



Meeting note

File reference	TR040009
Status	Final
Author	Ewa Sherman
Date	20 February 2014
Meeting with	Network Rail
Venue	Temple Quay House, Bristol
Attendees	<u>Network Rail:</u> Malcolm Parsons – Senior Programme Development Manager, Network Rail Colin Field –Town Planning Manager, Network Rail John Lewis – Divisional Director, Jacobs Huw Williams - Senior Consultant (Planning and Development), Jacobs Dan O’Kelly - Principal Environmental Scientist, Jacobs <u>Planning Inspectorate:</u> Jessica Powis – Infrastructure Planning Lead Katherine Chapman – Case Manager Ewa Sherman – Case Officer Sheila Twidle – Head of Environmental Services Jill Warren – Senior EIA Advisor
Meeting objectives	Initial meeting between the Planning Inspectorate and Network Rail (NR) to discuss the proposed Western Rail Access to Heathrow (WRAtH)
Circulation	All attendees

Introductions

Introductions were made by all attendees and roles explained.

The Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) explained its openness policy and advised that a note of the meeting would be published on the project page, together with any advice given in accordance with s51 of the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008).

Applicant’s presentation

Network Rail (NR) delivered a project presentation which provided an overview of the proposed scheme and timescales in relation to the pre-application period and submitting the application.

Discussion between the developer and the Inspectorate was structured around the presentation slides and the various matters were raised in relation to the main issues. They were the following:

- Objectives
- Funding
- Benefits
- Pioneering and Preferred Option
- Construction and tunnelling
- Notional programme
- Consultation

Scheme overview and objectives

The project named **Western Rail Access to Heathrow (WRAtH)** proposes a new railway link between the Great Western Mainline (GWML) approximately 800m east of Langley Railway Station to Heathrow Airport Terminal 5.

Heathrow is the UK's busiest airport and handles the most international passengers of any airport in the world. Whilst the London Underground and Heathrow Express services have improved connections to central London, there are limited options for rail passengers travelling to Heathrow Airport from other than London. The Western Rail Access to Heathrow project will create a new connection with the nearby Great Western Mainline (GWML), providing a more direct rail route for passengers travelling to and from Reading, Oxford, South Wales, Bristol, Midlands and beyond. Passengers to and from Heathrow from these destinations will not have to travel into and out of London via Paddington. Airport workers will be a particular target market, with trains timetabled to run from 5am onwards.

The Network Rail Draft CP5 Enhancements Delivery Plan which has been published for consultation sets out the outputs, scope and milestones required to be delivered by the planned enhancement programme in Control Period 5 (2014 – 2019) (CP5). The specific project output of this scheme is to improve access and rail connectivity to Heathrow Airport for both travelling customers and the airport's workforce by providing an interchange at Reading, thereby avoiding the need to travel via London when travelling from the west.

NR confirmed that the scheme will take place irrespective of Heathrow expansion options. The Planning Inspectorate anticipated questions being asked about this, and advised NR to bring out the national / inter-regional socio economic benefits of the WRAtH scheme in its own right. The Draft National Policy Statement (NPS) was discussed, which did not mention named schemes including WRAtH, so particular emphasis is needed to make the wider case for the scheme.

Procedural advice in relation to the pre-application stage

The Inspectorate asked if NR wished to carry out further non-statutory consultations on the scheme first, or progress to the formal pre-application stage now. NR confirmed that they wished to move to the formal stage now, given that informal consultations had taken place over the last 4 years, including consultations undertaken by Department for Transport (DfT). The Inspectorate commented that stakeholders and the public would need to understand that DfT consulted on the scheme in the past, in order to stem any confusion as the scheme progresses. NR

confirmed that this would be addressed on their website and it was acknowledged that WRAtH has not been in the public domain with NR branding.

NR emphasised benefits of the project which would include good connectivity to Heathrow Airport and direct rail service to Slough and Reading. NR confirmed that although there is currently no Rail National Policy Statement (NPS) the proposal is within the framework established within the Report provided by the Airports Commission. The funding for the proposal will be given by the government and has been agreed in principle. NR has a strengthened position with regard to government funding, which is provided in 5 year blocks the next control period CP5 2014-2019.

The main localised benefits would be reducing road congestion and a greater choice and connectivity for commuting to Heathrow. Contribution towards air quality improvements is an important issue as well. Network Rail stated that in future the wider UK benefits might include the predicted generation of £800 million of additional UK economic activity.

Originally the developer proposed six options for the project, which was reduced to four. They were:

- A – via Colnbrook freight – Great Western Mainline (GWML) branch,
- B – via tunnel to Langley - GWML branch,
- C – via Datchet tunnel under Windsor and Eton – Slough, and
- D – via Heathrow branch – GWML.

At present option B is preferred, with the intention of taking two sub-options at Langley forward to the next stage for further technical consideration and consultation. Both sub-options involve a tunnel from Heathrow Terminal 5 (T5), but there are marked differences in alignment. The potential need for compulsory acquisition of land was discussed, and the Inspectorate requested that NR provide information in relation to compulsory acquisition powers in the draft Development Consent Order, if needed.

The Inspectorate emphasised the importance of providing clear evidence for all options, including the final option taken forward and also each of the discounted options in the application documents, specifically the Consultation Report as this will assist in understanding how the project evolves through consultation. Also, the Inspectorate recommended that NR ensure that it is clear how views from different people / consultees have been actioned/reviewed to inform the final choice of the project boundary. Clarity on why and how NR has narrowed down alternatives will also be particularly helpful in terms of minimising the impact. NR commented that if options do not meet operational requirements then they will not be taken forward.

