

## Railfuture East Anglia Response to draft Greater Norwich Local Plan

Railfuture East Anglia sets out its response to the latest draft of the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP). Our comments are principally in response to Q23 which asks 'Do you have support, object or have any comments relating to approach to transport?'

### Introduction

We are disappointed that while the GNLP aspires to a considerable shift to non-car modes of transport, very little detail is given as to how this will be achieved. Rail in particular receives very little reference within the document. We appreciate that there is ongoing work with the Transport for Norwich Strategy, and the emerging Transforming Cities programme, and that more detail has been promised for the submission version of the plan. We also presume that the recently published draft Norfolk Rail Prospectus (NRP) will contribute to the plan, although this is not explicitly stated.

However we can see no reason why a stronger strategic framework could not have been set out within this document, to be filled in with more detail later. As things stand the value of the Regulation 18 consultation has been diminished because the transport strategy will only be properly presented after the consultation is over.

### Towards a zero carbon emissions Norwich City

The addition of 44,000 new homes in the Greater Norwich area over the lifetime of the plan will place greatly increased demands upon the city's transport system. Against this backdrop radical measures will be needed to contain traffic congestion, improve air quality and reduce particulate pollution. In addition, over the plan's lifetime Norwich will have to ensure that its carbon emissions are dramatically reduced.

There is little reference to the role that rail can play in the meeting the transport needs of a growing Norwich. Rail is by far the most sustainable way of moving large numbers of people at speed and sustainably. Policy 4 does indeed refer to 'innovative use of the local rail network' being made but no further explanation is given as to what this might entail.

The five railway service groups that converge on Norwich can have a much larger part to play in improving general quality of life and helping to reach carbon reduction targets. Currently rail commuting is relatively small compared to Cambridge. With longer and more frequent services for early to late, at clock face timings, new fare initiatives such as a London style intermodal zonal fares, many more users could be encouraged to use rail. In response to Policy 6 on the Economy, we maintain that improved local rail services would be beneficial to Norwich city centre not only in helping to retain existing jobs but also in attracting new ones. Journey times are competitive – for example 15 minutes from Wymondham to Norwich and 20 minutes from Diss. Much of the city centre can be reached with a 15 minute walk or less from Norwich station.

## Vision and Strategy

A stronger vision should be developed for delivering and promoting rail services across the Greater Norwich area in order to drive up local rail travel from the current level. This could be a vision along the lines of the Devon Metro concept which set out to achieve half hourly frequencies on Devon lines, particularly those centred on Exeter, and also set out aims for adding new stations and reopening closed lines (Okehampton and Tavistock). There has been success with a core half hourly local service being introduced from Exmouth via Exeter, where the trains reverse, to Torbay.

Because rail can move people fast and effectively over longer distances, local rail services include those to towns lying outside the Greater Norwich Area, including Thetford, North Walsham, Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft and potentially Dereham.

## Increased frequencies

Apart from the Great Eastern Mainline where three trains per hour are already committed under the existing franchise, half hourly frequencies should be a key part of any strategy for all other routes. The aspiration for half hourly interval services is already contained within the draft NRP but there is no plan or timeframe for the delivery of this objective.

We propose that improved frequencies could be linked to known future events such as the Greater Anglia franchise renewal in 2025 or the likely introduction of East West Rail services in the late 2020's.

For the Bittern Line, work has already been done on the potential for a half hourly service to North Walsham in conjunction with the new station proposed for Broadland Business Park. As an increasing number of houses are delivered in the North East Norwich Growth Triangle, further project work and lobbying should be carried out with a view to having a half hourly service incorporated into the new franchise from 2025.

As with the Devon metro, there is a case for a cross city service for Norwich. This could be done by extending a future new North Walsham service to Thetford, where the signalling system allows a turn back. This would link the Broadland Business Park with the growing residential areas to the south west of the City and the developing 'Cambridge Norwich Tech Corridor'. A timing could be achieved from Wymondham, say, to the Business Park of 25 minutes, including a reversal at Norwich. Further possibilities could be opened up with a new station at Thickthorn (see below).

The delivery of East West Rail (see below) opens up substantial opportunities for increased services not just between Cambridge and Norwich, but also extended onwards to Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

The Eastern Section Rail Prospectus published last year made a high level case for rail connectivity between Norwich and Oxford, and the Atkins Conditional Output Statement from 2017 outlined the potential for the kind of service that could be developed with up to three trains per hour. The Atkins study also made the case for the extension of East West services to Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

A further study will now be commissioned by the East West Rail consortium to determine the kind of service which could be implemented when East West Rail is completed in the mid to late 20's. There is an opportunity therefore not only to achieve the half hourly interval service for the Norwich to Cambridge route, but also on the Wherry Lines, as well as formulating longer distance services towards Oxford and the west.

