

# Response to East Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy Draft for Consultation

*11 November 2009*

London TravelWatch's Response to the Draft Route Utilisation Strategy



**London TravelWatch** is the official body set up by Parliament to provide a voice for London's travelling public, including the users of all forms of public transport.

Our role is to:

- Speak up for transport users in discussions with policy-makers and the media;
- Consult with the transport industry, its regulators and funders on matters affecting users;
- Investigate complaints users have been unable to resolve with service providers, and;
- Monitor trends in service quality.

Our aim is to press in all that we do for a better travel experience all those living, working or visiting London and its surrounding region.

Comments in our response are limited to our area of operations, except where the consequences of services or performance in other areas could have an impact south of Bedford.

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## Executive Summary

Network Rail published the East Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy for Draft for Consultation in August 2009. The RUS primarily focuses on the period from 2009 to 2019, but also gives consideration to strategy for the route up to 30 years in the future. London TravelWatch's key concern on the East Midlands Route is current and future capacity. Current levels of crowding on East Midlands Trains and First Capital Connect are significant at peak periods. Committed investment from the Thameslink Programme will provide a substantial increase in commuter capacity by 2015. The Intercity Express Programme is also planned to deliver capacity for long distance passengers.

- We Support – the inclusion of the Midland Mainline in the core mainline electrification strategy in the Network RUS. We also support the recommendation to conduct business case reviews of a number of infill electrification schemes that would have an impact upon the East Midlands Route.
- We Welcome – the options recommended addressing peak crowding and performance on the East Midlands Route. In particular we welcome the proposal for a flyover at Newark, which would increase capacity and improve performance on the East Midlands Route as well as the East Coast Main Line.
- We Recommend – scenarios with or without electrification of the Midland Mainline are considered for the options to address gaps. The reason for this is that many of the options are dependent on future electrification funding decisions. We suggest therefore that a range of scenarios are considered with and without electrification with options to address passenger demand.

London TravelWatch also recommends that the economic inputs of the RUS are reviewed both in light of the Draft Mayor's Transport Strategy and the prevailing economic outlook. Assumptions in the RUS may not fundamentally alter but it is important to understand the timing in which the gaps identified in the RUS develop.

## 1 Introduction

The East Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) covers a geographic scope of:

- Midland Mainline from London St Pancras to Sheffield via Derby and Nottingham,
- Core Thameslink Route north of Blackfriars to Bedford, and
- Regional East Midland services.

