

Mr Richard Eccles
Head of Route Planning
Network Rail
40 Melton Street
London NW1 2EE

5th January 2006

Our Ref: 5014_06_GNF

Dear Mr Eccles,

South West Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy – SWELTRAC Response

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above document. I am responding on behalf of SWELTRAC, the South and West London Transport Conference, a partnership of 12 local authorities, transport providers and operators, and organisations representing the interests of passengers and businesses.

Gap 1 - Capacity & Overcrowding

We welcome Network Rail's thorough analysis of the issues and options on the SWML. However we are concerned with the emphasis placed on capacity issues outside London, whereas the highest levels of overcrowding occur in the London area. In particular, the use of percentage figures to indicate higher growth in demand in outer suburban areas is misleading, as inner London areas have a much higher base figure of demand, and are likely to experience a higher volume of growth than outer suburban areas.

The RUS needs to consider the latest growth forecasts for developments near to stations, for example along the riverside affecting Wandsworth Town and Clapham Junction stations, in town centres such as Kingston and at Heathrow Airport. Individual local authorities will no doubt supply you with further details of such locations. The RUS should consider the problems of existing and forecast levels of overcrowding at individual stations and on local services as well as on the longer corridors, as we believe that these problems are more widespread than described in the document.

'Metro' Services

SWELTRAC wish to see the rail network in south London developed into a "metro" system of "turn-up-and-go" services, to compensate for the lack of Underground services, and to relieve highway congestion by providing an attractive alternative to the private car. As a first step, we have supported Transport for London's "ON" project, which has delivered higher frequency services on some routes, and we support their aspiration of 4 trains per hour on other routes. In particular, we would support the views of LB Richmond regarding the inferior services to Strawberry Hill station. This is the only station on the Kingston/Twickenham loop line that does not qualify as an 'ON' station, and the problem was exacerbated by the timetable changes that took place in December 2004. There is a similar problem at Whitton station on the Hounslow loop, which, whilst

served by 4 trains per hour, suffers from bunched timetabling which limits travelling options. Further down these routes, we would also encourage the undertaking of signalling improvements to help reduce delays at the four level crossings between Richmond and Barnes.

Gap 2 – Timetabling & Stopping Patterns

The review of the December 2004 timetable is welcomed, as although the timetable has resulted in greatly improved service reliability, there appears to be much slack in the timetable, with early running and leisurely journey times. However, the review of stopping patterns is of concern, as it could potentially result in the withdrawal of services from some stations, and undermine SWELTRAC's aspiration for a simple easily understood "metro" service for south London. The review could remove the additional stopping services introduced only a year ago at Wandsworth Town, Queenstown Road and Earlsfield, and possibly also result in a reduction in semi/fast trains stopping at Clapham Junction and Putney. This would be regrettable given the difficulty in boarding trains at these stations in the peak periods even with the recently enhanced capacity.

Gap 3 – Parking & Railheading

We are conscious that railheading is a particular issue at a number of stations within the SWELTRAC sub-region. We actively support any measures to improve interchange with other transport modes at all stations and believe that increased car parking should be limited to stations where there are poor public transport connections.

Gap 4 – Waterloo Capacity & Platform Lengths

We support TfL's proposals to improve orbital services around London to relieve congestion at central London termini, together with the development of key interchanges between radial and orbital routes at Clapham Junction, Wimbledon and Richmond. The RUS should aim to provide sufficient capacity in the system to provide for these services and to enable all services to stop at these interchanges. Additional services stopping at Vauxhall would also allow increased interchange with the Victoria Line for links to the new Eurostar terminal at St Pancras, thus reducing the need for many passengers to change at Waterloo.

Whilst recognising the difficulties involved, we would also welcome, where possible, increased platform lengths as a means of alleviating overcrowding by the use of ten or twelve car trains. This would be particularly relevant to any services taking over the current Eurostar platforms at Waterloo.

Airtrack

SWELTRAC is also concerned with the lack of serious evaluation given to Airtrack. This project is regarded as a key part of plans to improve rail services in south London, which currently has no direct rail access to Heathrow. Journeys to the airport are either by road or via the Underground with inconvenient interchanges at Paddington or Earls Court. Airtrack is an essential part of the infrastructure needed to serve the new Terminal 5, and Network Rail should ensure that the RUS plans sufficient capacity to enable the project to go ahead. At the very least Network Rail should conduct a sensitivity test of the current Airtrack proposals to ensure that the RUS does not

prejudice their implementation, and, where possible, capacity for it should be incorporated into improvement works.

Gap 5 - Clapham Junction Remodelling

The proposals to remodel parts of Clapham Junction are welcomed, but consideration should be given to bringing the larger scheme forward from the current possibility of 2025. Network Rail should work with developers and land owners in the locality to examine opportunities to improve the railway and platform alignments through the Station, and station infrastructure, to ensure that opportunities are not lost during redevelopment. This is particularly important in the vicinity of the southernmost platform 17, the realignment of which could facilitate further improvements to other platforms. Network Rail need to develop a master plan of improvements to the Station in conjunction with Wandsworth Council, which could then be used to guide potential developers in preparing schemes. In the shorter term, improvements should be made to platforms 7 and 8 to allow the two platforms to be used simultaneously and to enable the new generation of trains to be despatched from platform 8, now that slam door trains have been withdrawn.

Interchange Improvements

Network Rail should similarly plan for major improvements to other stations in the SWML area, to make them fully accessible and attractive centres for their communities, and to create convenient interchange with other services. To do this they need to be alert to development opportunities in the vicinity of stations and be prepared to co-operate with developers to achieve wider benefits for travellers. Local authorities will be pleased to assist in this process.

Gaps 6, 7 & 11 - Network Capacity & Freight

SWELTRAC also wish to see the bottlenecks taken out of the wider network, and therefore support the improvement of capacity at Woking (Gap 6), and Reading (Gap11). We would also wish to see Waterloo International re-used for domestic services on the SWML, as well as facilitating Airtrack, when Eurostar services are diverted to Kings Cross/St Pancras in 2007, as well as the removal of the Eurostar flyover at Nine Elms to allow an additional running line to be provided for the Windsor Lines. There are also a number of speed restrictions on the SWML which need to be eased to increase capacity, such as on the down slow line approaching Surbiton.

SWELTRAC also wish to see improved facilities for rail freight, with wider availability of routes for 9'6" container traffic (Gap 7).

I trust this letter clearly sets out SWELTRAC's comments on the RUS. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me on 020 8891 7323, or at c.tether@richmond.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

**Colin Tether,
SWELTRAC Manager**