

TRANSPORT COMMITTEE RESPONSE

1. In the medium to long term, what should be the main objectives for investment in the railways, in order to improve both freight and passenger services?

Local and regional train services need to be drastically improved to cope with the current problems of overcrowding. This applies as much to off peak loadings as it does to commuter periods as significant growth is evident in leisure travel. Trains should be refurbished on a rolling maintenance programme to afford acceptable comfort and seats to all passengers using them. Certain routes need to be electrified quickly (quick win?) and rolling stock procured so that improvements to services can be fast tracked. Many stations need to be upgraded to provide good waiting facilities and clean and safe environment.

2. How should these objectives be determined?

Stakeholders (both public and private sector) in all parts of the country must be involved in the process. Regional Passenger Champions need to be established to lead debate, programming and to chase progress. This may require some re-organisation of local authority transport policy provision. Robust passenger counts on congested and overcrowded routes will provide evidence for priorities.

3. What is the impact of rail enhancements on the economy?

Enhancements to quality of the travel experience, where it has taken place, has already demonstrated its worth to the economy. Passengers will follow quality and it is here that investment needs to be concentrated. Leisure travel can greatly benefit from improved and more frequent services as can business travel. A good, efficient and reliable rail network providing fast and frequent access between communities will attract more investment to developing towns and villages, as well as addressing road congestion. New lines and connections for fast freight and it would be timely to examine solutions for smaller industries remote from main rail routes to see if they can be advantaged by rail transport.

4. How should long-term development of major new infrastructure, such as high speed lines, be balanced against short and medium term investment to improve capacity and passenger experiences?

We see High Speed Rail (HSR) as an important development in the medium to long term. However the need for more capacity on local and inter regional trains should be the priority in the short to medium term. Electrification of the most appropriate routes and procurement of rolling stock, either by cascading or new build will determine the achievement date but this is likely to be much earlier than HSR. There also needs to be a determined effort to concentrate on the needs of regions and cities outside London and the South East, many of which suffer from inferior rolling stock and route networks. Manchester hub is an immediate priority.

5. Is enough consideration given to the integration of rail with other transport modes, and with demographic developments, such as new housing developments, when rail investment decisions are made?

No. Integration of transport modes is still a challenge. Provision of through ticketing and marketing of multi modal travel is still a patchwork and little attention is paid to sub-regions outside major cities, particularly rural areas where bus fares can be more than the train fare. Equally it can cost more to use a station car park than the

cost of the train journey and until this is addressed passengers will not be tempted from the convenience of their cars.

Provision of new stations for new housing developments tends to come as an after thought rather than part of the strategic planning process. An example is the Bruckshaw village development between Preston and Chorley where a new station is now being thought about 10 years after the development began.

6. Is enough consideration being given to the views of passengers in making investment decisions on the railways?

No. The current passenger representation is either remote or under resourced. Passenger Focus does not have the resource to cover regional needs and provide any immediacy of pressure to planners or train operators. Most other organisations are voluntary and fragmented and consequently unable to provide a totally effective representation. Outside the major city areas local authorities generally provide a poor level of representation due to under resource. The passenger view is now isolated and there needs to be an examination of a structure to adequately represent them and to be in a position to drive change with urgency.

7. What should be the key priorities for the next High Level Output Statement?

Investment in local and inter regional train quality, frequency and efficiency.

The Current Rail Investment Priorities and the Impact of the Recession

8. Is the current investment programme sufficient for the needs of the UK economy and for passengers themselves?

No. Whilst it has gone some way to make improvements many regions outside London and the South East retain trains that are not fit for purpose. Growth of passenger numbers continues to outstrip the investment need and there are many examples of passengers suffering severe overcrowding on cramped and old trains. Until a robust and reliable network is in operation (including multi modal opportunities) offering the passenger comfort, affordability and fast access to and from destinations the rail industry remains in a state of fragility. Unless quick and visible improvements are made there is a great danger of migration back to cars and nullified growth.

9. In light of the current economic crisis is it still important that projects designed to increase capacity continue on the present timescale?

It is vital that projects are not only continued but are enhanced. As the world comes out of recession the rail industry needs to be in a position to respond quickly. It will be likely that business leaders will have a very different outlook on the way economies work as growth is regained so there is likely to be a major opportunity for the railways. Projects may take many years and so the opportunity may be long passed if there is any easing of progress.