

Helioslough Ltd.

APP/B1930/A/09/2109433/NWF

Nick Gallop
Rail
Summary

Radlett

Strategic Rail Freight Interchange



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1 Summary

- 1.1 The Inspector to the previous Public Inquiry and the Secretary of State concluded that there was no reason to refuse the application on any rail-related grounds, whether on the location of the site relative to the rail network, ports or other interchanges; the capabilities of the rail network including loading gauge enhancement; the availability of rail paths; or that freight trains to and from the SRFI would prejudice the ability of the MML to carry passengers and accommodate growth in passenger numbers.
- 1.2 My evidence has sought to address material changes in rail-related issues since the Secretary of State's Decision Letter and the Inspector's Report.
- 1.3 The following conclusions are drawn:
 - a) The policy on, and need for SRFIs, has been positively and categorically reconfirmed by Government, in terms of the number of sites required, and in terms of the locational criteria indicating that suitable sites are likely to be located where the key rail and road radials intersect with the M25. The need has also been independently validated by the unsolicited approach from DB Schenker, Europe's leading rail freight operator (and a global logistics organisation) to operate rail services to and from the proposed Radlett SRFI on behalf of its customers;
 - b) There has been no material change to the Thameslink programme and associated timetable aspirations. Network Rail has reconfirmed the existence of a significant level of unused off-peak freight paths along the MML which could accommodate growth from the Radlett SRFI (see below), and the commitment to adopt best operating practices to regulate freight train access across the route. In the longer term, Network Rail is developing a programme with Government and the rail industry to enhance capacity along the MML. This is in line with its ongoing network enhancement programme, in support of the aspiration for a doubling of passenger and freight traffic by 2030;
 - a) Network Rail has reconfirmed its previous commitment to effecting the main line connection and the gauge enhancement works, working with all stakeholders to minimise the impact of possessions, and to maximise synergies with the Thameslink programme through to 2015. The conclusion of the First Capital Connect and East Midlands Trains franchises in 2015 also provides an opportunity to incorporate any

engineering works for the SRFI beyond 2015 within the refranchising process for these services;

- b) Network Rail has restated its view, with evidence from the timetable, that paths are available to cater for the requirements of the SRFI, and that work is in hand through the RUS and SFN workstreams to identify further enhancement options to the MML and the wider national rail network;
- c) The emergence of the SFN strategy, together with the unsolicited approach by DB Schenker on behalf of its customers, demonstrates the validity of the location, form and function of the proposed SRFI at Radlett;
- d) The rail-related conditions remain relevant, and in particular the condition related to loading gauge is now itself enhanced by the SFN proposals for British and/or European loading gauge enhancement along the MML.

1.4 On the basis that any changes which could be interpreted as being material are therefore either neutral (ie no change from 2007) or positive (ie supportive or complementary), the following conclusions are therefore drawn on the Council's reason for refusal:

- a) The evidence of Network Rail and DB Schenker demonstrates the availability of both existing unused capacity, as well as the ongoing network enhancement, which together could support the number of freight trains anticipated from the SRFI as well as the wider MML timetable. Whilst inevitably there can be no guarantee that sufficient trains paths would be available to serve the proposed SRFI, there is nonetheless a reasonable assurance from Network Rail, as guardians of the rail network, that sufficient paths could be made available outside the peak hours to properly service the facility if built;
- b) Neither the Appellant or DB Schenker would be pressing forward with the proposals for the Radlett SRFI if the main line connection was not viable. There is no policy or other requirement for such a viability assessment. It is apparent that the SRFI will operate as such and that it is ideally placed to encourage and profit from a shift from road to rail. Network Rail is satisfied that the rail connection is deliverable, and welcome the scope for a future northern connection, which in turn could provide a passing loop of the kind identified in the draft East Midlands RUS, representing a material benefit to the wider MML operations;

- c) Again, Network Rail and DB Schenker are satisfied that the loading gauge works can be delivered. The SFN proposals not only include the MML and connecting routes for gauge enhancement to British standards, they uniquely identify the MML for enhancement to larger European gauge standards. In the interim, the extent of W10 gauge across the network remains relatively small, such that operators customers continue to use standard-height containers and/or low-height wagons, and as W10 gauge enhancement works are progressed to and from the major ports, so the availability of low-platform wagons will increase for use on other routes such as the MML;
- d) The need for SRFIs has been positively and categorically reconfirmed by Government, in terms of the number of sites required, and in terms of the locational criteria indicating that suitable sites are likely to be located where the key rail and road radials intersect with the M25. The need for an SRFI in the north west sector has also been independently validated by the unsolicited approach from DB Schenker, Europe's leading rail freight operator (and a global logistics organisation) to operate rail services to and from the proposed Radlett SRFI;
- e) Taking the above evidence and conclusions into consideration, the Council's statement that the proposal is therefore contrary to the Regional Transport Strategy, Policies T1 and T10 of the East of England Plan and the advice in PPS1 regarding sustainable development, remains invalid.