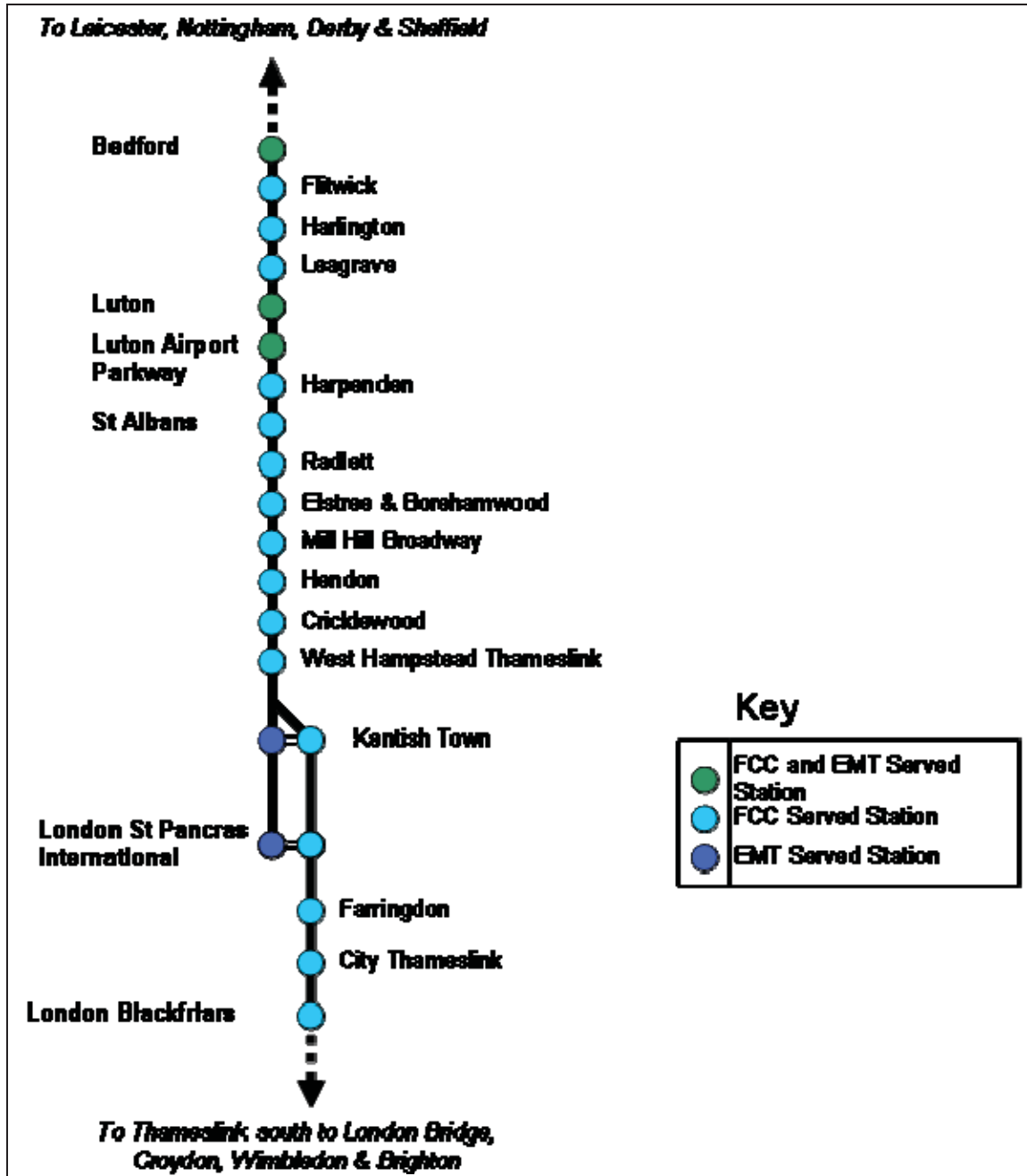
### *1.1 London TravelWatch's Geographic Scope*

London TravelWatch's remit extends from London as far as Bedford. Bedford is the northern limit of the Thameslink services on the Midland Mainline. There are two Train Operating Companies (TOCs) which operate trains services in the portion of the RUS within the Greater London area:

- East Midlands Trains (EMT) – Midland Mainline services to the East Midlands
- First Capital Connect (FCC) – Thameslink Services

The diagram overleaf details the stations within the East Midlands RUS which fall within the area of the National Rail network covered by London TravelWatch. Comments in London TravelWatch's response are limited to this area, except where the consequences of services or performance in other areas could have an impact south of Bedford.

Figure 1 – Diagram of East Midland Route National Rail Stations within the area covered by London TravelWatch



## **1.2 2004 SRA Midland Main Line & East Midlands RUS**

The Midland Mainline & East Midlands RUS was the first to be published by the then Strategic Rail Authority in 2004. The current East Midlands RUS is therefore part of an established process for evaluation of the strategic direction of the Britain's railway network.

The original 2004 RUS for the Midland Mainline and East Midlands only looked at a ten year period. The RUS that is currently being developed for this route has a far longer strategic view of thirty years. The strategy that the 2004 document set out was therefore focused on the shorter term. The main conclusions of the SRA 2004 RUS were:

- Additional stops in Midland Mainline trains at Bedford, Luton and Luton Airport Parkway to relieve overcrowding on Thameslink trains,
- Ongoing work to provide additional Thameslink trains,
- Ongoing work to examine the effect of Luton Airport Parkway having a much-improved Midland Mainline service,
- Abandonment of Midland Mainline's cross-platform interchange policy at Leicester,
- Restructuring the Nuneaton – Leicester – Nottingham corridor, with a reduction in service of 1 train per hour between Nuneaton and Nottingham, and
- Extending a London – Nottingham train to Leeds.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of these conclusions have either been delivered, or are in the process of being addressed. Since the 2004 SRA RUS there have been some key developments on the East Midlands Route and these are:

- The introduction of domestic and international high speed services on HS1 into St Pancras international, and
- The Thameslink Programme has received its funding go ahead, work has commenced on the infrastructure and rolling stock procurement.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 3.2, Midland Main Line / East Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy, SRA, 2004.

