

National Infrastructure Commission,
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please reply to:

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2020-08-15

Dear National Infrastructure Commission,

Rail needs assessment for the Midlands and the North – Interim report

Further to our response dated 29th May to your Call for Evidence, please now find below our response to the questions posed in your Interim report.

I also attach two documents as supporting appendices.

One is the substantive contribution from our East Midlands branch colleagues.

Another is *'The Freight Solution to the Castlefield Problem: The Business Case for a new route and western access to Trafford Park'* which has been led by our national Freight Group in conjunction with the Infrastructure & Networks Group and supported by independent consultancy Railfreight Solutions. It is now scheduled to be the basis of an article in the October issue of Modern Railways, and also a presentation at the Fourth Friday Club's planned 'Rail in the North of England' conference at the National Railway Museum in York on Friday 2nd October (Covid-19 permitting).

Yours faithfully,

Roger Blake BA, MRTPI (Rtd), MTPS
Railfuture
Director for Infrastructure & Networks

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Section 3.1 Identifying proposals for investment

Question 1: Please provide specific sources for evidence that the Commission could use in estimating costs and the impact of proposals on journey time and capacity.

Our response in May to the Commission's Call for Evidence referred to 'The Manchester Area Strategic Freight Package' then titled '*The Castlefield Problem – a Great Opportunity for Freight*'. Over the four months since its original publication substantial refinements, and strategic stakeholder engagement as identified in the report, have been undertaken; '*The Freight Solution to the Castlefield Problem: The Business Case for a new route and western access to Trafford Park*' is the August revision, attached. It includes cost estimates and while the journey time savings and capacity potential given are directly for rail freight there are consequential beneficial impacts on journey time (including punctuality) and capacity for rail passengers. That work has been undertaken in the context of "Cross-Manchester Capacity and Performance (Castlefield Corridor)" being a scheme included in last October's Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline from the Department for Transport.

Section 3.3 Assessing the packages

Question 2: Given the evidence for how transport impacts growth and competitiveness, is assessing against the Commission's proposed criteria of productivity, connectivity, and unlocking investment in land around stations a reasonable approach to estimating the impacts of proposed rail investments? Please provide links to any specific sources of evidence you think that the Commission should use to support this methodology.

We believe so. Our East Midlands colleagues have highlighted some particular references.

Section 3.3 Assessing the packages

Question 3: Given the evidence for how transport impacts sustainability and quality of life, is assessing against the Commission's proposed criteria of amenity benefits, impact of rail freight, natural capital, and lifecycle carbon emissions, a reasonable approach to estimating the sustainability and quality of life impacts of proposed rail investments? Please provide links to any specific sources of evidence you think that the Commission should use to support this methodology.

We believe so. 'The Castlefield conundrum' – and the evidence presented in the proposition which we advocate to resolve it – is a very particular case in point for assessing present-day as well as potential impacts of rail freight.

Section 3.3 Assessing the packages

Question 4: Do you agree with the Commission's proposed approach to uncertainty?

We welcome the Commission's proposed approach. Calls on decision-takers are we believe ultimately matters of strategic assessment of policy priorities and informed judgement based on acknowledged assumptions, an acceptable balance of risks, and accumulated experience of what over time has tended to work out best overall elsewhere.