

Strategy -
6d Network Rail Scotland RUS

- Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to inform the Board of Network Rail's publication of a Generation Two Rail Utilisation Statement (RUS) for Scotland and to seek approval of a response to the consultation on the draft.

- Background

Network Rail are required to produce strategic plans for their network, known as Rail Utilisation Strategies (RUS). Split into 18 distinct geographic areas, one of these covers Scotland. The original Scotland RUS was published in March 2007 and a consultation draft on a Generation Two RUS was published on 15 October 2010. The RUS covers the period to 2024 in detail and considers high level strategic interventions to 2040.

A copy of the document is available on the Network Rail website at:

<http://www.networkrail.co.uk/browseDirectory.aspx?dir=\RUS%20Documents\Route%20Utilisation%20Strategies\RUS%20Generation%20Scotland&pageid=2895&root>

Responses are required by 13 January 2011.

- Scotland RUS Generation Two Consultative Draft

Following an advance briefing from Network Rail, the forthcoming RUS was discussed at the Nestrans Board meeting on 29 September 2010 and although it had initially been intended to hold a press conference on the subject, this was not possible due to other commitments. Instead, Nestrans produced a press release and commented to media enquiries as requested.

The following summarises the main points within the RUS and identifies key concerns for Nestrans and the north east.

- The consultation draft on a revised Scotland Rail Utilisation Strategy (RUS) is not considered to provide good news for the north east.
- The document considers Scotland's rail network to be in four distinct categories: Edinburgh and Glasgow conurbations, the interurban market, the rural market and Anglo-Scottish market. It is disappointing that the suburban considerations in the first category consider only the Central Belt (as far south as Ayr and Dunbar and as far north as Stirling and Dundee), yet exclude the potential for growing the journeys into Aberdeen. Services to, from and within the north east are primarily considered under the interurban market.
- The document is predicated on "passenger journeys" and crowding, with scant regard to crucial aspects such as passenger kilometres travelled and service quality which are much higher priorities for the north east. This focus on passenger journeys biases the

document towards short, commuter trips with less emphasis on the strategic business and leisure markets which are so important to the north east.

- The RUS is specific regarding growth scenarios for Glasgow (24-38% growth by 2024/5) and Edinburgh (90-115% growth by 2024/5) but does not provide such background for the Aberdeen area or the interurban market. Without this basic statistical background and analysis, it is difficult to respond meaningfully to the options tested and the results which are indicated.
- Whilst the document recognises that “outside of the central belt strong growth is also forecast to occur” and that “on some corridors there is anticipated to be a degree of crowding” there is insufficient detail to comment on the impact of growth in the north east and whether sufficient resources are being invested to enable satisfactory levels of service to accommodate demand.
- There is a reference to the fact that “steps may be taken to encourage staggering working hours in Edinburgh, Glasgow and other major centres – perhaps incentivised by fares policy”, but little to back this up. It may be taken to imply that Network Rail are suggesting higher peak hour commuter fares relative to the cost of off-peak travel. Nestrans would support a review of fares policy towards encouraging rail travel at quieter times and on longer distance journeys to address loading differentials throughout the day and through different parts of the country.
- The Government’s Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) was published in December 2008 following the last RUS and this revision tries to take this into account. Network Rail report recent experiences of high passenger growth - much higher than previous predictions and they have therefore upped their predicted passenger numbers model.
- However, the STPR commits to reductions in journey times between Aberdeen and the central belt of around 20 minutes. The RUS considers various options towards reducing journey times and concludes that the major investments which would be required to achieve such journey time improvements to the network in the north east are unlikely to be economically viable.
- Network Rail have considered options for achieving the STPR aspirations including train lengthening, additional services between Dyce and Aberdeen and improving infrastructure to remove the constraint at Montrose-Usan. All of these options are discounted on the basis of cost. A further option to speed journey times by recasting Aberdeen-Dundee as an express service is also dismissed on passenger impact at intermediate stations and on freight operations. The bend at Arbroath necessitates the slow train speed there and the RUS concludes that stopping there doesn't delay the train anyway.
- Indications from assessment are that of three options for the Montrose-Usan section, the best is to build a straight new alignment south of the existing Montrose station. This would cost in the region of £71.3million with a further £82.1million of operating costs, but generates just £8-10million in revenues and a further £15-24million in user and non-user benefits (over a 60-year appraisal life). Indications are that this could achieve a 7 minute journey time reduction. Network Rail believe that even electrification will not achieve the 20 minutes reduction contained in the STPR. In the section on longer-term issues, the RUS does indicate that “doubling the single line between Montrose and Usan, probably on a new improved alignment...” could reduce journey times.
- On Aberdeen suburban services the document refers to forecasts of crowding by 2019 and that significant investment would be required to bring about even small

