HSUK TRANSPENNINE RAIL STRATEGY : WOODHEAD CORRIDOR RESTORATION

INTRODUCTION

The Pennine range represents probably the greatest physical obstacle to transport connectivity in the UK. Its roads and railways, vital for regional prosperity on both sides of the Pennines, are severely congested, and lack the capacity either to accommodate anticipated future growth, or to offer a resilient service when disruption occurs. All this has massive implications for both regional and national economic growth. This issue was ignored in the original (2010) HS2 proposals for the London-centric 'Y', and was only belatedly acknowledged (2014) with the launch of the HS3/Northern Powerhouse initiative. Proposals released in January 2018 fail to meet the journey time and routeing targets set by 'One North' in 2014; this leaves High Speed UK as the only credible proposals for improved trans-Pennine links. The abandoned Woodhead route presents a unique opportunity to transform transpennine and national rail connectivity; the following diagrams set out the HSUK vision for a multi-stakeholder restoration proposal that will cater for the multiple requirements of passengers and freight, on local and longer-distance journeys. For precise details of the core High Speed UK proposals (as included in the cost estimates), see the HSUK Regional Maps on www.highspeeduk.co.uk.

TPW1: TRANSPENNINE RAIL SYSTEMS - PRE-1923 GROUPING

Northern communities to the east and the west of the Pennines were linked by 5 principal routes, all operated by separate companies, respectively (from south to north):

- Hope Valley (Midland, linking Sheffield Midland and Manchester Central),
- Woodhead (Great Central, linking Sheffield Victoria and Manchester Piccadilly),
- Diggle (London North-Western, linking Leeds New and Manchester Exchange),
- Calder Valley (Lancashire & Yorkshire, linking Leeds Central/Bradford Exchange and Manchester Victoria), and
- Skipton-Colne (Midland and Lancashire & Yorkshire, linking Leeds Wellington Street/Bradford Forster Square and East Lancashire towns).

Although the existence of multiple routes between the primary cities of the North was to be welcomed, connectivity was greatly compromised by the duplication of terminals (only partially mitigated by the fact that New and Wellington Street stations in Leeds were adjacent, likewise Exchange and Victoria stations in Manchester). With high demand from both passenger and freight traffic, capacity on these routes was enhanced by substantial 4-tracking; in the case of the London North-Western's Diggle route, most of its length comprised 4 tracks, achieved either by on-line widening or by the construction of parallel loops.

TPW2 : ORIGINAL ELECTRIFIED ROUTE & ONWARD LINK TO MERSEYSIDE

The Woodhead route comprised the first rail link between Manchester and Sheffield. It opened in 1846, long predating the present Hope Valley route (1894). It was electrified after the Second World War, and at the time comprised the primary passenger route (from Sheffield Victoria to Manchester Piccadilly) and freight route (from the Yorkshire coalfield to Lancashire power stations). The diagram illustrates the core electrified sections of route, and the onward freight route via the Tiviotdale line, following the Mersey Valley through Stockport. The Woodhead route was closed to passengers in 1970, and to freight in 1981.

TPW3 : EXISTING TRANSPENNINE RAIL ROUTES

This diagram shows the abandoned Woodhead corridor in relation to the 3 transpennine routes currently in operation. Trains on transpennine routes are slow and often crowded, and service levels compare poorly with intercity routes to London. Leeds and Manchester are still connected by the Calder Valley and Diggle routes, although the latter has been reduced to 2 tracks, with 4-track sections eliminated and both the Spen Valley loop (aka the Leeds New Line) and the Micklehurst loop abandoned. More critically, Sheffield and Manchester are linked only by the Hope Valley route. This 'single strand' connectivity is unique among close-spaced primary UK city pairs, and compels bus substitution whenever disruption occurs; it is self-evident that a restored Woodhead route would radically improve transpennine connectivity between Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire.

Transpennine connectivity has also been significantly reduced through the closure of the Skipton-Colne line (in 1970), and this has only partially been mitigated by the introduction (in the 1980's) of new Leeds-Bradford-Burnley-Blackburn-Preston services, routed via Hebden Bridge in the Calder Valley. It is significant to note that neither the Skipton-Colne nor the Woodhead routes were proposed for closure by the Beeching report; instead, closure can be attributed to the 'cross-border' nature of both routes, and the lack of a single local authority to champion them.

