A Scrutiny Review Panel on:
Market Harborough Line Speed Improvements

Final Report of the Panel
May 2016
Foreword by the Chairman

“The proposals put forward by Network Rail to increase the line speed at Market Harborough, and across the Midland Mainline, provide a valuable opportunity for economic growth in the region. It is also an opportunity for Leicestershire County Council to work in partnership with Network Rail to provide better station facilities in Market Harborough and to improve local infrastructure to allow better access to the station.

Throughout the relatively short duration of this Panel we have heard from a number of stakeholders and it is very clear that these proposals are widely supported by local residents and users of the Midland Mainline. The Panel very quickly became aware of the benefits this will bring to the area and as such we strongly support the proposals.

I would not only like to thank the Panel members for their contribution to the Review, but also Network Rail and East Midlands Trains for the extensive information provided on the proposals and support they provided to us on our site visit to the station. I would also like to thank Harborough District Council for contributing to the Panel and hosting us after the site visit, and the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP), local user groups and elected members who all gave evidence to the Panel in a constructive and positive manner.

I hope you enjoy reading this report and that you find it an interesting precis of our Review. Our recommendations are included at the front of this report for ease of reference and our wider deliberations follow.”

David Jennings CC, Chairman of the Panel
County Councillor for the Cosby & Countesthorpe division
david.jennings@leics.gov.uk
Recommendations of the Panel

The Panel wishes to make the following recommendations to the Cabinet:

**General**

(a) That, in view of the substantial resultant benefits to the local and county economy, the proposals to improve the line speed at Market Harborough be welcomed;

(b) That the proposals to improve the station facilities, particularly in respect of disabled access and car and cycle parking facilities, be welcomed;

**Funding Gap**

(c) That there is recognition that, without addressing the £9.3 million funding gap, there is a danger that the project may not go ahead as planned and accordingly that officers be asked to press the case for full funding with partners and Central Government to ensure this project progresses and that local councils across the region who stand to benefit from the line speed improvements or station improvements be asked to make a local contribution to reduce this gap;

**Easy and Sustainable Access**

(d) That Network Rail’s proposals to improve car parking capacity at the station be welcomed, and that officers be asked to progress discussions to ensure a good quality and quantity of bicycle storage and undercover cycle parking facilities at the station are included;

(e) That officers be asked to consult with local bus companies to encourage bus services that currently terminate in the Town Centre to terminate at the train station where this is commercially viable;

(f) That, subject to (e) above, the County Council as the Highways Authority be encouraged look at ways in which sustainable transport access at the station could be improved;

**Rights of Way and Planning**

(g) That the Local Planning Authority seek to maximise the commercial and economic opportunities arising from the proposed investment in this project;

(h) That, in view of the significant associated costs of building a bridge, officers be encouraged to explore diverting the public right of way A46, off Langton Road. Great Bowden, and possible other additional non-motorised user routes from the north into the station;

(i) That officers at the County Council be asked to explore innovative solutions in tackling the current car parking issues on residential streets adjacent to the Station in a way that avoids disruption to local residents insofar as this is possible;

(j) That the significant role the County Council and the local planning authority would need to play in ensuring that any planning permissions for works associated with proposals are granted swiftly in order to avoid any undue delays to the project be recognised;

(k) That the County Council be asked to do all within its means to ensure that S106 contributions as part of future development in the area be focused towards providing a good level of pedestrian, cycle and highway access to the Station;

**Miscellaneous**

(l) That officers approach Network Rail with a view to ensuring that consideration be given to the donation of any surplus railway line to heritage railways such as The Great Central;

(m) That the active volunteer-base at the Station was and would remain an essential asset, ensuring the station remained an attractive and valuable asset to the local community;

(n) That officers provide Panel members with regular progress updates following Network Rails project steering group meetings.
Scope of the Review

1. The Panel was established as a ‘One-Day’ Review Panel in February 2016 with the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the proposed line improvements through Market Harborough and any associated potential improvements to the station facilities. In considering the proposals the Panel would need to understand the following issues:-

(i) How a £9.3 million funding gap might be addressed;

(ii) The arrangements for the construction and communication of the scheme to the public;

(iii) Traffic impact and use of alternative transport provision available during the works;

(iv) How disruption to highways and rail users could be minimised.

