

Response to *Improving Connectivity*



Jonathan Roberts, 27 February 2015

Enfield Council welcomes the paper on *'Improving Connectivity'*, published last month by Network Rail and with a foreword by DfT Franchising Director Peter Wilkinson, to whom this report is also copied in reply. We are of course replying from an urban perspective.

The paper sets out a couple of basic principles:

- To make the railway assets (infrastructure/ trains/stations) work harder and deliver more, as better value for money and better benefits for the communities.
- To seek to increase service levels without proportionate increase in revenue or capital costs (efficiency), so focussing on more benefits per £ outlay.

Much of the time, the paper is looking at transforming one train per hour (tph) rural services to twice-hourly. That isn't too relevant to the London urban area. Transport for London has made the basic point, in its analysis of the Lea Bridge station reopening business case in August 2014, that a change in service levels from 2 tph to 4 tph could assist local passenger demand by rail to grow from under 400,000 passengers entry/exit per year, to 1.2 million. So a doubling of service, but a threefold increase in demand, in the urban context – possibly urban areas will achieve more bangs for bucks?

In practice, available line capacities are currently saturated on the approaches to Liverpool Street, and along the Lea Valley Lines, unless there are concomitant increases in infrastructure capacity. So a minimum total outlay approach may achieve less than a higher cost outlay, intended to achieve much higher benefits because this is London, a capital city which is expanding rapidly. In an enlarged format, this is the case for Crossrail 2 to serve the Lea Valley.

Expenditure to achieve 8-tracking into Liverpool Street, and 4-tracking along the Lea Valley, may actually be very worthwhile, in which case it should not be the railway's job to resist that, but to support and assist.

So Enfield Council considers that it is important above all, in responding to the Improving Connectivity paper, to set out how and where and why there could be improvements to the Anglia Route, from its own perspective.

An urban focus - but not always a consistent or appropriate urban level of service or quality

Enfield Council covers a northern zone of outer Greater London, with 313,900 residents in 2011. Population and jobs growth is expected to continue at a high rate for the foreseeable future, to the 2040s and beyond, with schemes in the Upper Lee Valley such as Meridian Water having a London-wide priority.

The western part of the borough is served by the Piccadilly Line, with service frequencies up to nearly 30 trains per hour. The middle part of the borough is served by the Hertford Loop line of GTR, with up to 8-9 tph, though the offpeak frequencies are too low at 3tph.

The eastern part of the borough is served by the West Anglia routes of the Greater Anglia franchise, and here service frequencies and qualities are far more variable, and station and train standards also convey a poor impression. This is also part of the catchment covered by the Improving Connectivity paper, which looks at the Anglia zone.

The inner suburban stopping services from Liverpool Street to Enfield and Cheshunt via Seven Sisters and Edmonton Green are to be transferred to TfL control and Overground operation from 31st May 2015. The consequential improvements in quality – if not immediately frequency – will be welcomed.

Stations in Enfield on these lines are:

Silver Street (North Middlesex Hospital and North Circular Road orbital buses), Edmonton Green (shopping centre and outer London bus interchange), Bush Hill Park (suburban), Enfield Town (town centre), Southbury (commercial and residential), and Turkey Street (suburban).

The basic service frequencies are just 2 tph on each line (so 4 tph south from Edmonton Green, offpeak), and 4 tph Enfield Town and 2 tph via Southbury in peaks. Only Edmonton Green has a better peak service – 8 tph in peaks including a few Hertford East trains.

The Lea Valley line stations at Angel Road (1-2 tph peaks only), Ponders End and Brimsdown with a basic all day 2 tph (part industrial, part suburban), and Enfield Lock (3-4 variable tph) struggle with service volume and reliability because of the overcrowded Lea Valley two-track main line, where 4 tracks are really needed.

The capacity shortfall is causing Enfield to participate in the STAR scheme (Stratford-Tottenham Hale-Angel Road) for an additional track to support a more frequent local service as far as Angel Road – where a new £19.2m station next to Meridian Water will be paid for largely by the Council.

