

Network Rail – Kent Area Route Study consultation. March 2017.

Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (EDC) response.

Introduction.

Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (EDC) welcomes Network Rail's draft Kent Area Route Study (KARS) – presenting a vision for improving rail infrastructure over the next 10-30 years. It proposes way of addressing the challenge of a significant passenger demand increase on railway lines connecting the capital with Kent which are forecast to increase by 47%, between now and 2044.

The EDC held a well-attended (Spring) 2017 Rail Summit, whereby we highlighted priorities within three overarching themes with respect to improving rail infrastructure that would be fit for purpose and better able to support future housing and employment growth across Kent Thameside. These comprise:

1) Capacity... addressing the challenge of passenger demand and supply via:

- Adding additional carriages to lengthen trains and provide urgently needed capacity
- Encouraging Network Rail to drive forward projects to deliver the capacity required after 2024
- Offering strong support for the Crossrail extension to Ebbsfleet to provide additional capacity
- The need to take account of the full build out of the Garden City in the Network Rail work.

2) Connectivity... how new routes might support Ebbsfleet Garden City whilst simultaneously improving frequency of existing services via:

- Strong support by The EDC for the extension of Crossrail to Ebbsfleet to provide additional capacity
- Supporting Network Rail's vision of a new route from London Victoria to Ebbsfleet International - subject to a future master-planning exercise with the Ebbsfleet Central development and NSIP Theme Park development.

3) Interchange... Improving the travel experience and facilitating a seamless journey experience via:

- Network Rail to engage with the EDC to develop the potential of Ebbsfleet International Station as a Regional Transport Interchange;

- Supporting wider proposals on services and stations in the vicinity of Ebbsfleet to ensure that these remain attractive propositions for commuters e.g. Dartford.

1) Capacity.

A key issue with direct potential to impact on the EDC is a 127% forecast increase to passenger numbers on high speed trains to and from St Pancras International. With the now rapidly emerging Ebbsfleet Garden City is set to see 15,000 new homes built by 2031, plus the housing growth that Dartford and Gravesham are proposing. It is essential that Network Rail take full account of these housing numbers.

With a new passenger train franchise for Kent due to start in 2018, it is therefore timely that the Kent Area Route Study aspires to a more joined-up approach between potential bidders, the Department for Transport and Network Rail to meet the needs of passengers and business.

The EDC welcomes overarching aspirations presented in KARS, some of which include:

- Lengthening high speed, South London metro and Kent commuter peak time trains to 12-cars, where possible and where demand requires it
- Platform extensions to facilitate longer trains
- Increasing capacity at some London Terminals by way of creating new sidings to stable trains, facilitating additional peak hour trains
- Crowding relief schemes at various London stations to improve the passenger experience
- New signalling systems, including Traffic Management technology, to maximise train performance on busy sections where capacity is constrained
- Rebuilding Charing Cross station to allow for more and longer trains to terminate there, potentially extending the platforms across the Thames
- Provide additional tracks on the route into Victoria to allow more and longer trains to terminate there
- Creating a southern link from Ebbsfleet International via Fawkham to stations on the Bromley South route. This concept is of great interest to the EDC, as detailed below.

2) Connectivity

Cross Rail Extension from Abbeywood to Ebbsfleet

The EDC strongly supports the extension of Crossrail from Abbeywood to Ebbsfleet. We believe that this provides enhanced access and will provide the required capacity for the future. We note that Network Rail is putting forward their conclusion on capacity have not included the full build of the Ebbsfleet Garden City.

London Victoria to Ebbsfleet “Southern Link”.

The KARS recognises that *“The new housing and jobs created at Ebbsfleet could be supported by a new rail link to Swanley, Bromley South and beyond”*. Traditionally north-south rail connectivity across Kent is poor, a throw-back to the how the rail network developed and London-centric (predominantly commuter-based) passenger demand.

The EDC welcomes proposals that improve connectivity by any mode of transport to the Garden City. It is critical that non-car modes of transport are developed to facilitate the delivery of a Garden City that is not wholly dependent on the private car as a way of travelling.

The Ebbsfleet Southern Link is of particular interest to the EDC. It utilises the former Waterloo connection from HS1 to the Chatham Main Line with a new link line to Ebbsfleet International. The EDC is very interested to gain a broader understanding of how an Ebbsfleet International Southern Link would work in practice and if this could be achieved with minimal impact on developable land. We would be keen to meet with Network Rail when the concept is worked up to a stage where there would be merit in holding such a meeting.

3) Interchange: Improved Connectivity & Access.

The EDC welcomes any initiative that facilitates an easier, less daunting and therefore more attractive journey experience for all rail users, particularly those people with mobility, visual or learning challenges. We are proud to have a state-of-the-art railway station in Ebbsfleet International. Similarly, we recognise that some aspects of Greenhithe, Swanscombe and Northfleet might benefit from upgrades.

The latter in particular is just over 300m from Ebbsfleet International, or 800m by foot. However, the existing walking route is somewhat convoluted and difficult to make, with natural surveillance lacking in parts of that walking route and a perception of poor safety and security which may lead to more vulnerable members of society such as older people, females, teenagers or those with the aforementioned personal challenges, more reluctant to travel by rail.

The theme of “interchange” between locations such as Northfleet and Ebbsfleet International is one that The EDC is particularly keen to engage with key

stakeholders on, at the very earliest opportunity, as well as the generally poor/lacking passenger facilities at North Kent line stations. Whilst Greenhithe station affords step-free access, access at Swanscombe is via steps only, whilst Northfleet offers “some step-free access” (i.e. step free access only possible for services away from London and no step-free interchange between platforms).

Although appreciative of the physical (and often topographical) constraints, the EDC suggests that such poor passenger facilities within an urban location sitting just twenty miles from London poses something of a concern to an “outward facing” Garden City and we are keen to address this. Similarly, all three stations are only staffed part time and only Greenhithe Station offers accessible toilets and either dual height or height adjustable ticket office windows. This is a far from ideal situation and not conducive to a rail system that is “open to all”.

Summary

The EDC welcomes Network Rail’s overarching objectives as presented in the Kent Area Route Study consultation draft, March 2017. As suggested, we are keen to engage with Network Rail and support the development of ideas that will support the UK’s first Garden City for one hundred years and which will see the development of 15,000 new homes across the wider Garden City area. We look forward to liaising with Network Rail to discuss the proposals set out in the KARS and begin to develop concepts in more detail throughout 2017.