railfuture

RAILFUTURE RESPONSE TO LUTON RISING'S FUTURE LUTON STATUTORY CONSULTATION APRIL 2022

Introduction

Railfuture is Britain's leading, longest-established, national independent voluntary organisation campaigning for a bigger and better railway network for passenger and freight users. This response draws together the views of local Railfuture members, the Passenger Group and affiliated Rail User Groups, as authorised by Railfuture's national Board of Directors.

Our response is limited to rail aspects of the Surface Access element.

We confirm that we do not own land or hold any interests or rights, such as private rights of way or sporting rights covered by your proposal.

We are already in receipt of updates about your proposals.

Question 9: "Getting to the airport"

Do you have any comments on our proposed 'Getting to and from the airport – emerging transport strategy?' Do you have any suggestions for how we can maximise access to the airport by public/sustainable transport modes?

2.1.3: We believe that the start of the DART service to link Luton Airport Parkway Railway station to the airport is a critical milestone in encouraging passengers, meeters & greeters and staff to use the railway to get to/from the airport.

We believe the airport is correct to put DART at the heart of the Surface Access Strategy and welcome the formal commitment to extend the length of DART to serve the proposed Terminal 2.

2.4.4 / Table 2-2: We have commented below on the detail behind this table.

2.5.3 / Table 2-3: We believe the targets for growth in the share of passengers arriving by public transport (table 2.3) are not sufficiently ambitious. In 2.3.2 there is an observation on the beneficial impacts of the DLR's arrival at London City Airport; rather than seeking just a 2% (of passengers) growth for Phase 1 (which can be alternatively expressed as an increase in the ratio of 5%), targets should be significantly higher. For instance, the author of this response lives in Hertfordshire on the Midland Main Line and currently normally takes a taxi to the airport (or is given a lift by a family member). Post DART, walk (or taxi) to the local station, train, then DART (and the reverse) will become the default. EMR Connect, with the "30 minutes to the terminal" marketing can be expected to deliver an increase; Crossrail will also offer opportunities for growth, as it will substantially increase the "just one change" area for train travel (eg Slough to Luton Airport Parkway).

We are not in a position to suggest a specific ratio, but it would seem reasonable that Phase 1 has an uplift in proportion of travellers by 15 to 20% - ie to 44% to 46% with a further 10 to 15% uplift in proportion for Phase 2 (ie 50 – 52% of total travellers).

2.5.7 & 2.5.8: The post-pandemic nature of rail demand is different, and whilst Railfuture concurs with the hope of total demand returning, some aspects will not – eg during traditional rush hours, freeing up capacity for airport passengers.

Specifically, the changed "shape" of demand may well allow more rail capacity to be provided in the early mornings, to increase the proportion of rail based arrivals for (eg) a 5am check-in.

2.6.8: We agree and have provided more detail in our response to section 5.

5.2.1: The airport should be prepared to invest in Luton Airport Parkway station as airport passenger numbers grow. At present, the station contains many passenger aids (eg lifts, disabled toilets) that are single points of failure because they have not been provided as pairs / duplicates / in multiple locations. We recognise that after DART is operational, many flows will change substantially (eg the lift on the west side of the station will reduce in importance), but the airport should be prepared to invest to ensure the station can support the airport passenger numbers using it, and this needs to include facilities such as additional disabled toilets that are essential for some, but not all passengers; and likewise removal of reliance on a single lift to provide level access to a platform.

5.4.1: Our understanding is that the imminent May 2022 Thameslink timetable should be regarded as the new post Covid baseline. This will not deliver the 24 trains per hour through 'The Core' originally envisaged, but as regards the Midland Main Line will deliver the full off-peak service, with fewer services (that do not serve the airport) in the peak to/from Gatwick Airport, East Grinstead and Littlehampton. Whilst probably only a requiring minor change in approach, the airport needs to re-set its assumptions on capacity and destinations served by Thameslink. More critically, whilst the return to pre-Covid capacity is unclear, it is clear that there will be more capacity in peak hours for airport passengers due to substantial continuing "work from home" days by Thameslink Commuters.

