

[REDACTED]

21 March 2016

Rail Partnership Engagement
Transport for London
5R3 Palestra
197 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ

Response to the London Assembly's Transport Committee investigation into the proposed devolution of National Rail services in London

[REDACTED] supports the principle of more local determination of train services. We believe that the impacts of the devolution of rail powers fall into two categories: specific impacts around the edges of the area devolved to Transport for London and more strategic impacts because of the change in governance. The key to success of the proposed approach will be balancing the needs and aspirations of these two aspects to ensure that all services benefit from the devolution of services to Transport for London.

[REDACTED] recognises the benefits of investing in a growing rail network, and the current investment in Crossrail services as far as Reading is an early example of inner suburban services being transferred from national franchises to London concessions.

Whilst [REDACTED] has no direct responsibilities for managing train services and indeed doesn't have the structure in place to take on such a role, we nevertheless recognise the importance of the rail network in providing good connectivity between Greater London and key urban centres in our area such as Reading, Slough, Maidenhead, Bracknell, Windsor and Newbury, as well as key transport hubs such as Gatwick and Heathrow Airports, enabling access to employment opportunities in and around the area efficiently and reliably.

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Our local economy (£34bn+ GVA) is thriving and is a net contributor to the treasury. We see ourselves as an important economic entity in our own right. We acknowledge the benefits of being located so close to London, but we do not see our role as supporting the London economy: instead we see a strong and growing future for Thames Valley Berkshire.

This view of the south-eastern economies adjacent to London is shared with our colleagues in neighbouring LEP areas, and we already collaborate closely on matters like this consultation where we have a shared interest. We look forward to working together with our neighbours and yourselves to secure the long term planning of rail services in London and the South east.

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There is a particular service planning issue that has already arisen on the Western Route. It is to do with the large number of terminating trains planned for Paddington. Some of these are Crossrail services coming from the east (as many as 10 an hour currently planned to turn back at Westbourne Park) and some Great Western (the current franchisee) outer suburban services originating in Oxford and Bedwyn/Newbury, with plans for further similar services from Swindon and Basingstoke. This pattern of forced interchange and turnback of trainsets at Paddington could be made more efficient by extending some of the outer suburban services into the Crossrail tunnels. This level of integration can only be achieved through further devolution and excellent local cooperation.

We would welcome the opportunity to join a strategic planning board which could debate the merits of issues like this to ensure that both the London and South east economies beyond the TfL boundary benefit from infrastructure investments.

Although not part of the consultation document [REDACTED] understands from the recent stakeholder event, that there are proposals to develop a Strategic Board between DfT and TfL to manage this process. We say if implemented, this should include mechanisms for effective cooperation with surrounding authorities and LEs to ensure benefits and impacts outside of the devolved London area are properly understood and debated. It would therefore be considered appropriate that a representative from the seven Local Enterprise Partnerships (Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire, Bucks Thames valley, Thames Valley Berkshire, Enterprise M3, Solent, Coast to Capital) that cover the Greater Thames Valley be invited to sit on the Strategic Board, to ensure that business views in our area are fully represented.

In summary, the principle of more local determination of train service patterns is supported and we, therefore, welcome devolution of the proposed approach as a means of improving rail services and enhancing local accountability. However, it is imperative that mechanisms are put in place to properly represent the whole area in which services operate. Otherwise there is a concern that London, especially Central London, could always be given priority over other areas and services. This would be of detriment to areas surrounding the capital, which are a major location for economic growth as well as being essential for a vibrant economy in London itself.

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to this consultation. We hope that you are able to take the views expressed above into account when deciding on how best to take forward the proposals for rail devolution.

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