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Dear Valentina,

Coventry City Council - Consultation Response to PR13: Draft Determination of Network Rail's Outputs and Funding for 2014-19

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the ORR's Draft Determination of Network Rail's Outputs and Funding for 2014-19. Attached below are the City Council's detailed comments on this consultation which I trust will be duly considered as part of the consultation process. If you have any questions or require clarification on any of the points made please do not hesitate to contact me.

The City Council has set out ambitious plans to regenerate large areas of the City with a particular focus on the City Centre. Allied to these are proposals to develop the local and strategic transport network to support growth potential across the Coventry and Warwickshire LEP area and strengthen links to other UK cities. The rail network forms an important and integral part of these plans; however it is clear that investment in the rail network will be required to achieve these objectives.

The City Council has recently developed a Rail Story which identifies Coventry's rail markets and needs in the form of a High Level Output Statement. This work has highlighted the significant degree to which Coventry has been overlooked as a major rail market (with the largest station growth outside London) in all relevant formal rail industry plans. Even accounting for HS2 abstraction and using standard industry metrics, the rail market from Coventry is forecast to continue strong growth from 5.4m passengers per year now, to over 7m by 2023 and over 11m by 2043. This follows a period of significant growth at Coventry in the last 5 years of 80%, making it the fastest growing station in the UK.

Coventry's long distance rail market has historically been planned for and assessed under the guidance of three different Route Utilisation Strategies (RUS's)

- The West Coast Main Line (WCML) RUS,
- The East Midlands RUS; and,
- The West Midlands and Chilterns RUS.

The resulting effect of this planning structure is that Coventry's rail market has not been captured and assessed in any significant detail. Subsequently, its specific rail requirements have been diluted and lost across the three RUS's. Coventry's profile within the rail industry has diminished below what would be expected for a city of its size. As an example, Coventry is not included in the HLOS capacity metrics.

NUCKLE and Coventry Station

The City Council is already pushing forward the delivery of its regeneration plans, including much needed rail infrastructure enhancements on the Coventry to Nuneaton corridor which form phase 1 of the NUCKLE (Nuneaton-Coventry-Kenilworth-Leamington) scheme. This project will create new stations at Bermuda Park and the Ricoh Arena to enable improved service frequencies on the Coventry Nuneaton North-South corridor which contains the city's largest flow of economic commuter movement's, yet only 0.2% of journeys are currently by train.

NUCKLE is closely aligned to the Friargate redevelopment scheme which will create a major mixed-use office development supporting 13,800 new jobs. Coventry Station forms the centre point of the project and will act as the City's Gateway. A joint masterplan for Coventry Station is due to be developed by the City Council during 2013 with Centro, Network Rail, Virgin, London Midland and key stakeholders. This follows the allocation of approximately £8.5m to Coventry Station by the Local Transport Body, directly supporting the growth of a new north-south rail corridor, the pre-dominant local travel to work corridor and the LEP economic objectives.

Enhancements at the Station will be required to address significant rail passenger growth, rail capacity issues including crossover conflicts (as outlined below), the customer experience and integration with other transport modes.

The City Council is already demonstrating its commitment to address the need for investment at the station by providing leadership to the delivery of schemes to significantly improve access arrangements to the Friargate/station area. The project will involve the pooling of several large funding pots including £12.7m of RGF funding and £6m of ERDF to deliver:

- A new bridge deck over the Coventry ring road to strengthen public transport, pedestrian and cycle links between the station and the city centre.
- A new pedestrian and cycle underpass at Warwick Road to enhance links between the station and southwest Coventry.
- Public realm improvements at the station forecourt, improving access for pedestrians and improving bus/rail interchange.
- Improved pedestrian and cyclist access from the west of the station, by installing steps from an existing bridge over the railway.

Allied to this investment is over £75m of public realm and building infrastructure investment programme to kick start the regeneration and investment in the immediate city centre and station area.

Kenilworth Station

This scheme will see the introduction of a new station at Kenilworth by 2015 at a cost of £11.3m including £5m from the New Station Fund. The project will support the local economy of

Kenilworth, reduce road congestion and improve transport links along the strategically important Coventry and Warwickshire North/South corridor.

Coventry's Rail Connectivity

Other than London, Coventry does not have direct access to any substantive long distance rail services connecting to other significant economies across the UK. For example, Coventry Station does not benefit from any competitive long distance services between Coventry and the East Midlands, the Northeast, the Southwest, indeed, much of the West Midlands. This is a significant issue for the city which has impacted on its ability to attract inward investment, conduct business with other major cities and encourage sustainable travel for longer journeys. Outputs in the draft determination appear to do little to support any substantive benefits for improved long distance connectivity for the City other than the Electric Spine.

The draft determination includes proposals for the Electric Spine on the north-south corridor which will run between Sheffield and Southampton. This scheme offers significant potential to support improved long distance rail passenger services from Coventry to the Northeast, South coast, London, Thames Valley and Oxford as well as improved local connections on the Coventry North-South corridor which would complement NUCKLE phases 1-4. The draft determination notes that the scope of this scheme has not yet been defined and therefore additional time will be given to allow further development work. The City Council is concerned that there are already delays to this project and urges the ORR to ensure that the scope of the project is developed as soon as possible in partnership with stakeholders, including the City Council, and is delivered within CP5.

