work has begun on the development of 9 station travel plans which GTR is preparing as part of the franchise agreement.

Virgin Trains East Coast

The new timetable starting on 11 December includes one additional service calling at Stevenage on Saturdays and Sundays from London Kings Cross to Leeds.

London Midland

The additional evening service on the Abbey Line was introduced with the new timetable on 11 December.

4. HCC PROJECTS

Hitchin Station

Changes to the road access to Hitchin station, providing benefits for buses, pedestrians and cyclists, is expected to be delivered by May 2017.

St Albans City

Preliminary designs are being developed for improved access to the Ridgemont Road entrance of City station. This will tie in with GTR's station redevelopment programme. The HCC element could be delivered in 2018/19.

5. LOCAL AUTHORITY RAIL GROUPS

ECMA

The East Coast Main Line Authorities group held its Westminster event for MPs on 29 November.

WCR250

West Coast Rail 250 held its officer meeting on 17 November. The next member meeting will be held in Watford on 23 February.

6. OTHER PROJECTS

Devolution of Suburban Services

TfL's business case for rail devolution has been rejected by the Department for Transport. Whilst this formally only applies to Southeastern services, it is also likely to delay TfL's aspirations to take over Moorgate services to Hertford / Welwyn Garden City. TfL's intention was to apply to run these services from when the GTR franchise comes up for renewal in 2021.

Croxley Step Free Access

TfL's report on options for providing step-free access at Croxley station is expected to be issued in early February.

ORR Station Usage Statistics

The Office of Rail and Road issued its annual station usage estimates (2015/16) on 6 December. The headlines for Hertfordshire are:

Busiest stations:

Watford Junction	8,189,586 passengers
St Albans City	7,451,430 passengers
Stevenage	4,759,972 passengers

Quietest stations:

Park Street	20,646 passengers
How Wood	27,804 passengers
Bricket Wood	28,942 passengers

Total passenger numbers at Hertfordshire stations are now over 70 million per year, a 4.7% increase over 2014/15.