In summary we believe that there is much preparatory work that can be done before the current franchise expires and East West rail becomes operational to bring about the half hourly interval services that the NRP aspires to, and which should be recognised as an aim within this plan.

To enable rail to play a much larger part in creating sustainable commuting, we would like this train service pattern to emerge:

- 2tph from the Yarmouth and Lowestoft lines with all stations having at least 1tph
- 2tph semi fast from Cambridge including 1tph from Stansted Airport
- 1tph fast from Peterborough
- 1tph all stations from Thetford Cross City to North Walsham
- 1tph semi fast from Sheringham
- 1tph all stations including Long Stratton (see below) from Ipswich
- 2tph fast from London Liverpool Street

Ideally the 1tph from Stansted Airport should continue cross city to Yarmouth

## **Improved travel times**

Increased frequencies would permit a mix of fast and stopping trains. This means that journey times for fast services do not need to be compromised by the addition of new stations (see below).

While the NRP aspires to a 70 minute timing for Cambridge to Norwich, in the longer term the East West Rail prospectus envisages a 60 minute journey time with upgrading to the eastern section track and signalling improvements. The delivery of timing improvements should be considered in the context of the franchise renewal and the introduction of East West services.

If East West Rail can facilitate an improved frequency from Great Yarmouth it should be possible for one train per hour to run fast to Norwich in 25 minutes (faster than the aspirational 28 minutes contained within the NRP). A good connection at Norwich with a 90 minute London express would get very close to delivering a 2 hour Yarmouth to London timing.

## **New Infrastructure Investment**

We continue to stress the importance of developing with Network Rail proposals for replacing Trowse Swing Bridge with a two track bridge and providing a timeline for this. With accelerated proposals for East West Rail being delivered by the mid/late 20's the benefits that Norwich is seeking from this project together will not be fully deliverable unless the bridge is replaced.

## **Delivery of Accessible stations**

We believe that a time frame for making Wymondham and Diss fully accessible should be specified. The Cambridge facing platform at Wymondham is totally non-accessible, all the more unacceptable now that the County Council intends to make Wymondham station a transport hub, with bus connections. Diss station is not fit for purpose and requires the installation of lifts. As the only Norfolk station on the GEML other than Norwich itself this situation is no longer acceptable and disadvantages many potential passengers.

## **New Station at Broadland Business Park**

We are pleased to learn that a proposed new station has been retained in the Norfolk Infrastructure Plan, after some concern that this may have been removed.

We understand that the reason for the proposed removal was Norfolk County Council's understanding that running costs of the station would need to be underwritten in perpetuity.

However Railfuture's understanding of the rules for New Station Fund openings is that the underwriting of net operating costs is limited to 3 years. (See Derbyshire County Council cabinet report of 23 February 2016 regarding the new Ilkeston station).

The proposal for building a new Business Park Station is also linked with increasing the frequency of the Norwich to North Walsham service to half hourly. We accept there may well be separate subsidy issues linked to the provision of the additional train.

It may be necessary therefore to consider the provision of a new station and the provision of additional trains as separate projects. So the provision of new trains could be considered under new franchise proposals (see above) with the new station proposals being developed separately on its own merits and with funding being sought from the New Stations Fund.

### Wymondham to Dereham line

We understand that following on from its decision to look at the possibilities for reinstating the King's Lynn to Hunstanton line, Norfolk County Council may also look at the merits of reintroducing passenger services on the Wymondham to Dereham line. We would strongly support this step for reasons set out below:

- Dereham is a growing town with a combined population of town and neighbouring parishes likely to reach 30,000 over the life time of the Greater Norwich Plan. The town is the largest in Norfolk not rail served and the third largest in the East of England after Wisbech and Haverhill, both of which have rail/light rail reopening proposals under evaluation.
- A reopened rail link would help the economy of the town and allow for further growth. It would be good to permit additional housing growth in new areas, additional to commitments already made along A11 corridor or North East Norwich Growth Triangle.
- A rail link would not only create improved commuting opportunities to Norwich but by connecting to the national network would allow much better connections generally, including London and Cambridge.
- A railhead at Dereham would provide better access to rail for those residents living to the north of the town, particularly Fakenham.

We would of course expect the County Council to work very closely with the Mid Norfolk Railway in developing any proposals, without whose dedicated work the line would not exist today.

### Additional new stations

#### Introduction

Due to the rapid growth of Greater Norwich planned over the next 20 years, a detailed assessment should be made for potential new stations within the area, and how any such stations could contribute to the role of rail in contributing to the transport needs of the Greater Norwich area.

Railfuture has previously suggested new stations for Long Stratton and Thickthorn, and again set out our reasons why they should be included in the prospectus.

### Long Stratton

We have previously put forward a proposal for considering a new station at Forncett, near Long Stratton on the Great Eastern main Line. We explained this would not affect the Norwich in 90 proposals because there was provision for a third train per hour under the new franchise which could provide a stopping service. However the NRP continues to imply that a new station would be incompatible with reducing journey times. In view of what we have said we do not understand why the County Council still believes this to be the case.