TPW4 & TPW5 : OFFICIAL PROPOSALS FOR NORTHERN HUB & HS2/NORTHERN POWERHOUSE RAIL

Network Rail's Northern Hub proposals comprise a suite of enhancements to existing routes radiating from Manchester. These are aimed at improving both line speed and line capacity, and will bring significant benefits to transpennine services. But aside from the new Ordsall Chord in central Manchester, no new connectivity will be created, and overall, it is reasonable to categorise the improvements achieved as 'incremental' and still excessively reliant on certain critical sections of existing route. Northern Hub does not represent the step-change enhancement that is proposed for London-centric high speed axes, and it is puzzling that in its supporting documentation for the HS2 project released in 2010, the Government offered Northern Hub as mitigation for the absence of any proposal for a transpennine high speed link. Northern Hub also provides no new cross-Manchester capacity for freight, which must still pass through either Victoria or Piccadilly stations.

HS2 proposals are also shown indicatively; as noted previously, these comprise a 'Y', focussed upon Birmingham and London, and lacking any transpennine dimension. This can be seen in HS2's current proposals for terminus stations, at both Leeds and Manchester; in both their configuration as termini, and in the alignment of the approach routes, these proposals introduce huge inefficiencies into the provision of efficient high speed links between the principal cities of the North. To meet the journey time specification of 30 minutes of the 'One North' initiative (originally promoted by the city councils of Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and Newcastle and adopted by Transport for the North) on both Manchester-Leeds and Manchester-Sheffield routes, 2 separate new transpennine lines, each with tunnels over 30km long will be required.

TPW6 : ALTERNATIVE TRANSPENNINE STRATEGY : HIGH SPEED UK 'TOTAL TRANSPORT SOLUTION' VIA THE WOODHEAD CORRIDOR

Although current Network Rail plans take no account of the potential of the abandoned Woodhead rail route, it is still evident that both as a route and as a wider development corridor, it offers the greatest possibilities for achieving step-change improvements in transpennine rail connectivity. The interests of the multiple stakeholders - passengers and freight, on local and longer-distance journeys - create a requirement for a balanced 'Total Transport Solution' addressing all needs. This diagram sets out the key strands of the Total Transport Solution:

- High speed intercity passenger services linking Liverpool and Manchester to other primary cities (ie London, Leicester, Nottingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow) along east-sided Anglo-Scottish spine route, as per High Speed UK proposals.
- Lorry shuttles linking M60 to M1, to assist road haulage between Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire and thus eliminate HGV congestion on A628(T) Woodhead road (and other Trans-Peak routes).
- Longer-haul container flows from East and West Coast ports.
- Local passenger flows between Greater Manchester, Pennine and South Yorkshire communities.

TPW7 : WOODHEAD CORRIDOR RESTORATION : PROPOSED HIGH SPEED PASSENGER SERVICES

A transpennine high speed rail connection is crucial to creating a symmetric and comprehensive national network of high speed lines. It is the key differentiating element in the High Speed UK proposals, permitting multi-billion savings and radically improved rail connectivity, compared with the alternative HS2 proposals. HSUK's transpennine route is crucial in enabling all primary UK cities to be interlinked by hourly (or more frequent) high speed services.

The cost savings, amounting to over £20 billion pounds, circa 33%, accrue through High Speed UK's shorter overall route length, lesser need for tunnelled construction, and general avoidance of sensitive rural areas, in the Chilterns and elsewhere, through close adherence to existing transport corridors. It should be noted that these savings apply even with the major civil engineering works necessary to establish a high speed (ie 200/250km/h locally) route through the Pennines, with major upgrade to the existing Woodhead tunnels, and several kilometres of new tunnel and viaduct required where curves on the existing Woodhead route are too tight. There will be minor intrusion into adjoining areas of Peak District National Park, principally impacting upon the Victorian reservoirs in Longdendale; and this must be balanced against the major local environmental improvements achieved with other aspects of the proposal, in particular the M1/M60 lorry shuttle.

The HSUK proposals have now been developed to include a new through route via Manchester Airport, connecting the airport to HSUK and other trunk routes to east and west of the airport and giving direct airport access to most major communities of the North (see Diagram TPW13). These connections, together with HSUK's comprehensive intercity links, satisfy all the connectivity and journey time requirements of the 'One North' initiative promoted by the city councils of Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and Newcastle. These journey time requirements have since been adopted in the Government's Northern Powerhouse initiative.

TPW8 & TPW9 : WOODHEAD CORRIDOR RESTORATION : PROPOSED LORRY SHUTTLE SERVICES & TRUNK HGV BANS ON TRANS-PEAK ROADS With only the M62 providing a highly congested transpennine motorway link via West Yorkshire, lorry flows between Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire are compelled to use inadequate trunk roads, in particular the A628(T) Woodhead road. This causes major congestion and disruption in local communities, particularly in Longdendale; this in turn creates a demand for new road construction with the ultimate logical conclusion of a 'Trans-Peak' motorway to complement the M62 to the north. This can only be realised with huge environmental damage within the Peak District National Park. Restoration of the Woodhead route - to a structure gauge larger than that required for European double-decker rolling stock - offers a unique opportunity to transfer the critical lorry flows (and possibly cars also) onto a 'Shuttle' operation, similar to the Channel Tunnel or Alpine passes. This would connect a terminal at Bredbury on the M60 with Tinsley on the M1.

