

## **Council – 19th November 2012**

### **Notice of motion – Electrified railway network**

I set out below a notice of motion to Council on 19th November 2012 from Councillors I. Shires, D.A. Shires, Woodruff and Barker:

*This Council notes the importance of an electrified railway network.*

*This Council notes between 1997 and 2010 under the last Labour Government, only 39 miles of railway track was electrified.*

*This Council welcomes recent announcements made by the Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition to invest £9.4 billion into modernise our railways, including the electrification of the Walsall to Rugeley Trent Valley railway line and increasing capacity in the West Midlands.*

*This Council therefore resolves that the Chief Executive be requested to write to the Minister welcoming this investment.*

### **Background information**

The route between Walsall and Rugeley (the Chase Line) is the highest priority for in-fill electrification in the West Midlands (following on from the already approved Barnt Green – Bromsgrove route).

The scheme will involve the electrification of around 15 miles of existing double track railway line, linking the already electrified West Coast Main Line and Birmingham – Walsall route. It will cost circa £30 million.

The Walsall – Rugeley electrification project will deliver immediate benefits and efficiencies, especially in respect of the operation of local passenger services between Birmingham, Walsall, Cannock and Rugeley improving connectivity for commuters, business and leisure users through reduced journey times and more frequent services.

In July 2012 the Government included the scheme in the High Level Output Specification (HLOS). This is a statement of its objectives for control period 5 (period 2014-19). The HLOS is given to the rail industry in response to the Initial Industry Plan (IIP) which they had given to DfT in September 2011.

The rail industry will now produce a Strategic Business Plan for DfT approval in January 2013. This will need to include the Walsall to Rugeley electrification scheme for it to be delivered in the 2014-19 funding period. Therefore continued lobbying is essential to ensure that funding is secured.

## **Description of outcomes/impact of the scheme to support economic growth/job creation**

The project will improve accessibility between the Birmingham City Centre Enterprise Zone (EZ) and residents and business in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership area (GBS LEP) and the Black Country.

The scheme improves connections between areas within the GBS LEP supporting the principle of creating a fully-functional economic geography, spreading economic benefits throughout the partnership.

The project supports the ongoing revitalisation of Walsall town centre by improving access to a range of potential workers, shoppers and visitors.

Estimated economic benefits equate to an additional £113m of GVA benefit per annum to the wider West Midlands (equivalent to 1,370 additional jobs).

### **Project Details**

The scheme will enable a half-hourly service to operate on the Chase Line improving connectivity for commuters and businesses on a cost effective basis

It will improve connections for passengers changing at Rugeley Trent Valley for services to Stafford, Lichfield and London.

It will avoid the current need to reduce the peak service frequency on the Chase Line to free-up scarce diesel rolling stock resources.

It will provide faster journey times and improved connectivity with higher capacity electric trains.

Provide £21.3 million user and non-user benefits and in excess of £25 million revenue/operating cost benefits (2002 Present Value) according to Network Rail.

It will allow the conversion of the existing local diesel service on the Birmingham – Walsall – Rugeley line to electric operation, freeing up further diesel trains to strengthen overcrowded services on other routes in West Midlands.

It will create a new electrified route between the West Midlands and the North West, relieving capacity on the current Birmingham New St – Wolverhampton – Stafford route and creating an effective diversionary route for passenger and freight services thereby facilitating a more robust 7-day railway operation.

Electrification work will also make it easier to create a larger loading gauge allowing the increasingly common 9'6 containers to be transported which would have benefits for proposed freight terminal at Pentalver.

It will make it easier to provide direct electric services to Birmingham International and Coventry.

In the longer term, electrification could allow services such as the Birmingham – Liverpool train to run via Walsall, significantly improving Walsall’s connectivity to Stafford and the North West, and giving new commercial opportunities to serve a town that is larger than the City of Wolverhampton.

Post-HS2 such as service could be combined with the Birmingham – London semi-fast trains to provide a through service to London.

### **Wider Chase Line Improvements**

The electrification schemes will follow re-signalling and line speed improvements due to be completed in 2013/14. The line speed will rise from 45mph to 75mph allowing journey time improvements.

A scheme to close Bloxwich Level crossing to motorised traffic is also currently being publicly consulted upon. This scheme would remove the 20mph line speed limit at the crossing, allowing more efficient running on the line. With electrification and consequently more trains using the line, the barriers on the crossing will be down for longer periods (possibly up to 30-45 minutes per hour), causing congestion in the local area. The Council is working with Network Rail to investigate if closing the crossing, installing a pedestrian bridge at the current crossing site and improving alternative vehicular routes would be a better option than the unpredictability and consequent congestion caused by a level crossing remaining on the line.

In the Walsall Unitary Development Plan there is a proposal to move Bloxwich Station from its current site in a cutting to its original location adjacent to the crossing. The aim of this is to improve security at the station, provide a park and ride facility, bring the station closer to Bloxwich district centre and to remove some of the overlap between the catchments of Bloxwich and Bloxwich North stations which would hopefully improve patronage. This is still an aspiration of the Council, although building a business case for the change is difficult when it is only served by one train per hour. This situation may improve once electrification and service improvements are completed.

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