2. The Panel met in total on four occasions with its main evidence gathering session taking place on the 18 March. It took evidence directly from relevant organisations and stakeholders (detailed in paragraph 5 below). As part of the evidence gathering session, members of the Panel undertook a site visit to Market Harborough Railway Station in order to visualise how the proposed improvements would affect the station and consider whether any changes might be required. Following the site visit, the Panel resumed its meeting at the Harborough District Council offices.

Membership of the Panel

3. The following five members were appointed to serve on the Panel:

David Jennings CC  Bill Liquorish CC  Christine Radford CC  Jeffrey Kaufman CC  Max Hunt CC

4. Mr Jennings CC was elected as Chairman of the Panel.
Stakeholders consulted

5. Members of the public were invited to contribute to the Review via a press release issued prior to the start of the Panel's business. No submissions were received. Interest groups including all those highlighted below were individually invited to take part in the Panel’s Review. The Panel is grateful to the following who all contributed to its work:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Newman</td>
<td>Network Rail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexandra McMillan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lisa Angus</td>
<td>East Midlands Trains</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blake Pain CC</td>
<td>Leader of Harborough District Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarah Hill CC</td>
<td>Local County and District Councillor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andy Rose</td>
<td>Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christopher Groome</td>
<td>Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Rail Action Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve Jones</td>
<td>Harborough Rail Users Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephen Pointer</td>
<td>Harborough District Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phil Crossland</td>
<td>Leicestershire County Council</td>
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Background

6. In 2011 Network Rail announced that the Midland Mainline would be electrified, in the hope that this could be achieved by ‘the end of the decade’. Since then a number of other proposals have been developed, including straightening the line in a number of areas and undertaking other journey time, performance and capacity improvements. The section of the line running through Market Harborough has been included in these proposals. The improvements to the Midland Mainline form part of a £38 billion package of improvements to the UK rail network.

7. The Midland Mainline project has been split into two ‘key stages’. The first stage, which includes the improvements to Market Harborough, is scheduled for completion by December 2019. This will include increasing freight services, restructuring the timetable and reducing journey times. In addition to this, the line will be electrified between London to Kettering. The second stage scheduled for completion by December 2023 will electrify the rest of the line up to Sheffield and develop a fully electric fleet for Midland Mainline trains. As such any work taking place on the line at Market Harborough will be built towards the specification required to electrify the lines.

8. The necessity for this Review was further enforced by the development of a Rail Strategy for Leicester and Leicestershire which was approved for consultation by Cabinet on the 1st March 2016. The draft Rail Strategy contains four key priorities, one of which is the need to maximise the benefits from the Midland Mainline.
9. Network Rail has publicised its general proposals for the straightening of the line and improvements at Market Harborough station. At present, the line speed going through Market Harborough is one of the slowest in the UK with speeds of around 60mph, and as such there is a considerable business case for straightening the line. The general proposals indicate that the line will be straightened in the station area itself and to the north of the station. Figure 1 below demonstrates what the new straightened line (in red) would look like compared to the current line (in green). Figure 2 provides further detail on the changes to the line going through the station area.

10. Network Rail has previously confirmed that it will also be lengthening the platform at Market Harborough. Currently passengers have to move to the front of the train in order to get onto the platform. The lengthening of the line to accommodate 240m trains will make the service much more accessible for passengers.

Figure 1. Old (green) and new (red) railway line through Market Harborough
11. At the time of the Panel’s first meeting it was unclear what Network Rail had specifically planned for the station facilities other than improving disabled access to all stations across the UK under its “Access For All” Programme.

12. The proposals for the line and station facilities were clarified by Network Rail at the Panel’s evidence gathering session on 18 March (the details of the proposals are appended to this Final Report for completion).
**Project Funding**

13. Prior to the commencement of the Review it was known that there was a funding gap of £9.3 million which could have a significant impact on whether the improvements went ahead or the extent to which the improvements would be made. As indicated below, the Local Enterprise Partnerships - D2N2 (derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire), SCR (Sheffield City Region) and the LLEP - had already committed a combined total of £13 million to the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Source</th>
<th>Total (£m)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Network Rail - Discretionary Fund</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Rail - Journey Improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Network Rail - Access for All Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>Network Rail - Train Lengthening</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Local Enterprise Partnership Funding Total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total funding Committed</td>
<td>36.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expected Project cost</td>
<td>46.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding Shortfall</td>
<td>-9.3</td>
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**Project Cost and Funding**

14. The Panel was pleased to learn of a boost for the project from the Government when the Chancellor in his March 2016 budget statement announced that the project would receive £1 million of additional funding to enable parking improvements at the Station.