At this stage, the Lea Valley local stations and the local service will **not** be transferred to TfL control, though the Council would support that change, for the line throughout to Cheshunt and Broxbourne and possibly to Hertford East.

Why change the specification and control?

This is essentially because of the urban character of the areas served. TfL has amply demonstrated with its ownership and supervision of the London Overground lines, that they are a better custodian of urban passenger services than any National Rail franchise operator. TfL takes the revenue risk, and can focus on the operator getting the quality and capacities right.

This is down to close attention to the train and station qualities, and service specification with the urban traveller in mind, with a single minded focus on ensuring these targets are built into the incentives for the concession holder. The

outcome has been a transformation of the demand on the former Silverlink network and the ex-LUL East London Line, with demand rising nearly four-fold from ca. 38 million passenger journeys in 2007 to ca. 140m now, and with no end in sight to the growth in demand.

Enfield wants this sort of transformation for all the National Rail local services in its area. Not to do so is to deny residents, visitors and businesses the opportunity to transform the way in which they can get around the borough, impose less environmental impact, and yet achieve a much greater Gross Value Added and economic growth.

Oxford Economics in a report to the Council in January 2012 (report attached) sets out that having rail accessibility at the new Meridian Water development area (3,000 jobs, 5,000 homes) would grow GVA by at least £15m pa faster than without adequate rail accessibility. Meridian Water is the area served by Angel Road station. 'Served' is a very loose term for what the present station and service at Angel Road offers – a limited 1-2 tph peak hours only service, at an unstaffed station which is hard to find and reach the platforms and feels highly unsafe in the dark.

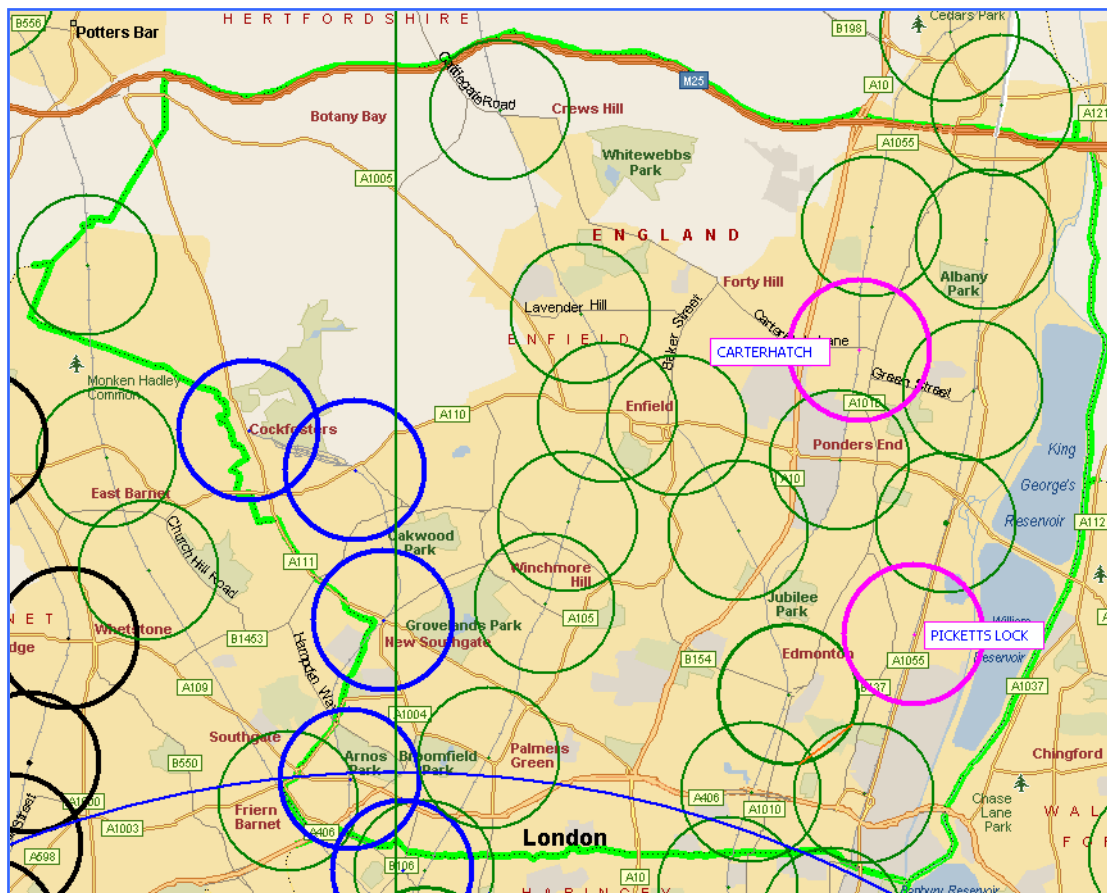
The specific issues arising there are discussed in detailed analyses about accessibility issues and the value of improving the rail offer, as part of the STAR scheme work and the case for relocating Angel Road station with new proximity to Meridian Water development and with a better rail service frequency. Copies of two relevant JRC reports are attached.