In relation to the EIA process, the Inspectorate emphasised the importance of obtaining sign off at each stage from the key environmental bodies before progressing. The way alternatives are addressed will need to be robust in the EIA process as well as in the consultation process. Records of relevant meetings should be included in order to provide evidence.

Network Rail is currently proposing the following notional programme:

- Statement of Community Consultation – April 2014
- EIA Scoping Report – August 2014.

Network Rail confirmed that they have done a lot of preparatory work on the Scoping Report. The document requesting the Scoping Opinion to be submitted to the Inspectorate in August 2014 will be a thorough/robust report.

- Public exhibitions – May 2014
- EIA Scoping decision – September 2014
- Single option selection – November 2014
- Finalise Consultation Report – April 2015
- Submitting Environmental Information – September 2014
- Draft DCO and final Environmental Statement submission – September 2015
- Ongoing (formal) engagement with the Planning Inspectorate – February 2015 – July 2015
- Tunnel work start – May 2019
- Tunnel work complete – June 2020
- Ongoing environmental monitoring – January 2017 – December 2023.

On review of the timescales, the Inspectorate advised that NR should be clear about the terminology used during the pre-application stage; for example 'Consultation Report' is the term for the final document submitted as part of the application, and therefore should the applicant decide to produce update reports during the consultation, it may be helpful if these were assigned a different name.

The Inspectorate provided advice about the process for screening and scoping, and recommended that information was available in PINS Advice Notes. The Inspectorate is unable to comment on draft ESs but will comment on draft HRA reports if time and resources permit. The Inspectorate also commented upon the need to consider carefully the timing of requests, such as for example to avoid NR undertaking any public consultation at the same time as asking for a scoping opinion when the Inspectorate would need to undertake the formal consultation on the scoping request. Where this has happened in the past it has tended to result in confusion for consultees.

It should also be clear, when looking at programming, as to who the documents are being prepared for, whether they are drafts for internal review, external consultees or final versions for submission. At present the timetable above provides for a mix of all of these, which can be confusing.

The Inspectorate offered to review a more detailed programme with the developer and discuss this at a later date.

Furthermore, prior to considering how best to put together the application documents, the Inspectorate advised NR to familiarise themselves with s55 checklists for other rail projects, for example Redditch Rail Enhancement and Stafford Area Improvements – Norton Bridge Railway project.

Consultation

NR is proposing to conduct a high level consultation process with the local authorities, technical and environmental bodies, local community and partners in the rail industry in three stages:

- Stage 1 – two potential options (spring / summer 2014),
- Stage 2 – single option (autumn / winter 2014), and

- Stage 3 – final scheme (winter 2014 / spring 2015).

The Inspectorate commented that it was important that consultation should focus on the key issues and NR should be careful to provide sufficient time for each consultation stage.

NR explained that they have been in discussions with South Bucks District Council and Slough Borough Council regarding the proposed WRAtH project, including the construction sequence, existing and future HGV routes and the treatment of spoil including the potential for some backfilling of existing minerals sites. Network Rail confirmed that they have not started promoting the project properly yet. However, they will be meeting MPs in the area while they are finalising their consultation strategy.

Network Rail advised that their next steps will involve further work on establishing greater cost certainty and in particular any risks associated with the proposed project. They want to ensure value for money for the taxpayer and also establish principles of ownership for new infrastructure. Further actions on NR's part will involve consultations and briefings across the rail industry, and also with the local authorities and the stakeholders. NR will be looking into securing agreements with the aviation industry and Department for Transport.

Any other business

The Planning Inspectorate would undertake an outreach programme, if time and resources permitted, before the application for the project is formally submitted.

The Inspectorate also explained the role of the Consent Service Unit (CSU). This has been set up to provide free independent advice on certain environmental consents which fall outside of the Planning Act 2008 regime. They can draw up a Consents Management Plan for the developer to work to. Non-planning consents will need to be submitted at the same time as DCO submission. The Inspectorate suggested putting Network Rail in touch with the CSU to discuss any issues directly with them. The link to the page is provided here: <http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/legislation-and-advice/consents-service-unit/>

The Inspectorate can advise on draft documents, including draft Development Consent Order and draft Consultation Report, and provide comments. Currently the Inspectorate is looking to trial a process to set out clear timeframes for the Inspectorate to provide advice throughout the pre-application period. To enter into this, the Inspectorate suggested a further meeting once a more detailed programme is available for discussion.

The Inspectorate has a series of advice notes to help applicants with the DCO process and deliverables, which are reviewed periodically, so advised the need to monitor this on a regular basis.

Further actions

- As Network Rail has already provided information on the proforma sent by the Inspectorate the project page will be created on the National Infrastructure pages of the Planning Portal website.

- The Inspectorate will provide links to some good examples of documents that the Inspectorate has received to date to assist in the preparation of application documents.
- Network Rail and the Inspectorate will set up telecoms approximately every two months so both parties can keep communication going between the developer and the case team. The Inspectorate would be happy to trial a formal process for communications with NR, if they wished.
- The Inspectorate would be able to review a draft version of the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC), although would require several weeks' notice.
- The next follow up meeting will be arranged in due course.