

## Open Floor Hearing 10<sup>th</sup> October 2018

I am speaking tonight on behalf of Blisworth Parish Council and wanted to raise two issues: the first in relation to the potential isolated nature of the examination process and the second in relation to capacity and engineering issues on the West Coast Mainline. However, after attending the preliminary meeting yesterday and witnessing Rail Central's QC attempting to intertwine his client into the Northampton **Gateway** examination and then hearing the suggestion that a joint rail capacity study be undertaken, I am sure by now you are starting to form your own opinions as to whether it is going to be possible to judge this application in complete isolation.

On the second issue, the proving of the network's ability to accommodate even one SRFI is something that we, as a community, have been pushing for clarity on for nearly three years now, but to no avail, despite the efforts of our member of parliament the Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom. Network Rail first requested that Rail Central carry out a feasibility study on the wider network as far back as 2013 and, here in 2018, at the business end of two applications, we are still no clearer as to engineering feasibility nor individual or collective capacity of the WCML or the wider strategic network. This is, and has been, incredibly frustrating but we are where we are.

Hopefully without too much repetition of ground covered yesterday I would just like to try to add to the rail debate.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> April 2017 Martin Frobisher, Route Managing Director at Network Rail wrote to the Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom stating "There are a number of potential developments including Rail Central and Northampton Gateway who want to connect to the Northampton loop on the WCML. Our view is that not every proposal can safely connect to this stretch of the railway due to the high levels of existing traffic". Whilst fairly definitive, Network Rail have chosen to elaborate no further on this statement.

In their strategic case study for HS2 the Department for Transport stated "the West Coast Mainline remains highly constrained, meaning that the route is operating close to capacity in the peak and it is challenging to increase service levels still further". The 2016 Freight Network study declared the intent of *routeing services 'cross-country' to avoid the capacity and performance issues of travelling across London and on two congested main lines'*.

In the next few years the WCML will have to deal with the challenge of increased passenger services to Northampton, the in-feed of trains from East West rail at Bletchley and the aspirational 20 additional freight paths required by the Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal expansion. The Strategic Freight Network sets out the requirement for the core routes, one of the objectives of which is to minimise freight via London and protect the WCML south of Nuneaton for enhanced passenger services.

There are currently four SRFIs looking to significantly **increase** freight traffic on this southern section of the WCML, the two under consideration here, the Daventry expansion (which 4 years after obtaining consent has no new rail head and no rail connected warehouses) and the West Midlands Interchange. This unprecedented development is clearly in conflict with the national freight strategy previously outlined and also contrary to a core principle in the National Policy Statement that SRFI

developments should take account of investment in capacity enhancements, rather than precede them.

Further to yesterday's debate we would therefore welcome early clarity around the capacity issue. If Network Rail do not believe that all competing uses can be accommodated then why is the community being subjected to the stresses of opposing two separate proposals when only one (or neither) may be theoretically feasible. In establishing some clarity it may reveal a clearer examination path to follow and a significantly improved chance of policy objectives being achieved.

If all the SRFIs currently being built or proposed in the Midlands are not supportable by the rail network then surely someone needs to decide which might best fulfil Government's strategic objectives before we are subjected to numerous expensive, time consuming and stressful examination processes which, ultimately, may only serve to contribute to the failure of a national policy objective.

In addition to asking Network Rail to commission the joint study mooted yesterday we would like to request that the Examining Authority establish the sense behind allowing four so called **strategic** rail freight interchanges to be brought forward at exactly the same time on the very section of rail that the National Freight Network is looking to avoid pushing more freight down. The absence of any strategic oversight is starkly exposed by the disjoint between investment in the freight network and the locations currently being promoted for the next generation of SRFIs.

Lastly on the subject of rail I would like to pick up on Ms Thompson's understanding of SRFIs when she quoted yesterday that they are built on the premise of "build it and they will come" in relation to the potential take up of rail. I would contend that a more apt quote would be: "build it and they MIGHT come" with the corollary "build them in the wrong place, or all next to each other, and it is highly likely that they won't".

To finish I would just like to add that we are a small rural community, unanimously opposed to having the largest warehouse park in Europe being thrust upon us and have spent the last three years building a credible opposition to these unwanted developments. In fact some members of the community have been involved in attempting to prevent unwanted industrial incursion into an important strategic gap for many years prior to this. I would therefore like to take this opportunity just to state that whilst the examining authority may be able to focus their thoughts purely on Northampton Gateway; in any discussion on SRFIs our local community has no choice but to contemplate implications of a far greater magnitude. Having experienced this at first hand for three years now, I don't believe that anyone, fighting for the survival of their rural community, should have to experience the stresses and personal impositions of something of this magnitude more than once in their lifetime. Certainly not twice and definitely not twice at the same time.

Thank you