## 2 Strategic Gaps that have been identified by the RUS

The current capacity and demand have been established by Network Rail using December 2008 service capacity and its utilisation as a baseline. Forecasts of future demand have been generated of passenger numbers up until 2019 but consideration has been given to strategy up to 30 years in the future.

*Table 1 - RUS Strategic Gaps and Relevance to London TravelWatch*

No.	Gap	London TravelWatch Response
1	Peak crowding and growth in key corridors (peak crowding and growth)	Key in the area between St Pancras and Bedford
2	All day crowding and growth peak and off-peak (all day crowding)	Key in the area between St Pancras and Bedford
3	Freight capability of the network in terms of route availability, loading gauge, capacity and diversionary routes (freight capability)	London TravelWatch supports freight capability in order to relieve capacity on the North London Line for passenger services
4	Regional connectivity and journey times between various key locations either within the RUS area or outside RUS geographical scope (regional connectivity)	This gap has less relevance to London TravelWatch's remit as it largely refers to services outside greater London
5	Reactionary delays resulting in performance problems at some locations (performance)	Issue of concern for all transport users
6	Demand for travel in late evening and weekends (Seven Day Railway)	Issue of concern for all transport users



### 3 London TravelWatch Response

London and the surrounding region face twin challenges for its transport system, that of a forecasted expanding population and economy. The corridor from central London to the East Midlands is one such area where both population and economic growth is forecast. This means that the demand for transport is likely to increase placing further pressure on train services.

#### 3.1 Draft London Plan and Mayor's Transport Strategy

The Drafts of the London Plan and Mayor's Transport Strategy have both been released since the RUS Draft for Consultation was published. The two documents set out a strategy for transport in light of the forecasted population growth of 1.3 million and employment growth of 750,000 by 2031.

The London – Luton – Bedford corridor is identified as a growth area in the Mayor's Transport Strategy with a number of specific opportunity areas notably Cricklewood. The Strategy highlights the importance of the metropolitan connectivity as well as the demand for travel to and from central London. Clearer definition of the Cricklewood new station is needed in the RUS plans for services to the existing facilities and those that may come into use by 2015.

The Thameslink corridor in 2017, with the impact of the introduction of the Thameslink Programme is shown as having reduced from 'severely stressed' to 'highly stressed' in the Mayor's Strategy. However, even when the Thameslink Programme has been fully implemented, by 2031 TfL's modelling showings the corridor returns in the 'severely stressed' category<sup>2</sup>. This suggests that there would be a need for further capacity enhancements following on from the initial 2015 Thameslink Programme. London TravelWatch suggests that consideration is given therefore in the RUS to means to address post-2020 capacity on the East Midlands Route.

#### 3.2 RUS Economic Forecasts

The economic forecasts for this RUS were made in summer 2008 and updated at a later stage with revised assumptions. However, London TravelWatch suggests that these factors are further reviewed before publication. This is because of the potential impact of the revised assumptions on the timing of the gaps identified by the strategy. In ensuring that the forecasts are as up to date as possible, the strategy developed is more likely to accurately forecast for the growth in demand that is anticipated.

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<sup>2</sup> Figure 32, page 119, Draft Mayor's Transport Strategy

### 3.3 Current Capacity

The options in the RUS prior to the commencement of the Thameslink timetable in 2015 do not make a substantial difference to the capacity into and out of London. The basic number of trains on the Midland Mainline south of Bedford will not change in peak hours, and the option to introduce an additional peak hour service from Bedford has not been recommended due to a lack of capacity.

London TravelWatch therefore urges that the most efficient use of the existing paths is made. Specifically, in relation to Bedford, the current numbers of East Midlands Trains services calling are constrained by the Franchise Agreement with the Department for Transport. London TravelWatch recommends that consideration is given to stopping additional EMT services at Bedford to relieve crowding currently experienced, particularly in the evening peak. This is of particular significance prior to the introduction of the full Thameslink timetable in 2015.

The franchise agreement for East Midland Trains allows only the number of stops shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3 below. London TravelWatch would like to see further stops included in the evening peak in order to relieve overcrowding.

