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22nd July 2020

Dear Sir/Madam

Aberdeenshire Council Proposed Local Development Plan 2021

This letter comprises Network Rail's response to the consultation on the above plan.

Introduction

Network Rail is the statutory undertaker which owns, operates, maintains, renews and enhances the country's railway infrastructure and associated estate. This includes track; bridges, viaducts and tunnels; signals; level crossings; maintenance and stabling depots and stations.

Recent projects taking place in, and benefitting, the Aberdeenshire area include the Aberdeen to Inverness Rail project. Feasibility appraisal work is currently ongoing with regards to rail enhancements between Aberdeen and the Central Belt including potential line speed improvements, additional loops to allow passing of freight trains, and upgraded signalling along the entire length of the line to reduce headway times.

The rail industry's Long-Term Planning Process which takes a high-level view of funder and market requirements over a 30-year planning window is informed by the connectivity aspirations set out in Scottish Government transport policy comprising the Infrastructure Investment Plan; the National Transport Strategy; Scotland's Railways; and the Strategic Transport Projects Review.

The process is also informed by Network Rail's forecast of rail demand on individual corridors and the likely capacity constraints that are likely to arise as a result of increases in passenger and freight demand. This long-term, high-level view informs the more detailed work required to make investment decisions in the short and medium terms. Because Network Rail is funded and regulated in five-year Control Periods this process typically has a ten-year window. The next Control Period (CP6) runs from April 2019 to March 2024. Following the Rail Industry initial response to Scottish Ministers 'Scotland's Rail Infrastructure' consultation the High-Level Output

Specification was published in July 2017. Further work is being done to develop the interventions proposed in the Scotland Route Study as Choices for Funders in CP6 and CP7 (2019-2029).

The Vision

The importance of the railway to sustainable development that reduces the need to travel, reduces reliance on private cars and promotes safe and convenient active travel opportunities. For development plan objectives relying on sustainable transport and improved rail connections to be realised, Network Rail must rely on Plan policy and guidance which ensures the impacts of proposals on rail infrastructure are clearly assessed and that delivery, including funding, responsibilities are clear.

To enable Aberdeenshire Council to achieve the vision of the LDP we strongly recommend that comments provided within this representation are considered.

Primary Policies

Policy PR2 Reserving and Protecting Important Development Sites

PR2.1 We will protect and not allow alternative development on sites that may reasonably be needed in the future for:

- **delivering improvements to transportation including projects identified in the Settlement Statements, the Local or Regional Transport Strategy, or the Strategic Transport Projects Review, routes recognised in the Core Paths Plan network, closed railways and their abutments, embankments and cuttings, existing airports and airfields and operational areas of ports and harbours;**

Transport

RD2.7 We need contributions to make transportation improvements as shown in Appendix 7 and in the Delivery Programme. These will include work on the trunk road network and in Aberdeen City. The Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan has prepared a cumulative transport appraisal to inform their strategic transport advice. This could also include improvements to rail infrastructure.

Network Rail generally supports the approach of Policy RD2.7. It is right that where transport improvements are required that appropriate contributions are made by developers and we welcome the inclusion of improvements to rail infrastructure in the policy. We understand the need for local planning authorities and infrastructure providers to work closely together to understand development impacts and appropriate mitigations and to ensure effective delivery.

Network Rail should be clearly excluded from having to make developer contributions as a publicly owned company arm's length body of the Department for Transport (DfT).

Network Rail generally supports the provisions of Policy PR2: Reserving and Protecting Important Development Sites. In this respect Network Rail requires the continued support of the local authority in safeguarding and improving the railway network. Specifically, there is the potential to need additional land in proximity to Drumlithie and Laurencekirk to allow formation of new rail loops in connection to

Aberdeen to Central Belt rail improvements. These railway improvements are in an early stage of design and specific sites have not been identified but it would be helpful to have general policy support for this project in the Local Plan. Network Rail requests that the wording of the policy provides for the general use of land to support future improvements to railway infrastructure.

Level Crossings

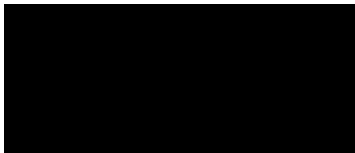
Level crossing safety is of the utmost importance to Network Rail and we are committed to reducing the risk at level crossings where reasonably practicable. In addition, increase in usage of a level crossing may impact on line speed conflicting with a main Government objective for faster journey times. Increase in road traffic across a level crossing may also have an adverse effect on the road network as a result of longer journey times and queueing while level crossings are closed to allow trains to pass. Only in exceptional circumstances will we permit new crossings to be introduced onto the network.

In recognition of these issues Network Rail is a statutory consultee in the development management process in respect of proposals which may impact on level crossings.

We work with local councils to reduce level crossing risk and encourage planning authorities to co-operate in securing level crossing closures or improvements in connection with new developments through development management and through clear development plan policy and supplementary guidance.

Network Rail would be happy to discuss any of the issues raised above.

Yours faithfully



Network Rail Town Planner