15. The Panel noted that, as part of the proposals, Network Rail had built in a contingency fund of around £9 million. Large scale projects such as this were required to build in significant contingencies to cover unknown factors, which inevitably emerge as scheme development progresses. The Panel noted that it would not be possible to utilise the contingency sum to fill the funding gap.

**Findings from the Review**

16. The findings from the Panel’s deliberations are set out below under the following key headings:

   (A) Funding
   (B) Line Improvements
   (C) Station Facilities
   (D) Wider Highways Improvements
   (E) Consultation and Communication

   **(A) Funding**

17. As referenced in paragraph 13 the £9.3 million funding gap for the project was considered to be a significant concern. Without the gap being filled, it would not be possible for Network Rail to carry out all of the necessary improvements. The
Panel queried a number of options for filling this gap including:

- Reducing the amount of work required (for instance, could a public right of way be extinguished rather than diverted);

- Press the case for partners, such as the LEPs, to contribute further towards the project beyond the £13 million that had already been committed; and

- Press the case with central government for additional funding.

18. The Panel ultimately came to the view that in order for the improvements to go ahead it would be necessary to seek a contribution from councils adjoined to Market Harborough that stood to benefit from the project. It was felt that this approach of identifying some local funding towards closing the gap would place the project on a better financial footing from which a reduced funding gap could hopefully be addressed via Central Government.

(B) Line Improvements

19. Network Rail outlined to the Panel what the new, straighter line would look like (as referenced in Figures 1 and 2), how much time this will save when taking into account the straightening works across the Midland Mainline, and what effect this could have on the local area. The Panel also heard, from both Network Rail and the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership, how this could benefit the area in terms of economic growth.

20. Market Harborough is already a “commuter town” for those working in London and this has contributed to house price rises in the area. An expansion of the facilities at the Station would unlock further opportunities for the local area. It would be important that the Local Planning Authority sought to maximise the commercial and economic opportunities that would stem from this project.

21. Not only would there be benefits to the City and County from being within an hour’s distance from London, but also to the wider region including the North Northamptonshire area. This was viewed as being significant as a means of marketing the area to businesses.
22. Those travelling by train through Market Harborough currently suffer one of the slowest line speeds in the UK due to the curvature of the line. Trains are required to slow down to just 60mph through the station. Whilst a slight bend in the track would remain as part of the works, a straighter line would allow trains to travel up to 90mph through the area. This, along with other line speed improvement along the Midland Mainline would contribute towards overall journey time savings of between 5.0 to 6.5 minutes between Market Harborough, Leicester and Loughborough and 0.5 minutes between Leicester and London St. Pancras. It is estimated by the Department for Transport that each additional minute of journey time can cost the economy approximately £133 million per minute. It is important to note that if the proposals are only seen in terms of the link between Market Harborough and London, the improvements to journey times could be perceived as being relatively insignificant. However the Panel was keen to consider the work within the context of wider performance improvement and straightening work across the entire Midland Mainline as the economic potential to be unlocked from this was significant.

23. In considering these broader economic benefits, it was assumed that the majority of passengers travelled from Market Harborough to London. However the Panel was surprised to learn that there was a 50/50 split between North and Southbound journeys. This further emphasised the need to view this benefits of this project beyond merely the “London commute”.

24. The line improvements themselves would involve the installation of a brand new line as improving the existing line was not considered to be feasible. As such, the Panel noted that disruption to rail passengers during the work should be minor with the most significant disruption taking place when the new line was connected to the portions of existing line. As this was largely a brand new line, with the potential for reconstructing some highways and public rights of way to accommodate it, the Panel acknowledged that this created an opportunity for Network Rail to modernise the line in anticipation of the electrification project which it was hoped would follow. This would then have the double benefit of a straighter, faster track with faster trains running on it.