improvements. It could be argued that overcrowding is already an issue, yet figure 5.9 appears to indicate that even by 2019, just 4 of 12 morning peak arrivals in scenario 1 (low growth) and 5 of 12 in scenario 2 (high growth) are likely to have higher than 100% passengers to seat ratio. In the evening peak, 2 of 11 departures from Aberdeen in both scenarios 1 and 2 are forecast to carry more than 100% loadings in 2019. The document states that “high load factors do not extend beyond Stonehaven and Inverurie”, effectively dismissing crowding as an issue of concern, even by 2019 in the high growth scenario.

- The RUS suggests that allowable standing time should be increased from the current target of 10 minutes and that flexible working and peak ticket pricing are more effective means of managing the crowding issue.
- On Aberdeen to Inverness, an assessment has been ongoing for around a year. This is scheduled to be reported to Transport Scotland in autumn this year. This includes consideration of options for improvements at Inveramsay and potential for a new station at Kintore. At this stage we are unaware of what the findings are, although the brief appears to have been a two hour end-to-end journey time providing an hourly frequency service. This option is to be taken to the next level of assessment.
- The few positives for the north east include opening up platform 8 (North) at Aberdeen station to improve train pathing for journeys north of Aberdeen. This reduces the need for shunting and is recommended on the grounds that it provides a saving to Government.
- To plug the gap between Stonehaven-Portlethen-Aberdeen in the morning peak, there is a proposal to provide an additional “shoulder peak” service after 2014. However, additional Dyce-Aberdeen services are not recommended as there are no available train paths without doubling the line through cutting and tunnel, which are expected to have a prohibitive cost.
- Reviews of linespeeds including differential speeds may be possible between Aberdeen and Edinburgh/Glasgow. Opportunities for linespeed upgrades will be considered when works take place.
- The document refers to the need to ensure that plans to provide High Speed Anglo-Scottish services (HSR 2) need to ensure the provision of suitable terminal capacity and adequate interchange to allow passengers to reach their ultimate destination quickly and efficiently.

On receiving the RUS, Nestrans officers identified a need to have a technical meeting with Network Rail officials. It is hoped to have such a meeting on 2 December, the outcomes of which can be presented orally to the Board. The intention would be to better understand the assumptions made in determining the outcomes of the RUS, particularly the growth forecasts for the Aberdeen area and to suggest to Network Rail that by focussing on passenger kilometres rather than merely number of journeys, they would better reflect the objectives of efficiently and effectively operating the rail network to its maximum potential. In such a way, it might be possible to reflect the north east’s needs in terms of better, more effective local and long-distance services.

Additionally, the RUS has failed in its duty to reflect the Government’s aspirations as articulated in the STPR. Governmental commitments to improve services should not be deflated by a publicly-funded company insisting that their priorities are taken forward because they are more cost-effective. The Scottish Government should be encouraged to step in and instruct Network Rail to rethink the RUS by reflecting the national priorities set out in the STPR.

- Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board:

1. notes the above report;
2. instructs officers to prepare a response to the consultative draft of the RUS based on the points made above;
3. sends a copy of the response on the RUS to Scottish Ministers and Transport Scotland, with a view to securing support for the comments; and
4. seeks the support of north east business organisations, local authorities and political representatives in helping to formulate a single north east voice calling for upgrades to the rail services to, from and within the region.

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