

Rail offers MMS answer

There are severe doubts about how effectively the industry is promoting rail in the Government's multi-modal studies.

Railfuture's London chairman Keith Dyall shows how much rail has to offer to the London-South Midlands Multi-Modal Study.

Many motorways are taking traffic which ought to be travelling by rail. There are a number of rail routes between South Midlands and London but unless one is travelling from Central London when one has the full range of options, then far too many journeys become unrealistic timewise.

Each of the main routes wanders in almost splendid isolation until it reaches the Midlands so that a person living on the Midland or Great Northern main lines has difficulty in reaching destinations on say the North Western main line such as Birmingham without going backwards and travelling into London, changing terminals and travelling out again.

The consequence is that far too many people use their cars. It will never be possible to cover every possible combination or anything like.

However far too few such journeys are possible without unrealistic journey times.

Commuting to London is increasing and from a wider and wider area around the capital. Public transport services are all geared to take people into central London and what is forgotten is that large numbers of people do not work within the central core and the journeys become difficult unless the commuters live and work on the same line of route.

A person living in Luton and working in say Finchley would have little option but to travel by car. It is also unhelpful when a major conurbation such as Dunstable is not rail connected.

It is also noticeable that at the M25 intersections with radial routes large numbers of vehicles leave the radial routes to be replaced by vehicles coming from the M25. The number of vehicles entering the radial routes is somewhat less than those leaving it, giving a clue that not all traffic is London-bound.

In the past there were a number of routes, which were of a non-radial purpose mostly of a local



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nature, which during the 1960s were closed because the local traffic to which their services were geared melted away.

Two of these are subject to very costly white elephant busway schemes, which would, if implemented, have marginal localised benefits.

Even one of the surviving routes, Bletchley-Bedford, is still geared to local traffic and not helping people who wish to go from say Hemel Hempstead to Leicester.

Many of the main line companies' advertising seems to indicate they want to take people into London but not the other way.

Midland Mainline does not advertise its services or train times at Thameslink stations through which it passes but does not call at. Bearing in mind that it is in direct competition with the parallel M1, this seems remiss. The list of closed routes,

which could be of benefit, is: -

- 1 Cambridge-St Ives-Huntingdon
- 2 Hitchin-Bedford
- 3 Bedford-Northampton
- 4 Welwyn GC-Luton
- 5 Luton-Dunstable-Leighton Buzzard
- 6 Aylesbury-Bletchley
- 7 East-West route.

While it may not be possible to put all of these back many of these are essential if we are to halt the rise in car usage on our trunk routes.

1 Cambridge-St Ives-Huntingdon

This would, with a station on the north side of Cambridge, bring many benefits including giving public transport options in opposition to the A14.

Improved access to Stansted Airport and Cambridge and West Anglia to the Great Northern, Peterborough and the North. It would also free up congestion on the north side of Cambridge and would provide alternative routes for rail freight from East Anglia and East London as existing routes are fairly congested. The main advantage is that the route is safe, and operationally viable

2 Hitchin-Bedford

It would provide access from the Great Northern suburban area to the East Midlands. Although there has been an increase in population in the area it is not clear that there would be sufficient to generate a viable local traffic base. The chances of reopening would increase if option 3 Bedford Northampton were to be reopened because it would increase the options for travel in that Birmingham and the West Midlands would become accessible from the Great Northern suburbs

3 Bedford-Northampton.

Would provide good links between the whole of the southern end of Midland main line into the West Midlands which would have potential to take traffic off of the M1 besides providing an additional route to London/Luton airport for Northampton residents. If item 2 were to be done it would improve rail journeys considerably within the area.

4 Welwyn-Luton

This is an option being considered by the orbital study. Would improve access to Midland main line from South Herts and North London and could provide some local traffic. With the implemen-

tation of item 5 the prospects for the route would be better.

5 Luton-Dunstable-Leighton Buzzard

This of all the routes holds the best chance of taking traffic off the roads and is certainly the most viable of all the schemes considered. Unfortunately the local authority have got a hang-up about using it for local bus services. Regrettably the busway will do little or nothing for transport in the area, and cost about £63million to implement. A rail link would serve a major town which is not currently on the rail network, reducing commuter traffic on the M1, improve access to Luton and the Airport from the West Midlands, Milton Keynes and Northampton. It would also link in Luton to the East-West route at Bletchley.

The track is already in place between Luton and Dunstable where there is sufficient land for a park and ride. Beyond Dunstable much of the trackbed is lost but it would be possible to put it back on a new alignment. We could consider Central and Silverlink services to Luton Airport or Thameslink to Milton Keynes. It is believed that a number of firms along the line of this route may be interested in using the route for freight and that Luton refuse department could use it for freighting out refuse.

6 Aylesbury-Milton Keynes

This is another route where the track is still in position and would connect the Metropolitan and Chiltern lines with Milton Keynes and the West Coast Main line.

7 The East-West route

This would in addition to the functions implied by its name be a distributor for the radial networks. The Bedford-Bletchley line will eventually form part of the East-West route.

If some of these options were carried out serious inroads could be made into the number of cars using the corridor.

Of course, the existing rail routes also need attention.

The East Coast main line could be four tracks between Huntingdon and Peterborough, the Hertford loop upgraded with passing places, attention to the Welwyn bottleneck and an improved junction at Hitchin.

If you would like a list of similar improvements for the West Coast, Midland, West Anglia, and Chiltern lines contact me at the Railfuture office or email me at keith.dyall@tesco.net