

## ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON HIGH SPEED RAIL INQUIRY INTO RAIL CAPACITY

### Memorandum of evidence by the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)

March 2012

#### Introduction

1. We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the All Party Parliamentary Group on High Speed Rail Inquiry into Rail Capacity. Although CPRE commented in the 1970s on the abortive Channel Tunnel and rail link proposal, it was during the planning of the Channel Tunnel in the 1980s and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link in the 1990s that CPRE established its expertise in relation to the planning of large rail infrastructure, including the involvement of local communities.
2. The combination of our national policy work and local reach through our branches and parish council members allows us to understand the big picture as well as local details, such as the local implications of franchise renewals.
3. CPRE's *Vision 2026 for the Countryside*, sets out how we would like to see the countryside in our centenary year. The Vision calls for a 'revitalisation of rural railways'. Although the Department for Transport (DfT)'s Rail Command Paper considers 'reopening railway lines and stations'<sup>1</sup>, it sets low ambitions for regional railways. Between 2011 and 2030, based on previous trends it forecasts an increase in passenger miles for regional railways of just 19-24% compared to 36-46% for the railway as a whole<sup>2</sup>. We believe there is much greater potential for our rural railways, harnessing the convenience of integrated ticketing, new technologies such as tram-trains and reopening missing links in the network.

#### i) How do you view the current capacity situation on Britain's railways?

4. Capacity is being stretched by the record demands being made on our rail network. Capacity constraints are more complex than might be first understood and do not simply correspond to the sections of line where passengers frequently need to stand because of a lack of seating.
5. We believe capacity is best understood in terms of train paths available rather than simply seats on trains. Otherwise complex trade-offs between providing for different freight and passenger services (i.e. long distance and stopping) as well as reliability can be concealed. The maximum permitted length of trains and the loading gauge - in other words the maximum height and width of trains - is also

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<sup>1</sup> Page 33 in DfT, *Reforming our Railways: Putting the Customer First*, 2012 Cm 8313

<sup>2</sup> Table 1.1, *supra*

relevant to how many passengers or how much freight can be conveyed per train.

6. There are many hidden capacity gaps. For example, prioritisation of long-distance passenger trains often means there is insufficient capacity to run local rail services at regular intervals or reopen local rail stations. A lack of gauge clearance or paths for freight trains can mean that rail does not serve business needs, such as being able to provide a competitive service to convey freight containers from ports to industry. Indirect routes may make rail less competitive than road, so concealing a role for rail. Even where there is no lack of capacity on particular lines in the conventional sense, there may be a need for additional rail capacity in terms of loading gauge or reopening missing links.
7. Some capacity constraints are actually due to missing links elsewhere, for example pressure on orbital lines in London between local passenger and long distance freight trains for paths. Implementing the full East West Rail scheme between Oxford and Cambridge would remove most of the freight travelling through London. This highlights the need for a 'larger than local' approach to transport planning, a level between the national and counties or conurbations.

**ii) What capacity do you believe Britain's railways will require in the future?**

8. The further one looks into the future, the more difficult it is to predict exactly what it will bring. Growth in population alongside the need to reduce carbon emissions will be a major challenge for transport. Just as decarbonising the energy sector will require generating more electricity, even if total energy use could be reduced, CPRE believes decarbonising the transport sector will require increasing passenger and freight miles travelled by rail, even if the overall distance travelled on all forms of transport could be reduced.
9. This would mean a need for more 'decentralised capacity' and a greater range of service patterns. There will be a greater need for local stations within walking and cycling distance of more people rather than out-of-town parkway stations, likewise for direct freight access to industrial sites rather than indirectly via Rail Freight Interchanges.
10. The places where the population and economy grow the most will determine where rail use grows, so capacity needs will be influenced by spatial planning. There is a strong argument to rebalance investment away from London and the overheated South East to the North, which could help encourage regeneration of brownfield sites rather than building on greenfield sites. Improving services between provincial cities will be essential, whether by new lines, such as High Speed 2 phase 2, which could revolutionise travel between Birmingham and Yorkshire, or by reopening lines such as Bedford to Northampton, which would improve connectivity between Birmingham and East Anglia.
11. The Right Lines Charter, a coalition of over a dozen national charities which CPRE led the setting up of in April 2011, sets out four principles for doing High Speed Rail well. The second principle calls for infrastructure proposals to be 'future-proofed by comprehensive testing against different scenarios...[to] help identify the best solutions for genuinely furthering sustainable development'. The four different scenarios used by Network Rail in its planning are a good start but we may need to be more ambitious if rail is, for example, to help meet the challenge of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector in line with national targets.

