

WEST COAST RAIL 250

Submission to APPG for High Speed Rail

Rail Capacity Inquiry

1) West Coast Rail 250 is a non-party political organisation representing over 40 local authorities which has long-established and excellent working relationships with Network Rail, the relevant Train Operating Companies, and the Department for Transport, and:

“campaigns for improved and environmentally sustainable rail services along the West Coast Main Line to support the economic development and social cohesion of communities along the WCML rail corridor”

2) These aims are supported by the following key objectives:

1. Increased capacity for passenger and freight services
2. Faster and more frequent long distance services
3. Improved links between local and regional centres and cross-border services
4. Improved facilities for passengers including access to local bus services

3) When our Campaign started in 1992 train services on the West Coast were amongst the most unreliable in the country. Our campaigning inside and outside of Parliament was crucial in delivering the success that is the West Coast today. We were instrumental in securing the option of a full route upgrade and new tilting trains when the first franchise was let in 1997.

4) We were, and still are, the only nationwide Campaign focussed on the West Coast Main Line and its crucial role to our local economies. We have strong links with both Houses of Parliament through the All-Party Group for the West Coast Main Line. This is a formally registered Group, sponsored by WCR250 and its activities complement those of the wider campaign. We

also benefit from links to the Welsh Assembly via the membership of the North Wales local authorities.

5) West Coast Rail 250 is a strong advocate of new High Speed Rail Line services between London, the West Midlands, North West England and Scotland. We are one of the few genuinely national campaigns focussed on achieving a truly national high speed network extending from London to Edinburgh and Glasgow.

6) Our commitment to a new High Speed Line recognises the importance of reducing journey times to and from Scotland, northern England and the regions as well as providing important extra capacity on the existing WCML.

7) We strongly endorsed the Network Rail 'New Lines' report of August 2009 recommending top priority for a new high-speed line along the current West Coast route. The Greengauge 21 Report published in September 2009 supported this strategy and underlined the role of high-speed rail in accommodating future growth, and allowing the current WCML to offer improved local and regional rail services. Subsequent studies from these organisations and HS2 Ltd all confirm the need for considerable extra capacity.

8) The recent WCML RUS and other evidence from NWR and Virgin Trains all indicates that the capacity of the existing line will be exhausted within 6-10 years depending on growth forecasts. What does not appear to be in doubt is a shared recognition that growth in national rail travel will continue at historically high levels – the only doubt is around the rate of growth. It is worth reminding the DfT that the last 20 years has seen a major under-assessment by Government of the increasing demand for rail travel. We believe this trend will continue reinforced by increasing oil prices, fiscal measures to reduce carbon emissions, little new road capacity and a growth in population.

9) WCR 250 is committed to campaigning for a new high speed route between Scotland and London, with new high-speed lines to the centres of Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow and Edinburgh, with stops at important calling points along the route such as Preston and Carlisle. Some individual members of our Campaign will also be submitting their own responses to this consultation focussing on more detailed issues.

10) Such a new high-speed line offers enormous benefits to cities and towns located on the existing or 'classic' line, as the switch of long-distance non-stop services will allow substantial capacity to be released which will deliver:

- a recast timetable to enable more services between major towns on the route;
- new capacity for freight services;
- new, faster journeys to and from larger regional centres such as Lichfield Trent Valley, Tamworth, Nuneaton, Rugby, Northampton, and Milton Keynes;
- reductions in overcrowding;
- immediate improvements to all services north of Birmingham from day 1 of the opening of the first phase.

11) We also wish to secure benefits to communities in North Wales as soon as the first phase has been opened. Even if London to North Wales services have to remain on the classic WCML until the North Wales Coast line is electrified, there should be some combination of reduced journey times, increased frequencies and a better range of through services for North Wales. It could also open up the prospect of through services being reintroduced between London and Shrewsbury via the classic WCML and Birmingham, maybe even onto the Cambrian line.

12) We believe that HS2 offers a great opportunity to improve the connectivity to, and within, our regional economies. The wider economic benefits need to be stressed and full use must be made of the planning system to foster growth and locate new developments to take advantage of extra services on the 'classic' WCML from day one of the first phase of HS2. Any new stations on the high speed route must be accessible by public transport and located close to existing city centres.

13) We recognise the economic importance of high speed rail to Scottish regional centres and the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, and it is therefore important that high speed rail is not just considered as a link to London but is also considered in terms of improved links between Scotland and the North-West and West Midlands. A high speed line to Scotland, or starting in Scotland as well as at the London end, gives the opportunity for Birmingham

– Scotland and Manchester/Liverpool – Scotland services to use the new line.

14) There are arguments for commencing simultaneous construction of a new high speed line in Scotland, and we welcome the latest initiatives by the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland to develop the detailed economic case.

15) It is accepted by Network Rail and the Government that the interim period - between now and the opening of the first phase of HS2 - will see a major capacity shortfall on the WCML. We would therefore urge Network Rail and the DfT to explore all options for further infrastructure improvements and schemes that deliver extra capacity on the existing WCML.

16) We do not support those groups or individuals who believe that there is no case for a new high speed line based on assertions that there is still much extra capacity to be provided on the existing WCML through a further major 'upgrade'. We reject this view and would remind campaigners that the recent West Coast Route Modernisation, resulting in only a partial upgrade of the line, caused huge disruption to services and the public, particularly with weekend blockades. A repeat of this would not be worth the upheaval for what would be a relatively small increase in capacity compared with that arising from a new high speed line.

12th March 2012