So far as improving connectivity is concerned, the lessons to be learnt from this urban example are:

- High quality accessibility to urban railway stations can be a great boon for the area and its GVA/economic growth capabilities. It is critical to achieve very good access within a 1km catchment, to maximise benefits and practical usefulness of the railway
- Areas deficient in accessibility can have some of their deprivation shortcomings redressed by better rail services (there are many such Local Super Output Areas in the vicinity of Angel Road, as discussed in the JRC papers.
- A good basic service frequency emerges as important, to achieve a trusting willingness by potential passengers to 'turn up and go'. In the case of London Overground, this network is starting to become a trusted lifestyle railway where people invest much of their travel patterns within a credible railway offer.

Urban accessibility

The general level of accessibility to the railway in Enfield borough is shown below in mapping. The circles set out 800m direct catchments from an existing station entrance, in green (blue for the Piccadilly Line). Allowing for real walking distance along roads and footpaths, this is broadly equivalent to a 1km station catchment.



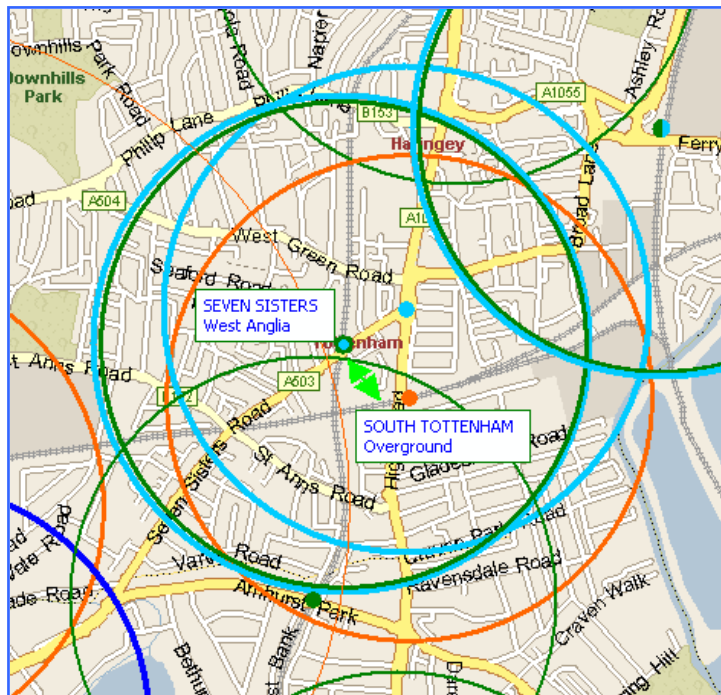
There are clear gaps in the railway offer, where the Council can foresee an emerging case for new local 'metro' style stations (shown pink above):

- Carterhatch on the Southbury Loop – to serve a high deprivation/regeneration area – providing that service frequencies are raised to Overground standards of at least 4 tph.
- Picketts Lock in the Upper Lee Valley, where that catchment has the potential to accommodate additional housing as part of the Upper Lee Valley opportunity area. Studies are under way to identify the scope for additional housing along that corridor. Picketts Lock would only be viable as a station if it had a basic 4 tph or better service, on tracks segregated from the main line to Stansted and Cambridge.
- In the latter instance, it is the merits of a better service which also lifts the accessibility prospects for neighbouring stations at Ponders End, Brimsdown and Enfield Lock.