Under the Plan there are proposals for nearly 2,000 new houses at Long Stratton, the additional homes being equivalent to a small town in itself. We believe that developments of this size should not be planned without rail access in mind.

The total population of Long Stratton will reach around 10,000 and is likely to be comparable with that of Diss. Public transport by way of bus provision will not provide the connectivity with the national rail network that a town of this projected size would need. In contrast a train service to Norwich taking some 12 minutes would be extremely attractive compared to a peak hour bus service taking some 40 minutes. A long bus journey to Norwich or Diss in order to even access a rail station is a disincentive to travel by rail at all.

Many residents do not drive, including increasing numbers of young people. In addition, skilled and mobile workers who may drive increasingly expect to have good and convenient rail services to hand an alternative. If the town is to develop to its full potential it needs to remain attractive to young people and skilled workers and a rail station would help in achieving this objective.

### Thickthorn

A new station with good car parking could serve the expanding communities to the west of Norwich, bring about new rail based journeys, and avoid the need to access the main station to the east of the city centre. Interchange could be provided with a high quality bus link to the Research Park, Hospital, UEA, city centre and main station, which could form the basis for a tram or light rail link at a later date.

The NRP claims that a new station would be at a considerable distance from the destination it is proposed to serve and would not offer any advantage over existing stations at Wymondham and Norwich.

In fact depending on its siting, a new station would be 2 to 3 miles from Hethersett, Cringleford and the Research Park. This distance is small enough to allow most methods of travel to access the station, including short distance bus, taxi, drop off and pick up by car, and cycle. This would offer better access to residential areas growing to some 16,500 residents under the life of the Greater Norwich Plan and also the Research Park which is home to 12,000 jobs.

While we support the concept of a transport hub at Wymondham in the short term it would not provide the same connectivity that a new station would. An 8 mile bus ride from Wymondham station to the Research Park would not be such an attractive proposition following on from a train journey already made from the Cambridge direction. Hethersett would also be some 5 miles distant from the hub and so less accessible than from a station at Thickthorn.

Development of the Cambridge line under East West Rail will mean an increase in the number of trains and would permit a mix of fast and stopping services.

## Rackheath and North Thetford

We welcome further studies and possible developer contributions for these new stations linked to new development. Such stations would best be served by a new local North Walsham-Norwich-Thetford service to avoid adding stops to existing longer distance services.

## Onward Connections

Journeys for rail users to and from stations should be made as integrated as possible. The following improvements are needed.

- Better real time information for buses. The current system does not work properly in that information is not displayed for some buses and users are in doubt as to whether services are running or not
- Improved integration of rail and bus tickets, including more promotion of Plus Bus, day tickets and season tickets in Norwich and other towns
- Public confidence – it will only be there if the bus service is totally reliable. Cancelled and late running services need to be identified and bus companies and local authorities held accountable.
- More evening bus services
- Electric buses - to improve air quality
- More bus priority measures for key bus routes to improve timings and reliability. As many local routes as possible need to integrate with Norwich station. For those that can't there needs to be a congestion free, high frequency and quality link between the rail station, Castle Meadow and the bus station.
- Norwich station – City Centre – UEA – Hospital – Research Park – Thickthorn is a key route with a large and increasing number of users. This would be a route suitable for converting to tram operation in the longer term, given new lower cost options for laying tracks and for battery powered trams over route sections.
- Site specific requirements for new developments within the GNLP area should include improvements to local public transport including all day bus links to the nearest station and contributions towards station improvements or new stations.
- Additional bike spaces are needed at all existing stations. New developments should be required to have dedicated cycle ways to stations, and a new network of cycle ways should be developed to existing stations.
- Major new developments should include 'hold points' so that further development cannot take place until any further required new transport infrastructure is in place.

We welcome the Norwich Transforming Cities bid which seeks to address many of the issues that are raised above.

## Freight

Sites should be identified for future road/rail interchange within the Norwich and Yarmouth areas. The needs of rail freight should also be considered as part of any rail line upgrades.

Rail freight can support sustainable development by allowing construction materials to be delivered by rail.

Norwich and Yarmouth are remote from the core of the national rail freight network. We recommend that the local authorities work with industry, particularly the supermarket retail

industry, to seek ways of operating domestic intermodal freight trains from the warehouses of the Midlands to be distributed from intermodal terminals at both Norwich and Yarmouth.

Parcels and other small units of freight are a fast growing road based sector. Many towns and cities are considering consolidation centres on the edge of urban areas in order to cut down multiple small deliveries. These deliveries can be taken on by bicycle courier or small electric vehicles.

Consolidation centres should be at railway freight terminals so that the evolving concept of express parcel trains can carry out the bulk transit. The local authorities should work with rail freight companies working up projects in this area of logistics.

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