

## MEETING HELD AT BIRMINGHAM WITH NETWORK RAIL 23.02.11

**Present:** Geoff. Steel & Patrick Rawlinson N.R.U.G. Tony Rudge & Mick Butler Network Rail.  
**Line speed Northampton – Rugby:** Signalling improvements in hand to raise speed eventually to 85 mph. These will be completed by June 2012 and effectively “enhance” existing 3 aspect signals with, in some cases, repositioning. Track improvements – no final date available but after above.

Line speed dictated by tripling of Daventry inland port terminal in near future with consequential increase in freight traffic. To maximise line capacity, all trains ideally run at the same speed (thought freight would be 75 max. but not confirmed at meeting). No funding for anything higher as “differential speeds” passenger / freight not conducive to improving line capacity.

**Line speed Northampton – Euston:** No change i.e. Slow Lines 100 mph, Fast Lines 125 mph. The 125 needs qualifying as it only applies to tilting trains, otherwise the maximum throughout W.C.M.L. is 110 mph for conventional stock. This is relevant when “new build” stock is being considered. At a meeting with D.f.T. Stuart Baker mentioned there would be new Inter City trains to replace the ageing existing fleet. Three lines were up for consideration viz. East Coast, Great Western and London Midland. In the light of the foregoing, it seems he was being disingenuous as we are very unlikely to ever attract this type of train serving Northampton for the aforementioned reason. In Birmingham it was categorically ruled out that the “Northampton Loop” will ever be equipped with balises to activate trains in tilt mode.

**New rolling stock serving Northampton:** Currently there has been no new build for some 2 years for any line. This means that existing trains cannot be strengthened with extra coaches for the foreseeable future, so overcrowding will continue. However, one olive branch was discussed by Network Rail which would see the reintroduction of the “07.12” or equivalent, formed by two sets of Virgin Super Voyagers (Class 221) which can tilt; this is envisaged as a non-stop service to Euston. There would be a balanced return working in the evening rush hour.

**Northampton Castle Station rebuild:** We were shown simulated computer pictures of how it was envisaged the new station would look. The design is certainly attractive at first glance but there are snags!

- 3 levels – *Top level* accessible from West Bridge with booking office and overbridge access to platforms 2 & 3. *Middle level* leads to new car park for c. 1300 cars. *Ground level* for taxis, pedestrians and other car users.

### Plus factors of proposed design

- Likely that a second footbridge be provided at North end of platforms, obviating need for everyone to use just the one. This will help to reduce congestion at the South end.
- Existing station facilities will continue whilst the new station construction takes place with minimum disruption.
- Disabled travellers will find the new facilities infinitely better than at present.

### Negative factors of new station

- No bus stop on West Bridge giving direct access to booking office and platforms (presumably people will have to walk from the existing stops).
- No provision for buses to use the station forecourt, preventing this ever being a terminus. Several services have previously or still do use this facility.
- No set-down point for taxis at West Bridge pedestrian entrance.
- In answer to a question re. the castle site, there was a vague suggestion of “relocation”!
- One road access for all traffic (two at present). This will only be from St. Andrews Road.
- Retaining only the existing three through platforms. It was apparent we would need a far stronger case for the fourth. All the positive arguments were made but it comes down to cost. A new platform would require signalling and track alterations which cannot be justified with the present and (possibly) envisaged level of patronage. If the Bedford line does get rebuilt, it would be possible and probably desirable, for “Thameslink” trains to continue to Rugby rather than terminating at Northampton.

## Aspirations for future services

**Northampton – Bedford line:** This line was surveyed c. 2002 by Connex (then operating a Rugby – Brighton service) and mentioned by W.N.D.C. in their inaugural public meeting in December 2005. Subsequently this has been mentioned at meetings with several Transport Ministers. One, Tom Harris, said “I know all about the Northampton – Bedford line; I am waiting for your County Council to make a submission”. Later, Patrick had a meeting with Jim Harker (County Council Chairman) who was acquainted with the above facts. He promised to bring this up shortly at a meeting with the other County Representatives involved viz. Bedford and Bucks. But there was no follow up. In view of the in-depth survey that was made, this seems an opportunity lost. Why does the Borough Council protect the track bed for 47 years after closure if there is no intention of reopening?

