

Comments on Network Rail's SBP

Viewed from the perspective of Essex and of East Anglia, the Network Rail Strategic Business Plan (SBP) is extremely disappointing.

This is despite comments in the SBP that claim to recognise the needs and importance of the area. For example the SBP states, on page 10, that:

The top cities for knowledge-based jobs are all on the core rail network

Two of these, Cambridge and Norwich, are in the Greater Anglia region but there is little in the SBP that benefits either of these cities.

Furthermore on page 66, it states:

Key strategies include:

Investing in the capability of the network to accommodate extra capacity, including the Great Eastern and Lea Valley

There appears to be nothing planned to achieve this, despite both these routes operating at capacity already (and, on the Great Eastern, there being no opportunity to provide extra capacity by lengthening trains). There are, however, extant proposals, supplementing the Great Eastern Mainline Vision, for increases in capacity by the building of additional tracks and these ought to be in the SBP.

There has been (and will be) some limited development during the current control period. Recently, Cambridge station has had its idiosyncratic station layout changed. The new services, is, however, largely to increase capacity on the East Coast Main Line. The recently installed Beccles loop allows a better service on the East Suffolk line. The work at Ely North Junction will allow more trains north of Ely. The Bacon Factory curve at Ipswich will avoid the need for freight trains from Felixstowe to reverse at Ipswich before taking the route towards Nuneaton.

There are a number of similar small improvements that could and should be implemented across the region. Examples include: passing loops on the Braintree and other branches, a second platform at Colchester Town, better provision for connections at Thorpe-le-Soken and double tracking or passing loops on the Felixstowe branch. All would bring benefit and many of these would contribute to a goal of a half-hourly service for all stations in Essex. Alas, none of them currently feature in the SBP, although there are extant proposals for such work.

If Network Rail is disappointed with the reaction to the SBP in East Anglia, it should be remembered that above-inflation fare increases have been justified by the improvements that are supposed to be being made to the infrastructure. Where are these improvements? Note also that Greater Anglia is one of the few franchises, other than the ~~the~~ that make the Treasury contribution

Furthermore, so far as East Anglia concerned, freight is almost completely ignored. There is no explicit mention either of Felixstowe, which is the major container port in the United Kingdom, or of London Gateway, which will be the first 21st Century major deep-sea container port and Europe's largest lo

The proposed "electric spine" will ~~nothing in the SBP about providing additional~~ but th capacity for Felixstowe or London Gateway. The long-needed electrification of the line between Gospel Oak and Barking would avoid the need for the whole of the London Gateway traffic to cross the whole of the Great Eastern Main Line on the level at its busiest point, East of Stratford. Similarly, electrification of the route from Felixstowe to Nuneaton would allow containers from Felixstowe to reach both the East and West Coast Main Lines and the electric spine, without the need for diesel haulage. Diversion of more of the Felixstowe traffic onto the route to Nuneaton would also alleviate congestion on the Great Eastern Main Line.

Finally, the SBP extols Network Rail ~~improvement is still needed!~~ ing proje Network Rail's engineering works on th and 10th of February Eastern overran and the Monday morning commuter service could not commence before 7:30 am –this on a line where 12-car trains are full by 6:30 am.

Peter Radford

Chelmsford Commuters And Rail Travellers (CART)

01245 262328

PeterRadford799@BTinternet.com