



Response by the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport to the Network Rail Western Route Study Consultation

The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (“the Institute”) is a professional institution embracing all transport modes whose members are engaged in the provision of transport services for both passengers and freight, the management of logistics and the supply chain, transport planning, government and administration. Our principal concern is that transport policies and procedures should be effective and efficient, based on objective analysis of the issues and practical experience, and that good practice should be widely disseminated and adopted. The Institute has a number of specialist forums, a nationwide structure of locally based groups and a Public Policies Committee which considers the broad canvass of transport policy. This submission has been prepared by the Institute’s Rail Freight Forum.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT) welcomes the opportunity to comment on Network Rail's Western Route Study. It is a national strategic transport objective to provide conditions to promote economic growth and to facilitate modal switch of freight from road to rail. Network Rail's Route Strategies are an important part of achieving these objectives and the Western Route is particularly important as the GWML is the second largest freight corridor into London after the WCML.

2. Freight

2.1 In assessing demand for Control Period 6 (2019-23) and onward to 2043, the Route Study takes forecasts for each market and relates these to route capacity. For Freight, the Study uses the 2012 Freight Market Study - an excellent source based on detailed, granular knowledge of the various markets served by the railfreight industry. In this respect it is superior to passenger forecasts which are based on more general economic trends.

2.2 The downside of the 2012 FMS is that it is getting a little dated and the Study acknowledges that aggregates traffic is growing faster than forecast due to minerals policy and economic growth. However, it does not take this fully into account in analysing required capacity and continues to assume 1% p.a growth. In practice,

there are 175 additional aggregates wagons being delivered in 2015/6, with orders likely to be placed for a further similar tranche. Clearly, not all these wagons will be used on the Western route, but a significant proportion probably will be, and each tranche equates to around six extra trains a day, indicating a substantial increase in rail-borne aggregates. There are also lesser numbers of new cement wagons being delivered for flows such as Clitheroe to Avonmouth.

2.3 The Route Study is not strong in identifying the specifics of intermodal and automotive growth, assuming that there will be 'more of the same', i.e. organic growth on existing routes. Whilst there will certainly be such growth, it fails to recognise that new flows will also come into play, e.g. automotive business from/to Portbury - one of the UK's biggest car import/export facilities - and from Honda at South Marston.

2.4 The translation of assessed freight demand into the number of freight paths per hour required on each route section appears sound. Unfortunately, these are not always fully reflected in the capacity enhancement proposals for the various route sections. There is also little recognition that, due to external constraints, freight demand is not evenly spread through the day and that, with freight increasingly debarred during passenger peak hours, more trains are concentrated into off-peak hours. Accordingly, more daytime freight paths are required between the peaks than an even spread would suggest.

2.5 Freight growth is, of course, accompanied by substantial passenger growth, which consumes much of the available spare capacity on key routes by 2019, let alone 2043. Given the long lead times for major infrastructure schemes, work needs to be under way now if capacity is to be available by 2019. The introduction of additional high speed services to Bristol and Cheltenham, plus the advent of Crossrail between Reading and Paddington squeezes freight capacity close to breaking point in 2019, particularly over the two track section between Didcot and Swindon, where the current 4.5 HST's per hour become 7 Super Express Trains per hour following electrification.

2.6 It is not at all clear how freight trains can be accommodated between so many SET's - the Route Study floats the possibility of considerably extended freight loops, but these would require major civil engineering (plus land acquisition and planning approval) and there is no evidence of even passive provision being made where bridges are being reconstructed and overhead structures installed as part of the electrification project. The same is true of Bristol - Parkway to Swindon, where 4 SET's an hour would appear to leave little or no capacity for freight from 2019, particularly with the very slow entry to and exit from the freight loops along this section (a comment that also applies to many other locations). There may be a tacit assumption that freights can be diverted via Gloucester to avoid this section but, apart from the extra mileage, time and cost that this entails, there are no plans for high gauge container clearance of this diversionary route and thus no option but for intermodal trains to use the direct route via Badminton

2.7 Ideas are floated for increased capacity on the Basingstoke - Reading and Didcot - Oxford corridors, but it is not clear that they can be delivered quickly enough to cater for rapidly growing freight and passenger demand. The Oxford area, in particular, looks set to become heavily congested with the advent of East-West Rail, electrification, growing freight traffic etc and is a major concern. The phrase 'significantly constrained by 2019' is applied to several of these key routes, suggesting that detailed capacity enhancement plans need to be put in place as a matter of urgency.

2.8 Looking further ahead, the Route Study acknowledges that Bristol Parkway - Swindon will have insufficient capacity by 2043 but declines to offer any proposals, arguing that constraints elsewhere mean there is no point in doing so - this seems logically inconsistent, given that capacity enhancement is necessarily a series of discrete but complimentary schemes. The stance appears to be driven by a reluctance to entertain grade-separation of Westerleigh Junction, even though this would not appear to be an unduly difficult project. The Study also avoids consideration of the route into the Severn Tunnel, on the basis it will be considered by the Wales Route Study, but consequently it is not clear that the impact of flows feeding through the increasingly congested Bristol area into and out of Wales are being fully evaluated.

2.9 The Study suggests some freight rolling stock changes to increase route capacity, notably the replacement of 45mph wagons on Mendip to London aggregates trains with 60 mph wagons, but fails to say how the new wagons would be funded. Given that 45mph wagons form around a quarter to a third of the Mendip wagon fleet, this is a major issue. More exotically, it advocates the use of Class 92 electric locos in place of Class 66 diesels on these trains on the grounds they would be 20 minutes quicker between Westbury and Reading. This may be true, but the Study does not reflect the penalty of having to change locos at Westbury (diesels being required from the quarries), with the resource and cost inefficiencies this would entail, nor how this would be reimbursed - with a very low value material, such as aggregates, even a small increase in transport costs can have a significant impact.

2.10 Finally, the Study makes no mention of the potential benefits of modest gauge enhancement (to W8) into the South West peninsula to enable containers and swap bodies to be moved in and out of the region, rather than being debarred beyond Exeter. With such modest enhancement, retail distribution by rail into the far South West would be a real prospect, as has occurred in the Highlands of Scotland, an area similarly remote from major distribution centres.

3. Conclusions

3.1 The Western Route Study is a valuable piece of work and highlights the many opportunities and challenges facing the railway network in the region. It proposes a range of interventions to address the issues that emerge from rapidly increasing demand for passenger and freight transport. These interventions do, however, need to be delivered earlier than the Study envisages to ensure that freight and in

particular, intermodal and aggregates traffic, is not constrained by lack of infrastructure capacity. The situation facing freight in 2019 on the Bristol Parkway - Swindon - Didcot section, and also around Oxford, is critical and needs urgent resolution.

Submitted by:
Daniel Parker-Klein
Head of Policy
The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport
Daniel.parker-klein@ciltuk.org.uk
0207 3481981
07894 620655

January 2015