*Figure 2 - Maximum and Minimum Departures between 16:00 & 18:59 from St Pancras<sup>3</sup>*

Station	Minimum	Maximum
Luton Airport Parkway	3	5
Luton	4	5
Bedford	6	6

*Figure 3 - Maximum and Minimum Arrivals before 09:59 at St Pancras<sup>4</sup>*

Station	Minimum	Maximum
Luton Airport Parkway	2	3
Luton	4	4
Bedford	5	5

Evaluation from the passengers' perspective should be conducted of the most efficient distribution of stopping pattern between First Capital Connect and East Midlands Trains for stations south of Bedford.

### 3.4 Long term needs of Passengers

The Office of Rail Regulation in its letter to the rail industry about its Control Period 5 Periodic Review suggests that it is likely that public finances will be very

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/rail/passenger/invitationtotender/integratedeastmidland.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/rail/passenger/invitationtotender/integratedeastmidland.pdf>

tight. The Midland Main Line has been included in the Electrification RUS as a core mainline scheme but funding has yet to be committed. London TravelWatch welcomes electrification because according to the figures in the RUS by 2019, diesel IEP would only result in a 16% capacity increase, whereas an electric IEP would result in 30% extra seats.<sup>5</sup> Electrification would therefore provide more capacity than the diesel alternative.

However, in the current funding context there is therefore a funding risk for electrification. In order to address this risk London TravelWatch suggests that the RUS considers a range of options scenarios:

- With Midland Mainline Electrification, and
- Without Midland Mainline Electrification.

In considering these two basic scenarios, with or without electrification, it is more certain that the needs of passengers will be addressed by the options proposed in the RUS regardless of funding decisions.

#### 3.4.1 Infill Electrification

If the electrification of the Midland Mainline is to provide full benefits to passengers it should be accompanied with appropriate infill electrification schemes. In the case of the East Midlands RUS these include:

- North London Line and West London Line connections to the Great Western, West Coast and Midland Mainline. This would allow electrically hauled freight over more routes from the North London Line. As a result of the increased power offered by electric locomotives freight trains could be faster or heavier provide additional capacity for passenger services on the London Overground.
- Corby to Manton Junction to allow a diversionary route for the Midland Mainline. This would allow both freight and passenger services to operate on this diversionary route allowing greater flexibility and engineering maintenance activities to be conducted without the need for replacement bus services.
- Felixstowe to Nuneaton electrification would allow full diversion of electrically hauled freight from Felixstowe to the West Midlands without passing over the North London Line. This would release capacity for London Overground passenger services.
- Birmingham to Stansted Airport would allow electrically powered services to operate over the key section around Leicester Station. The faster accelerating electric units would reduce capacity which is utilised by this train services.

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<sup>5</sup> Page 79, East Midlands RUS Draft for Consultation, August 2009

No commitment has yet been given to the funding of the electrification of the Midland Mainline, or any of the infill schemes mentioned. London TravelWatch has concerns about the risk that these schemes will not be funded in the timescales the RUS suggests.

### **3.5 Stations**

The RUS does not give significant attention to the facilities provided at stations beyond the National Stations Improvement Plan and other CP4 schemes. Along the lines of the DfT stations review possible consideration could be given to the following:

- The minimum stations facilities appropriate to the size of passenger flow, and
- The role of stations as transport interchanges with other modes of transport.

An example of a station for consideration is Bedford Station in relation to Thameslink as well as local redevelopment proposals.

Particularly at key stations and interchanges, step-free access must be provided. This is something which for most stations on the route will presumably be included as part of the Thameslink Programme. However, this does not seem to have been assessed as part of the baseline information.

The baseline information identifies that, of the stations between Bedford and St Pancras, only Luton Airport Parkway and Hendon have car parks that are not full by 9 am. There are specific car parking schemes at Luton, Flitwick and St Albans, however, this still leaves a substantial number of stations under provisioned so far as car parking is concerned.

### **3.6 St Pancras International**

The platforms that are used by East Midlands Trains at St Pancras International are 260 metres long. This creates an upper limit to train length on these services which is difficult to solve, given the constraints of the St Pancras area. In addition the narrowness of the station concourse means that the area for passengers both boarding and alighting is constrained. With passenger increases, the flow of passengers in this part of the station may in future cause problems.

