

Application by EDF energy to construct a power station at Sizewell in Suffolk (Sizewell C)

Rectifying the Missing Legacy - submission to the Planning Inspectorate by Railfuture

EDF Planning application reference: Book 6.10 Volume 9 Chapters 1-12

Summary of submission

Railfuture is not challenging the proposal on the grounds of generation need, and expects the application to be approved. We are however suggesting that two conditions be attached to any permission granted.

1. That EDF be required to revisit their strategy for bringing materials to the construction site, to use reasonable endeavours to make better use of rail and to enter into further negotiation with Network Rail to achieve this outcome.
2. That EDF be required to fund a full business case for improvements to the East Suffolk Railway Line, as detailed below.

Background

Railfuture recognises the need for additional generation capacity, not least to meet the demands created by the rolling out of electrification across the GB rail network (Network Rail Decarbonisation Task Force report "Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy", dated 31st July 2020, refers).

The East Suffolk Line is a mixture of single and double track supporting an hourly passenger service between Ipswich and Lowestoft. From the Ipswich end the first 9 miles as far as Woodbridge is a double track railway. The next 12 miles is single track as far as Saxmundham where the Leiston branch joins the railway. The next 9 miles to Halesworth is double track, followed by 16 miles of single track until it joins the Norwich to Lowestoft line at Oulton Broad. This single line includes a passing loop at Beccles, 9 miles north of Halesworth.

It is this passing loop at Beccles which fixes the timetable as northbound and southbound trains have to wait there to pass each other. Until this loop was installed in 2012, it was only possible to provide alternate-hour passenger services. Historically the railway was a double track line throughout, before 'rationalisation' in the mid-1980's. The whole double track-bed remains in the ownership of Network Rail.

During public consultation, EDF presented both 'rail led' and 'marine led' strategies (at stage 2) and later on 'road led' and 'rail led' options at stage 3. During both consultations Railfuture stressed the desirability of maximising use of rail. This would have required the installation of a passing loop, similar to the one at Beccles, somewhere near Wickham Market between Woodbridge and Saxmundham. Public pronouncements by EDF Energy at this time suggested that they would be able to leave a 'legacy' benefit following completion of Sizewell C. This was widely interpreted as leaving a passing loop that would permit an increase in passenger service frequency in future, possibly an Ipswich - Leiston service which would operate in addition to the hourly service to / from Lowestoft.

In its last consultation, stage 4, EDF promoted a 'hybrid' strategy using a maximum of just three trains per day, with no addition to rail infrastructure on the East Suffolk Line, and instead relying more heavily on road haulage. Coming from a company presenting itself as the provider of environment-friendly power generation, we consider that to be profoundly disappointing.

## The vision

In making our submission, Railfuture recognises that EDF would not normally be expected to provide infrastructure beyond that which would be required to build a power station. However, Railfuture would embed the legacy value of EDF's contribution in a more ambitious upgrading of the East Suffolk Line. This would involve more than just a passing loop - a greater length of double track which would exploit the benefits of the recent upgrading of the passenger train fleet, as well as increasing the frequency and therefore attractiveness of rail passenger services on the busier section of the line south of Saxmundham.

Enhancing rail's attractiveness by reducing journey time between Lowestoft and Ipswich

This can be achieved in two ways, both of which require the restoration of the line south of Saxmundham to a double track railway.

### 1. Performance of new rolling stock

Greater Anglia have replaced their old fleet of diesel units with new 100mph-capable trains (class 755). The old fleet was a mixture of class 153, 156 and 170 units. The slower class 153 had a maximum speed of 75 mph and so the sectional running times and timetable had to be defined by and were constrained around the limited performance capability of these units. As we have seen (above) the north and southbound trains have to pass at Beccles, which dictates the other crossing points. These were just north (about 90 seconds journey time) from Saxmundham and between Ipswich and Woodbridge. If the timetable could be re-written to exploit the greater capability of these new – not just faster top speed but also, and more importantly in this context, faster-accelerating – trains then the crossing points would move further south. This however is not currently possible as the line south of Saxmundham is only single track. Re-doubling this section of line would contribute greatly to improving the attractiveness of the rail service.

### 2. Provision of a second passenger service

If the residents of Leiston are to enjoy a 'legacy' benefit from the construction of Sizewell C, including the improvements to the Leiston branch, Railfuture advocates a second service on the East Suffolk Line between Leiston and Ipswich - calling all-stations at Saxmundham, Wickham Market, Melton, Woodbridge, and Westerfield (for the new 'Ipswich Garden Suburb', which would also be served by Felixstowe branch services). Of these five intermediate stations only the busier two, Woodbridge and Saxmundham, would still be calls in services to / from Lowestoft, giving further journey time improvements by omitting calls at the other less-busy three to be served instead by the new Leiston service.

## Performance risk

To achieve the above improvements would require sufficient double track between Woodbridge and Saxmundham to permit the passing of north and southbound Lowestoft trains, the passing of each with the 'stopping' Leiston services and the passing of the two stopping services themselves. These would require more than one passing loop and so Railfuture suggests that three options be examined:

1. Doubling of the line between Wickham Market and Saxmundham
2. Doubling of the line between Melton and Saxmundham
3. Complete doubling of the line between Woodbridge and Saxmundham

Option 1 would be the 'bare minimum' required to achieve the suggested improvements. However, the current franchise agreement includes provision of through services between Lowestoft and London. These services will be exposed to greater risk of picking up delay minutes on the Great Eastern Main Line (GEML) south of Ipswich with consequent impact on timings on the East Suffolk Line.

Option 2 would overcome this problem but would require the reinstatement of the former 'up' platform at Wickham Market.

Option 3 would require the reinstatement of the up platform at Melton in addition to the above but would avoid the operational expense of switches and signalling which would incur the costs of supplying power to remote locations.

Our ask

Railfuture therefore recommends that the Planning Inspectorate attach a condition requiring EDF to fund the necessary business case and development work to provide a genuine legacy for the East Suffolk Line and the communities served by it. This will not be realised within the Sizewell C construction period but will provide a lasting foundation for a zero-carbon future when increasing reliance will be placed on the use of rail.

In the meantime, Railfuture wishes to see EDF and Network Rail redoubling their efforts to maximise the use of rail for the construction of Sizewell C.

Exact replica of submission made online to  
<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/Eastern/The-Sizewell-C-Project/>

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