With this link in place, it would be possible to implement lorry bans (for trunk flows) on all Trans-Peak roads ie Greenfield-Holmfirth (A635), Woodhead (A628T), Snake (A57), Peak Forest (A623T) & Buxton-Matlock (A6). Aside from local economic and environmental benefits, this would also effect major reductions in transport CO₂ emissions.

TPW10 : WOODHEAD CORRIDOR RESTORATION : PROPOSED LONG-HAUL FREIGHT ROUTES

A restored Woodhead route will hugely benefit long-haul railfreight flows. Existing routes lack both the route capacity and the physical size (in tunnels and bridges) to accommodate 9'6" marine containers on standard wagons. This hugely limits the hinterland of Northern ports (Liverpool on the west coast, Immingham, Hull & Teesport on the east coast), with major impacts upon Northern economic activity. Restoration of Woodhead, along with restoration of routes bypassing Manchester along the Mersey Valley, will provide the required step-change enhancement in both line capacity and structure profile.

This raises the tantalising possibility of coast-to-coast freight links, with a 'land-bridge' operation in which containers on Transatlantic mega-carriers might be landed at Liverpool, transferred by rail to an east coast port, and loaded aboard smaller ships en route to Scandinavia and the Baltic. This 'bulk-breaking' operation normally takes place at Rotterdam, but could equally well occur in the UK, with major savings in shipping times and costs.

TPW11 : WOODHEAD CORRIDOR RESTORATION : PROPOSED LOCAL PASSENGER SERVICES

The engineering works required to establish an enhanced Woodhead rail corridor will inevitably cause a degree of disruption and environmental nuisance to local residents, as well as some permanent intrusion arising from the operation of intensive rail traffic. Community support will be essential, and it is important to recognise that not all local residents suffer immediate impacts from traffic congestion along the route of the A628T. Community benefits will be maximised through reintroduction of local passenger services, linking east Manchester and Longdendale to employment opportunities in South Yorkshire, and likewise from Barnsley and Penistone to Greater Manchester. New passenger services, extending as far east as Barnsley, would act as a spur to the restoration of the abandoned Dearne Valley route from Barnsley to Mexborough; and with this link in place, a new transpennine link, running Manchester-Glossop-Penistone-Barnsley-Mexborough-Doncaster would become feasible.

TPW12 : KEY INFRASTRUCTURE WORKS ASSOCIATED WITH WOODHEAD RAIL CORRIDOR RESTORATION

Restoration of the Woodhead corridor will attract major new transpennine traffic flows to the railway, and this will create pressure for development elsewhere in the region. The greatest priority will be to facilitate east-west flows across Manchester, and to achieve superior intercity/high speed links to Manchester Airport. This diagram sets out the key rail infrastructure enhancements necessary to transform trans-Pennine rail connectivity:

- South Manchester freight bypass via Tiviotdale route through Stockport, and connecting back to Liverpool and Manchester route via Glazebrook.
- South Manchester Loop created by a) upgrading of existing Guide Bridge-Stockport line, b) new link to Manchester Airport from Stockport-Crewe line, following route of A555, c) new-build route west of airport to Altrincham, and d) returning via restored routes through Glazebrook to HSUK route to Liverpool. See below.
- Skipton-Colne restoration to create new transpennine link.

TPW13 : ENHANCED RAIL CONNECTIVITY TO MANCHESTER AIRPORT

To improve intercity access to Manchester Airport, a new link is proposed from the Stockport-Crewe line. This will extend to the west of the airport (thereby transforming) the airport's terminus into a through station), and return via Altrincham and Glazebrook to the HSUK main route to Liverpool. This South Manchester Loop will enable direct access to Manchester Airport from all primary cities of the North (ie Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and Newcastle, as required by the One North initiative) and also a large range of more local connections, with most second-tier cities also directly linked to Manchester Airport. These greatly increased train movements through Manchester Airport are of course only possible with through operation, rather than the terminating operation that currently applies.

The HSUK proposals for improved rail links to Manchester Airport will also have the highly beneficial effect of enhancing hub function at Stockport. The national intercity timetable developed by HSUK shows Stockport achieving 'Top 21' connectivity, with direct links to 20 other principal towns and cities including all 12 UK primary cities.

