25. The Panel did raise with Network Rail the potential for using the leftover railway line as a freight loop. However, as Market Harborough is located in a valley, a freight train would struggle to move out of Market Harborough once it had stopped. Accordingly, members suggested that Network Rail could explore potentially donating any surplus railway track to the local heritage railway lines such as the Great Central Railway.

26. There are a number of considerations for the new line, including the issues pertaining to public rights of way which are outlined in paragraph 35. Changing the current land use of the ‘pony paddock’ (owned by Network Rail) to the north of Market Harborough, and other public rights of way considerations will require Network Rail to consider as early as possible the planning applications required for the works to proceed. The planning authority and the County Council would have a role to play in ensuring this did not result in undue delays to the project.
(C) Station Facilities

27. As a result of the work to the platforms and the tracks there was a clear opportunity to extensively develop the station facilities which were badly in need of improvement. There was broad acknowledgement amongst the Panel and stakeholders that the disabled facilities at the station were inadequate. The Panel was reassured that a number of the project proposals included the introduction of new and better facilities which would be much more accessible by those with mobility impediments.

28. One of the key improvements needed was the passenger platform to be lengthened. At present when trains are stopping at Market Harborough passengers are required to move to the front of the train in order to disembark. However by extending the platforms this would allow longer trains to stop at the station without any inconvenience to passengers. Furthermore, the platform improvements would also aim to decrease the distance between the train and the platform in order to improve access. The Panel also felt that the lack of covered platform was unfortunate and that there was an opportunity to rectify this as part of the proposals.

29. Research undertaken suggested that 58% of those using the station travelled to it by car. This perhaps reflects the wide rural catchment of this particular station. As use of the rail network is forecast to significantly increase in the coming years, the Government’s announcement of £1 million for increasing the number of car parking spaces at the station was welcomed. As a result of this, the Panel noted that Network Rail was looking to increase capacity from 300 to over 500 spaces. However the Panel also recognised that provision for secure and covered cycle storage and parking, such as canopies, was important in encouraging sustainable travel to the station.

30. In addition to the increase in car parking capacity, the Panel was of the view that access to the station via bus would be crucial. The Panel felt that Network Rail
should consider creating sufficient space in the car park at the station frontage to enable buses to turn around after having terminated at the station. It was clear that further work would be required of the County Council in partnership with local bus companies to ensure these were feasible prior to taking these matters further with Network Rail.

31. The Panel was pleased to note that Network Rail was hoping to include a number of other improvements to the station, including the introduction of a shelter and ticket machines on both sides of the track.

32. It became very clear during the Review from all stakeholders the Panel met with that the current station building is a treasured community asset with a strong volunteer-base maintaining the aesthetics of the building. As a result of this Network Rail had agreed not to make changes to the building’s external appearance and would instead consider only the potential to improve its internal facilities.
(D) Wider Highways Improvements

33. Both the Leader of Harborough District Council, Councillor Blake Pain and the local member Dr. Sarah Hill CC made it clear to the Panel that there were a number of issues around parking which would need to be tackled. The Panel noted that there have been numerous complaints regarding commuters using the nearby residential streets for parking in the absence of sufficient parking provision at the station. Whilst it was hoped that the increased car parking capacity would tackle this issue, it would be important for the County Council to look into innovative parking enforcement solutions in the residential areas surrounding the station in order to mitigate any ongoing issues. It was hoped that this could be achieved in a way which would not adversely affect homeowners with parking permits.

34. It was made clear to the Panel that, arising from the 3,500 increase in dwellings in the town’s local plan, usage of the train service from Market Harborough was projected to increase and, as noted previously, the improved facilities would make the town an even more attractive commuter area for those travelling north and south. Owing to this ongoing and forecast development, the Panel suggested that officers should look to using Section 106 contributions from developers for the development of cycle lanes to the station. The Panel also stressed the need to look into improving access to the station by sustainable means such as bus and cycle. Should officers be successful in pressing the case with Network Rail for a bus stop within the car park, works would be required on the local highway to improve bus access.

