

COUNCIL MEETING – 8 MARCH 2022

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

In accordance with Rule No. 14.1 the following question was submitted to the Council from **Councillor Peter Harris**.

"What is the Council's view of the recently published 'Integrated Rail Plan' by the Government, on behalf of the residents of the area, and what response will or have we made?"

Reply from Councillor Keith Girling – Chairman of the Economic Development Committee

“As a District we remain committed to working with and influencing key decisions on matters of transport and rail is no different. Members will be aware that the government published the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) for the North and Midlands on 18 November 2021, setting out a new approach to improving rail provision in these areas.

The IRP announced the cancellation of HS2 eastern leg north of East Midlands Parkway Station. This means that onward services to Nottingham and Derby and Sheffield would be on an electrified Midland Main Line and that the proposed East Midlands Hub would not go ahead at Toton. Because of the reduced scope for Yorkshire/Northern England connections via HS2 the government have now proposed improvements to the East Coast Mainline (ECML) as well.

The proposals to improve the ECML offer opportunities to the District as they include measures to tackle bottleneck at stations and junctions. Newark is specifically mentioned in the plan with commentary on the capacity issues at the flat crossing just to the north of Northgate Station, where the ECML crosses the Nottingham to Lincoln line. The flat crossing has long been identified as a bottleneck which not only slows trains on the ECML but which restricts service improvements on the Nottingham to Lincoln line. With the emergence of HS2 the importance of removing the flat crossing and replacing it with a flyover had receded, however this renewed focus on upgrading the ECML may see the scheme become a priority again. Members may recall through discussions on the A46 Newark Northern Bypass that ensuring a future ability to grade-separate the flat crossing was one of this Council’s red-lines, a view shared by Nottinghamshire County Council, Lincolnshire County Council, and Midlands Connect. We will continue to work with these partners to lobby to address the flat crossing, which will be a nationally significant piece of infrastructure in terms of costs and impact. Officers and Members continue to meet regularly with the Department for Transport and Network Rail. Should the flat crossing be removed improvements will reduce journey times and may well allow stopping patterns that facilitate more Newark to Leeds journeys.

The IRP also sets specifically references the proposals for the Robin Hood Line extension and associated new services and rail stations at Edwinstowe and Ollerton. This project is likely to be included within the County Council’s Levelling Up Submission, with Officers working closely as the scheme is developed and costed. This will open significant opportunities for access to

services, leisure, and employment to the Sherwood communities. The line will also likely link in with proposals being developed for the Maid Marion Line expansion in Ashfield.

The IRP for the North and Midlands has not been consulted upon itself, but the schemes and proposals within it will be in due course. We will continue to influence and shape thinking in this regard in readiness for the formal future consultation process that will be shared via the new governance arrangements beyond May”.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Harris

Councillor P. Harris asked what the Council would do to galvanise a better solution for trains from Newark North Gate to the north of the country, following the publication of the technical appendix to the Integrated Rail Plan published in January 2022.

Reply from Councillor Keith Girling – Chairman of the Economic Development Committee

Councillor Girling agreed that this would not be the best solution for Newark, but that the Council, and Nottinghamshire County Council, would continue to lobby, through East Midlands Councils to improve the service. He noted that there may be other options open as well, given the HS2 line had been postponed and not in fact cancelled, but acknowledged that any developments to railway lines and changes to service notoriously take a long time to get resolved.