The Improving Connectivity paper examples one possibility of strengthening services on the Southbury loop to 4 tph, at the cost of making the Enfield Town service a shuttle connecting with Liverpool Street trains at Edmonton Green. We find this nonsensical as a remedy in the urban area. It is only a further 6-8 minutes to reach the major Victoria Line interchange at Seven Sisters, where millions of passengers travel to yearly from **both** branches.

It is perverse and a disbenefit to impose a say 4 minute penalty (worth 10 minutes in value of time analyses) on passengers, and a second interchange, for short distance urban travel. The railway service should go where the demand points, not impose a railway junction mentality on the service offer, subject to the basic service being efficient. At the very least, a greater service intensity – using the present services as a baseline – should be offered as far as Seven Sisters, if Liverpool Street remains a location challenged by capacity constraints for some years. Extra trains should then reverse at Seven Sisters, not at Edmonton Green.

An improvement to interchange in the Seven Sisters area would also open up the Overground’s cross-London service at a station adjoining Seven Sisters, just south of that station and west of South Tottenham. Map here:



A similar step change in connectivity will be achieved in May 2015, with the opening of the new direct interchange between Hackney Downs (West Anglia) and Hackney Central (Overground). More such connectivity would be a good outcome.

Urban service frequencies

A further topic, as covered in our response to the Anglia Route Study (attached), is that Network Rail’s planning presumptions for the main line network are minimalist in the extreme for service development and expansion. They demonstrate the wrong approach to service quality specification in the urban area. Enfield Council believes the comparative yardstick for lines such as Liverpool Street-Edmonton-Enfield/Cheshunt should be the Piccadilly Line frequency, in future years. Moving towards 8 to 10 tph would be a desirable objective, not just sticking with 4 tph (even if that itself is not yet achieved at too many stations in Enfield borough).

Making the most of the local geography – stepping stones to the future

The railways in Enfield are radial. This is a common occurrence in urban areas. The creation and expansion of interchanges with orbital lines is therefore very important, where this is possible, to expand at relatively low cost the utility and efficiency of the radial railway, to support a more diverse range of travel patterns and lifestyles, and a better spread of accessibility to jobs.

In Enfield, the emerging Crossrail 2 project is very important, as the future umbilical for the Upper Lee Valley corridor, which will build on the initial stepping stone of the STAR project, due to open in 2018.

We see merits in not waiting for the delivery of Crossrail 2 before initiatives are put in hand to take the West Anglia and Lea Valley mail line to a further stage of capacity, to serve the fast-growing economic corridor linking to Stansted and Cambridge. We foresee a continuation of STAR, towards Enfield Lock and maybe Cheshunt, with a mixed third/fourth track continued – and with the level crossings at Brimsdown and Enfield Lock resolved – which can bring the next step change in service frequency, capacity and urban renewal and expansion. We advocate consideration of a ‘proto-4 tracking’ scheme along the Lea Valley, even if all trains cannot yet reach Central London but have to serve alternative termini.

We also consider that upping service frequencies to 8-12 tph on main radial corridors where frequencies are currently much lower, when taken in conjunction with the objective to increase public transport accessibility levels (in London) to PTAL scale 4, will enable important structural changes by permitting greater housing densities along such railway corridors. Here, the ‘means’ – a more intense railway service – definitely supports the ‘ends’ of London growth and the greater capability of the urban area. This is beyond the territory of value mechanisms such as WebTAG and immediate benefit-cost ratios.

Conclusion

With current proposals such as the London 2050 Infrastructure Plan, railways should not be the inhibitors of economic development. Enfield Council welcomes ‘Improving Connectivity’ as a stimulus to the debate. The Council urges that Network Rail and the Department for Transport consider more fully the urban dimension in their plans to improve railways for national and regional purposes. There is a long way to go with West Anglia, where quality, quantity and service capacity still fall short of the urban priorities. We should be happy to discuss this topic in more detail, so that we can all look forward to more appropriate railway specifications in future years.