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Andy Bliss
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Dear Andy

MERSEYSIDE ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY DRAFT

I attach ORR's response to this consultation.

Yours sincerely

John Larkinson





Merseyside Route Utilisation Strategy

Response to Consultation Draft

1. This is the response from the Office of Rail Regulation to Network Rail's consultation on the Merseyside Route Utilisation Strategy (MRUS). Our comments are without prejudice to the approach we will take when considering the final RUS, when you submit it to us.

Specific Comments

Scope

2. Although the RUS is focussed on the Merseyrail Electrics network it does in fact include information on several other routes and potential schemes outside that area. These include the Borderlands Line (Bidston-Wrexham); possible upgrade of the Halton Curve; potential service extensions via Burscough; enhanced services to Wigan; and freight access to the docks. These comments either serve to update earlier work in the North West, Wales, Lancashire & Cumbria and Freight RUSs or look at the proposed projects from a Liverpool-centred perspective. We welcome the fact that the opportunity has been taken to review matters and would suggest that the Foreword to the final RUS makes clear that the scope has included these projects.

Demand forecasting

3. We welcome the analysis of a range of demand forecasts, but there must be a question mark over whether the initial forecast range is still seen as overly conservative, given the recent downturn in the economy.
4. It would also be useful for the RUS to provide further justification for using the alternative employment growth scenario, post 2010, of 0.7% per annum produced by consultants Volterra, rather than the government's TEMPRO forecast of 0% per annum.

Consistency with Network Rail's current Route Plan

5. There are a number of schemes detailed as proposed enhancements within the MRUS that are not mentioned in the draft NR Route Plan for CP4. This makes it difficult to assess the impact on the cost of implementing the MRUS or the extent to which its objectives would be met or otherwise should some or all of these schemes not go ahead.

Rolling stock and depots

6. The rolling stock and depot situation is covered briefly in sections 4.5 and 4.6. Hopefully matters have now been clarified somewhat since the draft was written and some more specific options for maintenance, stabling and cleaning of an enlarged fleet (which appears to be needed in the short term with transfer of spare Class 508s from other parts of the UK network) can be included. This section could also helpfully make reference to the wider Network RUS Working Group 3 on rolling stock and depots, which is baselining depot capacity and facilities.

Stations (other than in the central core)

7. We welcome the consideration of car parks in section 6.5 and note that this issue has been identified in several other RUSs and concerned several members of the SMG. We agree that because the availability of parking influences where and how many people access the rail network, this is an important issue for this RUS. However, there appears to be limited identification of options to deal with this issue. For example, at those stations where car park utilisation is already high, we should like to see some more analysis of the effect of the suppressed demand, and the scope for alleviating it.

Freight

8. Whilst we recognise that there is currently a negligible amount of freight traffic on the core Merseyrail network, the national Freight RUS was not able to reflect relatively local issues and geographic RUSs are the best place for these. The North West RUS was completed before the re-opening of the Olive Mount chord and commitment to W10 gauge clearance to Seaforth. The need to protect access to Birkenhead Docks and Canada Dock is touched on as a connectivity issue in sections 6.4.8 and 6.4.9 of the draft MRUS. The final MRUS could usefully include an update on these issues and either bring all freight issues together or at least improve referencing between them.

Engineering Access

9. As you are aware, we believe that RUSs have an important role to play in achieving the right balance between access to the network for the operation of train services and access for maintenance and enhancement. The Merseyside network is relatively straightforward in that it is virtually all passenger-only with a single operator. We understand that the tunnel sections are managed on a similar basis to the London Underground, with nightly complete shutdowns. Various sections of the network have been the subject of blockades in recent years and there is



presumably a view on whether such arrangements are effective both from an engineering efficiency perspective and their effects on passengers. These arrangements are touched on in section 3.8.5 but we consider that it would be helpful if more details are included in the final document.

10. The periodic review determinations included funding for the seven day railway initiative. Whilst the Merseyrail network may not be one of the routes proposed for early implementation it would be helpful to clarify the situation in the final MRUS.

Office of Rail Regulation

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