The airport should have an aspiration to organise (and possibly fund) an increase in the frequency of early morning Thameslink services to better serve airline departures (and to a lesser extent arrivals) at the start of the day.

5.4.4: On EMR, we agree that the EMR Connect service is a substantial improvement for airport passengers and workers. Not mentioned, but very relevant, is the additional delivery of stops every 30 minutes by EMR Intercity services at Kettering, offering greater frequency for journeys such as Luton Airport Parkway to/from Derby.

Whilst EMR Connect offers a substantial improvement for Central London and stations between Bedford and Corby (and Thameslink offers good connectivity for much of southern England), passengers on the Midland Main Line north of Kettering are faced with an additional change there vis a vis the historic timetable philosophy and it is not an ideal changing location, particularly for passengers with larger item(s) of luggage, prams/buggies and/or limited mobility, due to large platform to train gaps.

This is because current EMR timetable philosophy (as specified by the Department for Transport) segments the route at Kettering with EMR Connect being the very substantial portion of the service to the south. The Airport should aspire, and lobby, for, as opportunity arises, for:

- Calls by EMR Intercity services at Luton Airport Parkway station, so as to provide direct trains for passengers living in more localities (eg Leicester, Nottingham). In this context, the minimisation of overlap between the Connect and Intercity brands may no longer be so essential as the mix of business, commuting and leisure traffic evolves in the post-pandemic world.
- A full redevelopment of Bedford Station as set out in our comments on East West Rail below.

5.4.15: On East West Rail, a key issue for the airport is Bedford station development. The extra traffic from east and west provides additional justification for an additional platform that will allow EMR Intercity trains to London to call at Bedford without a significant time penalty (they can already do so on their northbound journeys). Thus justifying more calls and more opportunity for just one change journeys. For more detail, we refer you to our response to the East West Rail Statutory Consultation of June 2021: https://railfuture.org.uk/display2717#page=14.

5.5.1: We agree with this aspiration but note that this needs to be delivered in advance of the airport expansion. The aspiration needs to be extended to include support for the PAYG features (keyGo) of GTR's Smartcard, 'The Key', and, in time, for the more general rollout of PAYG on National Rail.

On ticketing, and not mentioned, we believe it needs to be possible to purchase the full range of national rail tickets at the airport terminal. This is for journeys that are not suitable / possible via PAYG and for destinations such as London when PAYG is not the best option (eg for passengers without contactless bank cards, travelling with children or in a group).

6.5.5 / Table 6-1: In the Interventions, we note no mention of the local Community Rail Partnership (Beds & Herts CRP ~ https://www.facebook.com/BandHCRP). We believe it will be productive for the airport to work with them to encourage a switch to rail for more local passengers on the Midland Main Line, particularly as DART almost eliminates the barrier of the distance between Rail station and airport terminal (we refer to our comment under 2.5.3).

9.6: On 'Trip Generation – Public Transport', we believe that the situation has moved on very significantly vis a vis the de-facto baseline date of 2019. In particular:

- The commuter market has very substantially reduced, and for many workers there is a permanent shift to substantial portion of days being "work from home". There is also now more flexibility in timing of work attendance – with, eg, the option to work at home briefly then travel in after off-peak fares are available.
- The commuter market has moved from 4 busy days and a quieter day (Friday) to 3 busy days and 2 quieter days (Monday & Friday). Thus commuter and air passenger demand has become more complementary.
- Whilst total commuting demand may yet return to pre-pandemic levels, we believe this will only occur if London becomes the hub for many more staff (for example – previous demand of 100 = 80 travelling 5 days and 25 travelling 4 days a week; new demand of 100 = 60 for 2 days, 60 for 3 days, 30 for 4 days and 16 for 5 days – ie a total employment rising from 100 to 286).
- The Rail Industry's economics have fundamentally shifted from being centred around the peaks to a need to generate optional travel, which means the industry needs to be more receptive to encouraging passengers.
- In the medium term fare structure changes may make it more appealing for passenger to travel at the traditional peak time.