**iii) What is the best way of providing capacity and future-proofing Britain's rail network?**

12. The solutions will depend on the corridor and the area, so we do not advocate a 'one size fits all' approach. For the southern end of the West Coast Main Line, which is four tracked and has recently been upgraded, the only credible upgrade is a bypass line to separate out the fastest long distance trains from inter-regional and local passenger as well as freight trains. There are capacity shortages even in Cumbria where the need to provide paths for trains to Glasgow has limited services to local stations. The further north one goes, however, the greater the scope for line speed improvements and passing loops on existing lines as an alternative to a completely new railway, particularly as they could be delivered in the shorter rather than longer term.
13. On the Great Western Main Line, Midland Main Line and East Coast Main Line there is scope for more four tracking beyond the Home Counties. In relation to the latter there is also scope to upgrade line speeds, loading gauge and electrify parallel routes, for example so that they can better cater for freight. In some urban areas where platform capacity is limited at major stations, the introduction of tram trains could free up capacity for longer distance services while improving the connectivity of local services.
14. In the Beeching era, many routes were closed because they duplicated other routes and were therefore felt to be unnecessary. With the railway catering for record growth and aspirations for a reliable 24/7 railway, there is a pressing need to reopen many of these routes in order to provide greater resilience and reliability.

**iv) What will the effects of providing extra capacity be, beyond addressing journey supply? What would be risked by failing to provide that capacity?**

15. There would be a number of serious consequences of failing to provide additional rail capacity and increasingly difficult trade-offs, between different service types as well as between capacity and reliability.
16. We are concerned that further 'salami-slicing' of rural rail services would be a likely outcome, as rural stopping services are a less profitable use of train paths than long distance trains. The potential to reopen rail stations at settlements whose growth justified a service would also be limited. Rail services can prove a lifeline for rural communities and can help tackle the growth of motor traffic on minor rural roads, on which traffic has grown more than any other type of road since 2002. This could increase the pressure for road building, even in sensitive areas of countryside.
17. A lack of capacity would also make it difficult to cater for the demand for more rail freight. Besides the costs to business of having to rely on increasingly congested roads, the benefits to the environment and communities of getting freight off lorries onto rail would be missed.
18. The UK already has some of the highest ticket prices in the world. Although arguments have been made that rail travel is only for the rich, managing demand through increasing peak ticket prices further would make it harder for those on lower incomes to travel by rail.

## Recommendations

19. In the light of the issues raised in this submission, CPRE makes the following recommendations which we hope the group will take into consideration:

- Investment in the rail network should be planned around growth in the right places, taking account of environmental capacity, rather than seeking to address predictions based on the past. This needs to be closely integrated with spatial planning.
- A 'larger than local' approach is needed to plan the development of the rail network and fairly allocate capacity where there are constraints. The Government needs to do more to encourage local authorities to work together following the abolition of the regional tier.
- The Government and rail industry need to give rural communities a more positive message of intent for rural rail services, showing commitment and ambition.
- The National Networks National Policy Statement will be a critical opportunity to set these needs in long term policy.
- The Government should encourage local authority leaders to lobby for investment in their local rail networks<sup>3</sup>.

CPRE  
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<sup>3</sup> The Prime Minister has recently encourage local authorities to shout for investment in roads: <http://www.thisiskent.co.uk/Courier-says-need-A21-dualled-Prime-Minister/story-14019910-detail/story.html>