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HS2 released rail capacity options published

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Network Rail and Passenger Focus have set out the improved level of service commuters using trains on the West Coast Main Line could expect if High Speed 2 is built.

Building on responses from a survey of 6,000 rail and non-rail users by Passenger Focus, Network Rail has drawn up a list of 'conditional outputs' which it believes should be pursued if long-distance services migrate to High Speed 2. Under the scenarios explored commuters travelling into London from Northampton, Milton Keynes, Leighton Buzzard, Berkhamsted, Hemel Hempstead and Watford Junction would benefit from faster journey times made possible by running 125mph trains.

The conditional outputs specified by Network Rail, which it says would make best use of the released capacity on the WCML, are:

London suburban

- An increase in the provision of London suburban peak services to the level where all passengers travelling for more than 20 minutes have a reasonable expectation of a seat for the duration of their journey
- A reduction in journey times between London and major commuter stations, such that the mixture of non/limited stop and stopping services to/from any given station does not lead to overcrowding

London urban

- An all-day increase in the minimum frequency of London urban services to four trains per hour. This would only be possible with additional infrastructure or a reduction in the frequency of Bakerloo line services on the DC lines that serve both London Euston and London Underground

West Midlands suburban

- Provision of additional direct services between major centres in the West Midlands metropolitan area

London interurban

- Provision of services to broadly maintain the existing connectivity between London and intermediate stations.
- A reduction in journey times between London and Trent Valley stations

Non-London interurban

- An increase in the number of direct trains between large stations at the north and south ends of the WCML and specification of the local timetable to connect with these services

Freight

- To accommodate 85 and 80 trains per day on the Wembley-Rugby and Rugby-Stafford sections of the WCML respectively. These freight paths should not have significantly longer journey times or reduced capability compared to currently, to ensure that rail remains competitive with road haulage
- To be able to accommodate the same level of freight traffic with high speed services using the route north of Lichfield, as would be the case without these new services

Euston: 125mph trains could serve main commuter towns once High Speed 2 opens



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In the majority of cases Network Rail has concluded that the outputs identified could be delivered when the proposed new line between London and Birmingham opens. A second stage of the study is planned to develop a more detailed understanding of any trade-offs between outputs in order to provide the best overall level service on the West Coast Main Line in the future.

Paul Plummer, Network Rail group strategy director, said: "HS2 would not only transform travel between our major cities, it is also the best way to solve the capacity crunch facing passengers and businesses on the West Coast Main Line. This joint study with Passenger Focus means we now know what commuters, business and leisure travellers and freight companies want from their railway so we can work with our customers and government to help plan for a future West Coast Main Line which best meets the their needs and supports rather than stifles economic growth."

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