At to-day’s meeting, Patrick reassured Network Rail that a reinstated line would not involve a new level crossing at Bridge Street. The railway would run over the roadway via a railway underbridge giving M.O.T. clearance for road users. There would be an approach gradient of c. 1 in 80 for rail traffic which is well within the capabilities of modern traction.

**Oxford – Bletchley (flyover) - W.C.M.L.:** Chiltern Railways have focussed on reopening this East – West link where the trackbed and much of the track still exists. A separate exercise has shown a good business case for this. Should this materialise, Northampton would benefit with a direct link to the South and West instead of the present alternatives of either via London or Birmingham.

## General

**Recommendation from Network Rail to progress way forward:** The “key players” are Department for Transport (who hold the purse strings for Network Rail and largely dictate policy) and the Transport Minister. The latter in particular can only respond positively to a major scheme from a direct approach by *Northamptonshire County Council*, something which has not happened hitherto.

We have had regular meetings with the various Transport Secretaries but no representation locally with D.f.T. since Tony Francis came nearly a decade ago. Perhaps in the light of to-day’s findings this should be reconsidered.

**Birmingham service:** Extra off-peak service operating from the May 2011 timetable between 10.00 and 15.00 hours.

**Franchises:** Virgin ends March 2012

London Midland December 2014

**Rugby stop:** Strong representation made for Inter-City stop citing “catchment” area of  $\frac{3}{4}$  million people [M.K. 207,057, Northampton 194,458, Coventry 300,848, Rugby 87,453 – 2007 figures] Stated that it was sometimes as quick to travel Glasgow-Euston-Northampton (extra 130 miles) than using the intended service via Birmingham.

## Not discussed at Birmingham meeting

London Midland rolling stock consist:

Class 350/1 30 sets of 4 carriages introduced 2004

Class 350/2 37 sets of 4 carriages introduced 2008

Class 321 7 sets of 4 carriages retained from Silverlink (used peak hours and St. Albans branch)

There have been no orders for new carriages anywhere for over 700 days (nearly 2 years). This severely limits the scope for stock transfer between operators and cascading to other lines. It is likely that a further delay of up to a year will ensue following the resumption of orders being placed.

**Patrick Rawlinson**

401  
299  
281  
249  
230  
209  
194  
182  
158  
82  
50  
0  
Miles

<b>Glasgow</b>	
Carlisle	
Penrith	
Oxenholme	
Lancaster	
Preston 128,542	
Wigan 301,417	
Warrington 191,080	
Crewe 111,007 (with Nantwich)	
Rugby 87,453	
Milton Keynes 207,057	
<b>Euston</b>	<b>2007</b>

<b>Glasgow</b>	
Carlisle	
Preston 128,542	
Wigan 301,417	
Warrington 191,080	
<b>Euston</b>	<b>2009</b>

<b>Glasgow</b>	
Carlisle	
Preston 128,542	
Crewe 111,007 (with Nantwich)	
<b>Rugby</b> 87,453 "Catchment for"	
Coventry 300,848	
Northampton 194,458	
Milton Keynes 207,057	
<b>TOTAL = 789,816</b>	
<b>Euston</b>	<b>*2012</b>
	* Opportunity for change at Renewal of Franchise

393  
335  
268  
254  
232  
188  
156  
76  
0  
Miles

<b>Edinburgh</b>	
Berwick 25,949	
Newcastle 259,536	
Durham 87,709	
Darlington 97,838	
York 181,094	
Doncaster 286,856	
Peterborough 156,061	
<b>Kings Cross</b>	<b>2007</b>