Central London station capacity is an issue affecting the East Midlands RUS at St Pancras International in particular. The RUS draft currently does not address the issue of station capacity at the key London Stations as a gap. London TravelWatch suggests that the constrained nature of the St Pancras station concourse, as well as the absolute length of the platform is a gap when the numbers of additional passengers forecast are taken into account.

### **3.7 Thameslink Programme**

#### **3.7.1 Disruption**

Passengers will undoubtedly benefit from the Thameslink Programme. However, its implementation is leading to disruption in the short term. As part of joint research by London TravelWatch, Passenger Focus and the DfT in to the Thameslink Rolling Stock Project passengers' concerns about disruption featured highly in responses to the research. This research produced in 2008 showed that while passengers understood the long term benefits they were concerned about the medium term impact on them during the period of construction.

The challenge for the rail industry as a whole is to keep this disruption to a minimum and to effectively communicated information to passengers. Effective communication will allow passengers to plan journeys as far as possible around the disruption as well as increasing understanding of the eventual benefits of the scheme. The objectives of a 'Seven Day Railway' may be hard to achieve with engineering access needed to deliver Thameslink.

#### **3.7.2 Budgetary Concerns**

London TravelWatch is concerned that in the current economic climate that the Thameslink Programme could be vulnerable to budgetary pressures. We have written to the Secretary of State seeking assurances that the benefits to passengers will not be reduced by funding cuts or delayed by changes to the programme.

#### **3.7.3 Future Passenger Requirements**

As has already been mention the Draft Mayor's Transport Strategy forecasts demand which will see the need for additional capacity on the East Midlands Route by 2031. Additional review could be considered of these forecasts in the East Midlands RUS.

#### **3.7.4 Cricklewood (Brent Cross Development)**

The Cricklewood redevelopment project is given significant status in the Mayor's Transport Strategy. However, it is not entirely clear how the RUS intends to factor in the traffic generated by this development.

### **3.8 High Speed 1**

The opening of St Pancras International to Eurostar Trains as well as domestic high speed services is a key change since the 2004 SRA RUS. The RUS could consider whether the long distance passenger services on the Midland Mainline are sufficiently integrated with the high speed services to Europe, Stratford and Kent. The draft Mayor's Transport Strategy seeks to encourage more direct

services to European destinations and the impact of this could be considered further as part of the RUS.

### **3.9 Capacity North of Bedford**

There are a number of key constraints on capacity of the Midland Mainline which fall outside the area of London TravelWatch. However, we are keen to support the following schemes to address these constraints for two reasons,

- Increased capacity for passenger trains allowing more services from London and improved performance, and
- Diversion of freight traffic away from London to provide additional passenger capacity on core London orbital and radial routes.

The schemes in question are those to increase capacity north of Bedford are:

- Leicester to Trent Line Speed Improvements in HLOS,
- Ipswich to Nuneaton Capacity Improvements (CP5 in Leicester area), and
- East Midlands Signalling Renewals – Remodelling of Trent East Junction. 2009-10.

## 4 Conclusion

London TravelWatch welcomes the proposals to address the needs of passengers' in the East Midlands RUS draft for consultation. The benefits that will be delivered on this route by Thameslink and IEP are significant in terms of passenger capacity. London TravelWatch is concerned that in the short term the most efficient usage is made of the existing capacity prior to the implementation of these two projects.

In terms of gaps that have not been directly addressed by the RUS, London TravelWatch suggests that consideration is given to central London station capacity, as there is a clear issue with the volume of passengers forecast to be using St Pancras International. In addition, we also suggest that the basic facilities of stations are also assessed relative to their passenger usage.

In respect of future solutions to gaps identified on the East Midlands Route, London TravelWatch recommends that scenarios with and without electrification are considered when developing options. In this way it is more likely that the needs of passengers will be met regardless of funding decisions on electrification of the Midland Mainline.

## Appendix A – Glossary

Term	Definition
CP4 / 5	Control Period 4 / 5
DfT	Department for Transport
EMT	East Midlands Trains
FCC	First Capital Connect
HLOS	High Level Output Specification
IEP	Intercity Express Programme
ORR	Office of Rail Regulation
RUS	Route Utilisation Strategy
SoFA	Statement of Funds Available
SRA	Strategic Rail Authority
TOC	Train Operating Company