

To LandLRailStrategy@leics.gov.uk

Members of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum remain to be convinced of the benefits or economic viability of the proposed high speed routes. HS2 will be of little use to most of Leicestershire when travelling south and we must press that accommodating HS2 does not extend journey times between Leicestershire and London. The business case for HS2 included over £8 billion in savings from existing services, which implies substantial deteriorations in services to London. There is a need for more capacity and better connectivity and whilst HS2 does add to rail capacity, it would appear that there are much less costly and environmentally damaging ways of doing so. Lower speed and more integrated new routes would be cheaper as such routes could go round sensitive and expensive barriers.

If we accept that the decision is made and it is to go ahead this strategy must include improvements to reduce the adverse impacts of HS2

With talk of a Northern Power House we need to be able to travel direct to Manchester if Leicestershire businesses are not to lose out. If we are to gain from HS2 going north we should have a local rail link to Toton. There was a direct route to Manchester via the Hope Valley route during the improvements to the West Coast Route and it worked fine. There were other east west routes used in the past which could be reconsidered and re-activated / upgraded e.g. the Loughborough – Liverpool direct route. This latter route may well have originated in Leicester and could probably also provide a route through to Manchester.

We feel the principal aim should be the aim should be for the residents of the three East Midlands cities to be able to reach Birmingham in 30 minutes or less and London, Manchester and Liverpool in an hour. Freight should be a high priority if only to get such movements off the roads and major developments of freight depots should link into the stated government strategy of preferring development on old railway land, or adjacent to railway stations.

Local services going west are poor. Ashby is a busy and sizeable community and its Ashby Park and Ivanhoe Business Park commercial complexes have been expanding. Coalville is also a large community and it seems essential that they should be linked to Leicester by a rail or light tram system. We should press for the introduction of passenger traffic on the Ivanhoe / National Forest Line, running from the Midland Main Line just south of Leicester to Burton via Coalville and Ashby. It has been estimated that to upgrade the track to full passenger service standards might cost £175M but it would cost comparatively little to upgrade signalling and points for light passenger traffic by tram. There are speed restrictions for heavy freight movements due to subsidence, but light tram type traffic should be able to travel at speeds making them a viable alternative to road use. In addition better transport links out into the developing National Forest Area would encourage more people from the urban areas to visit the recreational sites improving their health and general well being and boosting local rural economies. There is likely to be a need for subsidy in the early years but the history of the Robin Hood line suggests that the line would cover its operational costs within a few years and when you take into account the cost to the economy of the road traffic delays and bear in mind road maintenance costs, the subsidy required in the first few years to make this sustainable are justified. The reintroduction of passenger services would make an important contribution to a reduction in motor vehicle usage. Halts could be put in at several points with ticket purchase machines and a service very like the Manchester tram network could take thousands of commuters and shoppers off the roads. It might even be possible to have this service terminate at Knighton and have some London bound trains stop there to give connectivity going south although this would add considerably to the cost. Knighton in its present configuration does not lend itself to a halt and station but the costs could well prove a good investment in the long term.

The link going east needs improvement. When the Midland Main Line is electrified, the Birmingham - Stansted route will be a line linking with electrified lines at Birmingham, Nuneaton, Leicester, Peterborough, Ely and Stansted Airport, so should itself be electrified. It could perhaps be an EM Airport-Stansted link for passengers and possibly freight and might also provide a way into the west end of the Northern Powerhouse. Some time ago a plan was discussed to develop it as a freight alternative to road between Harwich/Felixstowe and the NW ports for Ireland. At the same time the passenger service could be doubled to hourly and line speeds significantly increased. This more ambitious plan should not be discounted as it would provide a SE-NW line to balance the Newcastle-Bristol NE-SW route.

Certainly with any upgrade of existing lines the strategy should include the possible re-opening of closed stations and / or the provision of new stations where substantial development has taken place in the vicinity.

Alterations to public rights of way are inevitable but the integrity of the network of such routes must be maintained by bridges, underpasses or realistic re-routing

Terry Kirby, Chairman,
Leicestershire Local Access Forum,
c/o Room 700, County Hall, Leicester, LE3 8RJ
(www.leics.gov.uk/laf)
Telephone - County Hall 0116 305 7086

The Leicestershire Local Access Forum (LAF) is an independent statutory body, set up as a result of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000, and exists to represent the interests of everyone concerned with access to the countryside and the public rights of way network including footpaths, bridleways and byways, cycleways and areas of open access.

Section 94 of the CROW act makes it a statutory function of the forum to give advice to a range of bodies, including local authorities, on access issues in respect of land use planning matters. The Secretary of State advised that in particular forums were to focus on the impact and options for minimising possible adverse effects of planning policies and development proposals, in respect of future public access to land. Forums are tasked with identifying and expressing support for opportunities to improve public access, or associated infrastructure, which might be delivered through planning policies or new developments.