35. There are a number of public rights of way which would be affected by the new line. These can be seen in more detail in Appendix A. Network Rail has proposed that three bridges along the line would need to be completely reconstructed to allow for the electrification work to proceed. Network Rail has investigated the current usage of footpath A46 (currently an underpass) in Great Bowden and believe that, owing to its relatively low usage, the part of this route going under the railway could be extinguished and pedestrians diverted. Approximately £1 million could be saved from extinguishing part of this route under the railway and diverting pedestrians rather than building a replacement route (that would have to be a bridge) through this area. The Panel is of the view that, in order to keep the project on track and on budget, where a more pragmatic solution can be found attempts should be made to avoid works such as this.
Footpath A46, under the Midland Mainline, to be considered for diversion.

(E) Consultation and Communication

36. Network Rail has already undertaken a consultation exercise with the residents of Market Harborough by briefing the local members and holding an open day on 27 February (in the town’s Market Hall) for the public which broadly outlined the proposals. The Panel was pleased to see that the decision not to alter the current station building was as a result of a public desire for the building to be retained as an attractive local asset to the community.

37. Network Rail is planning to continue to update local residents and users on the proposals, including a second open day event which is to be held in the Autumn. Once the plans had been finalised, the proposals would be published on the Network Rail website and local residents affected by the work would be updated on a regular basis particularly where it had the potential to cause disruption.

38. As with any planning applications and public right of way diversions, these would be subject to the usual consultation exercises and were subject to any comments from local residents and groups. The usual risk of objections to a planning application therefore applies to these proposals.
Recommendations of the Panel

39. The Panel wishes to make the following recommendations to the Cabinet:-

**General**

(a) That, in view of the substantial resultant benefits to the local and county economy, the proposals to improve the line speed at Market Harborough be welcomed;

(b) That the proposals to improve the station facilities, particularly in respect of disabled access and car and cycle parking facilities, be welcomed;

**Funding Gap**

(c) That there is recognition that, without addressing the £9.3 million funding gap, there is a danger that the project may not go ahead as planned and accordingly that officers be asked to press the case for full funding with partners and Central Government to ensure this project progresses and that local councils across the region who stand to benefit from the line speed improvements or station improvements be asked to make a local contribution to reduce this gap;

**Easy and Sustainable Access**

(d) That Network Rail’s proposals to improve car parking capacity at the station be welcomed, and that officers be asked to progress discussions to ensure that a good quality and quantity of bicycle storage and undercover cycle parking facilities at the station are included;

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(f) That, subject to (e) above, the County Council as the Highways Authority be encouraged look at ways in which sustainable transport access at the station could be improved;

**Rights of Way and Planning**

(g) That the Local Planning Authority seek to maximise the commercial and economic opportunities arising from the proposed investment in this project;

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**Miscellaneous**

(l) That officers approach Network Rail with a view to ensuring that consideration be given to the donation of any surplus railway line to heritage railways such as The Great Central;

(m) That the active volunteer-base at the Station was and would remain an essential asset, ensuring the station remained an attractive and valuable asset to the local community;

(n) That officers provide Panel members with regular progress updates following Network Rails project steering group meetings.

**Timetable for Decisions**

40. Following approval by the Scrutiny Review Panel, the Final Report will be submitted to the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 9 June and then the Cabinet at its meeting on 17 June. In accordance with standard practice, the Chairman of the Panel will represent the matter at the Cabinet meeting with support from officers.
Background papers


Circulation under the Local Issue Alerts Procedure

Dr. S. Hill CC
Mr. B. L. Pain CC

Officers to Contact:

Ben Holihead, Committee Officer
Tel: 0116 305 6339
Email: ben.holihead@leics.gov.uk

Sam Weston, Principal Committee Officer
Tel: 0116 305 6226
Email: sam.weston@leics.gov.uk

Phil Crossland, Director of Environment and Transport
Tel: 0116 305 7000
Email: phil.crossland@leics.gov.uk

Appendix

Appendix A – Line Speed Improvement Summary
Appendix B - Midland Mainline Electrification Programme
Appendix C - Line Speed and Station Improvements Summary

Equalities and Human Rights Implications

41. The station improvements are intended to provide better access for those with mobility impediments to both sides of the station, and as such will have a positive contribution to Equalities and Human Rights.