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Consultation Response

## **Alternative Solutions Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS)**

May 2012

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. **pteg** represents the six English Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) in England which between them serve more than eleven million people in Tyne and Wear ('Nexus'), West Yorkshire ('Metro'), South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester ('Transport for Greater Manchester'), Merseyside ('Merseytravel') and the West Midlands ('Centro'). Bristol, Leicester and Nottingham City Councils, Transport for London (TfL) and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) are associate members of **pteg**, although this response does not represent their views. The PTEs plan, procure, provide and promote public transport in some of Britain's largest city regions, with the aim of providing integrated public transport networks accessible to all.
- 1.2. As well as promoters of local transport, PTEs have developed a number of light rail schemes which are of direct relevance to the Alternative Solutions RUS and SYPTE is participating in the tram train trial between Sheffield and Rotherham. As such we feel that we have a particular perspective that will be helpful in shaping the next iteration of the RUS document.
- 1.3. Our response therefore highlights a number of key issues in relation to the Alternative Solutions RUS, in particular the cross-over between local transport issues and responsibility for the mainline railway.

## 2. Consultation Response

### Local transport

- 2.1. The LTP and local transport planning process is relevant to the RUS as there is a clear overlap in interest between the outcomes put forward locally and the types of solutions identified in the RUS document.
- 2.2. PTEs (and other local transport authorities) are responsible for developing Local Transport Plans (LTPs) which set out the strategy for delivering local transport across a defined area. Within the context of an LTP, transport issues and problems will be identified. It is then generally up to the PTE to determine (through a thorough process) what the intended outcome is meant to be and how best that might be achieved. This process will inevitably consider a range of options before narrowing down to a preferred choice, which could include light rail and tram train options.
- 2.3. Additionally the government is seeking to devolve greater levels of decision-making and responsibility to the local level. It is currently consulting on the devolution of local major capital schemes<sup>i</sup> (where funding for large projects of the type considered within the RUS would come from) and separately on the devolution of responsibilities for local rail services<sup>ii</sup>:
  - Where funding is devolved the outcome may be that there are more demands made locally for light rail, tram train and other solutions which Network Rail will need to respond to.
  - Where responsibilities for local rail services are devolved, then it is entirely likely that differing demands may be made of the railway, either to better integrate with local transport networks, or to seek different options for delivery, including ones which offer the potential for greater value for money (the latter issue is explored below).
- 2.4. We feel that as currently drafted the RUS document does not fully recognise the role of local transport authorities and LTPs, the potential for greater devolution, and that these elements

need to be strengthened. We would be happy to assist in doing so for the next draft of the document. Taking this point further, we also feel that the RUS needs to stress that the role of Network Rail should be around enabling and facilitating local transport authorities to develop the most appropriate solutions to the transport problems they have identified, where those solutions are likely to interface with the mainline railway.

### **McNulty and a lower cost regional railway**

- 2.5. The RUS document is being prepared at a time of enormous change in the railways. The government's Command Paper, *Reforming Our Railways*, follows on from the work of Sir Roy McNulty and his team around achieving value for money on the railways<sup>iii</sup>.
- 2.6. Part of the McNulty conclusions was to recommend a review of regional railways to look for lower cost options, identifying that:  
*'Opportunities to improve value are likely to be centred on:*
  - *Different service levels*
  - *Different equipment*
  - *Lower-cost infrastructure*
  - *Different working methods; and*
  - *Different standards*<sup>iv</sup>
- 2.7. Plainly the RUS has an important contribution to make to the review (when established) and should be seen as a key input in regard to the review. Therefore we would like to see the RUS document be much clearer about its contribution to delivering a lower cost regional railway and exploring the issues raised in the McNulty report. This may mean moving beyond tram train and light rail conversion.
- 2.8. We believe that there is a further potential area worth exploring through the RUS process around delivering a lower cost regional railway, and in particular the contribution that it can make to the replacement of class 14x and 15x vehicles over the next few years.
- 2.9. There is a significant challenge to the regional railways in terms of achieving value for money and, at the same time, accommodating significant growth. The replacement of life expired vehicles which are no longer compliant with disability and access regulations provides a potential opportunity to address these two issues and we would like to see a further exploration of how potential alternative solutions can be used to address these issues and how the RUS can set the context for a future review of regional railways. Lighter weight diesel and electric vehicles which can be run on the network, particular where there is a degree of self-containment.
- 2.10. There is an opportunity with replacement of the Northern (and to a lesser extent Great Western) franchises over the next two years to put in place a framework that helps achieve a lower cost regional railway. Introducing change at the point of renewal for rail franchises is much easier to achieve than after the franchise is let (and given a potential 15 year franchise, all the more important to do so).

### **Community Rail**

- 2.11. PTEs have an interest in Community Rail services, working closely with local partners to improve local rail services. Whilst successful in many regards, community rail initiatives on

their own have not been able to significantly tackle the cost base of operations and we would be cautious about promoting them solely in this regard. We would support initiatives to widen and strengthen community rail where it is appropriate to do so.

### **Taking forward the Alternative Solutions RUS**

- 2.12. We have a strong interest in the RUS and making sure that it helps us deliver local transport across our areas. We recognise that where local transport and the mainline railway interface, there is an essential and legitimate role for Network Rail to work with partners. Equally we are keen to ensure that the RUS document does not unduly preclude PTEs from considering options at a local level.
- 2.13. We are therefore more than happy to continue to work with Network Rail and help shape the RUS process.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/dft-2012-04/>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/dft-2012-10/>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.rail-reg.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.10401>

<sup>iv</sup> McNulty, Summary Report, p64