Coventry is located at an important intersection on the national railway network where the Nuneaton-Leamington line crosses the busy West Coast Main Line. The Electric Spine proposal follows the Nuneaton-Leamington line, and therefore bisects the WCML at Coventry Station. Whilst the detail is not yet available, the implications of this could be significant due to added pressure on Coventry station which already has significant rail capacity constraints following significant growth over the past 5 years. Whilst the City Council welcomes the inclusion of the Electric Spine, it is very keen to understand precisely how the scheme will operate and how it will accommodate capacity constraints at Coventry. For example, it would not be acceptable for any growth in freight traffic through the station to compromise the capacity for passenger growth.

The development of the Electric Spine between Nuneaton-Coventry-Leamington offers further incentive to invest in improved passenger services, however the gap between Birmingham-Nuneaton-Leicester will severely limit the potential for the Coventry and Warwickshire region to fully capitalise on these opportunities. The Water Orton corridor between Birmingham and Nuneaton is already constrained by capacity issues, and the electrification of the line would help to address this. It is highly recommended that the scope of the Electric Spine be amended to include this important link.

The City Council has a very keen ambition to see the reintroduction of direct rail services between Coventry and Leicester following the opening of HS2. Evidence demonstrates the significant latent demand for these services, and likewise the fact that an average of 87% of trips between Coventry and the East Midlands are by car yet only 1% are by train reflects the inadequacy of the current service provision. This proposal will require additional enhancements at Nuneaton to reinstate direct rail connectivity. The City Council recommends the inclusion of this missing link into the Electric Spine proposal.

The Coventry to Kenilworth line also forms part of the Electric Spine proposal, however sections of this line are currently single tracked e.g. at Gibbet Hill just south of Coventry. This limitation is already constraining capacity and it will undoubtedly limit the additional benefits which the Spine could support e.g. the proposal to divert two Cross Country passenger services per hour via Coventry, local services to Kenilworth station and the potential for a new Coventry South station. The City Council understands that Network Rail is carrying out a GRIP 4 Study of Conditional Service Outputs for the Leamington to Coventry route in 2013, within its wider assessment of the Electric Spine, and is thus keen that the double tracking of Gibbet Hill to Kenilworth is not delayed beyond CP5. The City Council recommends that the proposals to complete double tracking form part of the Electric Spine proposal and that this takes place within CP5.

The City Council is proposing to engage with Network Rail to seek assessment of hitherto undeveloped service options made possible by Electric Spine which could include : -

- South Coast/Thames Valley – North East services via Coventry and Nuneaton avoiding Birmingham New Street
- South Wales/Bristol – North East services via Oxford, Coventry and Nuneaton avoiding Birmingham New Street
- London Paddington/Thames Valley – Birmingham New Street electric services via Coventry

WCML

The City Council is keen to see increased WCML capacity before HS2 e.g. Rugby, Northampton, and Milton Keynes. Links between the West Midlands and Milton Keynes were identified as a gap in the West Midlands and Chilterns RUS. The Coventry economic rail model has concluded that improved fast services to Milton Keynes at 2 TPH would create GVA of £48m and 1200 new jobs (figures are indicative at this stage). Delivery of additional capacity on London Midland services between Coventry, Rugby, Northampton, Milton Keynes could be achieved before HS2 to sustain and stimulate forecast rail growth and development of labour market sharing. Passengers numbers from Coventry to destinations on the South East WCML corridor (excluding London), could total nearly 1m passengers a year by 2043.

The City Council is working with the Coventry and Warwickshire LEP to develop the Coventry Gateway, a major new employment area in the southeast of Coventry which will create up to 14,000 new jobs. This is very likely to increase the market for additional rail travel in the east of the City on the WCML. The City Council has an aspiration to develop a new station in the East of the City at Willenhall. East Coventry has no rail provision at present.

Rail links between Coventry and Birmingham/Centro area are important to the local economy, currently supporting a high level proportion of commuter trips. Capacity constraints on the WCML are however limiting growth for local and strategic journeys. The City Council supports the investigation of options to increase capacity on this extremely busy line, for example through the introduction of four-tracking or station loops.

HS2

The draft determination specifies “a development fund for enhancements in CP6 that is intended to include, in part, necessary development work for the linkage of the existing network to HS2. We would expect Network Rail in CP5 to ensure that, when renewing and enhancing its network,

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it takes account of potential connections and interfaces with HS2 to ensure that costs in the longer term are minimised”.

We welcome this fund which is highly relevant to the City Council's wish to see significantly enhanced local connectivity to the new Interchange Station near the NEC. Options for local connectivity are currently being developed, however it is clear that direct rapid connectivity will be required to enable Coventry to exploit the benefits of HS2. This could for example include the reinstatement of the Whitacre link as part of a wider rail strategy for the east Birmingham area e.g. linked to the need to electrify and address capacity issues on the Water Orton Line and improve capacity on the WCML. We recognise that significant work on the feasibility and business case for such initiatives is required, but would ask that Network Rail are tasked with working with local promoters such as Birmingham Airport to explore how their and our connectivity outputs can be achieved.

I trust these comments are clear but if you require clarification on any of the points made please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mike Waters', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mike Waters
Transportation Manager