



To **Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee**

Date **21st October 2015**

Subject **NUCKLE – Arena Railway Station**

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To explain the reasons for the delays in opening the Arena Railway Station, the issues in respect of events trains and how we propose to move forward.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee is recommended:
- 1) To note the issues set out in this note.
 - 2) Identify any recommendations to the appropriate Cabinet Member

3 Information/Background

Background to project and phasing

- 3.1 NUCKLE (Nuneaton, Coventry, Kenilworth and Leamington) is the name given to a package of rail projects to radically upgrade north- south services through Coventry. The ultimate aim is to create a rail corridor with high quality services connecting the East Midlands/North East through Coventry to the Thames Valley and South.
- 3.2 The project has been split into a number of phases. The first phase is the building of new stations at Coventry Arena (Ricoh) and Bermuda Park, improvements at Bedworth and a new bay platform at Coventry with associated track and signalling changes to enable more frequent services. It is being delivered in partnership with Warwickshire County Council and Centro.
- 3.3 The intention was to deliver phase 1 as a whole. In 2013 we went out to tender in two packages – civil engineering (principally the building of the stations) and track and signalling. The reason for the split was to attract as much interest as possible given the limited number of contractors with signalling expertise.
- 3.4 Due to an overheated signalling market (a combination of the government announcing a number of major railway projects at that time and a bow-wave of outstanding signalling work with the approaching end of Network Rail's five-year funding cycle), only one tender was received containing signalling costs at around 3 times the expected cost. In comparison, the civils costs were as expected. The consequence was that NUCKLE phase 1 as a programme had become unaffordable.

- 3.5 Expert advice suggested that lower signalling prices would be achievable in the future once the short term work bank reduced and as the industry responded to increased demand. However that left us with a problem: if the project was delayed until that time, the European Regional Development Funding (£3.5m) would no longer be available. It was also possible that the Department for Transport (DfT) funding (£9.75m) could have been withdrawn.
- 3.6 A decision was taken (and approved by Cabinet on 4th March 2014) to split the project:
- Phase 1, Package 1 (NUCKLE 1.1) was the construction of the two new stations and improvements at Bedworth. This only required minor signalling changes which we were able to procure through Network Rail.
 - Phase 1, package 2 (NUCKLE 1.2) will be the building of the bay platform at Coventry Station and associated track and signalling changes to accommodate this and to permit the operation of more frequent services between Coventry and Nuneaton and the continued operation of the oil train to the Bayton Road depot. It also includes a crossover at the Arena to allow events trains to shuttle between Coventry Station and the Arena.
- 3.7 To allow us to use the ERDF funding on NUCKLE 1.1, the DfT agreed to split their funding between the two packages. However, the issues described above delayed the start on the project by a year but, if we had not split the project in this way, the whole project would have been lost.

Delays to station opening

- 3.8 NUCKLE 1.1 new stations are now physically complete and will enter into service by the end of the year. The physical works were substantially complete in July as per programme. However the opening date has been delayed for the following reasons:
- Network Rail introduced a requirement for a cabinet to be climate controlled which was not originally specified in the designs. As a specialist item this had a long lead time added about 6 weeks to the programme.
 - London Midland were concerned they would not be able to release their crews for training over the Summer holidays as they required all available staff to cover for those on holiday.
 - During September, Network Rail asked for signalling testing and commissioning plans relating to changes to software at their signalling control centres to be submitted and approved before the new stations entered into service; this was a change to the previous position where this could take place after opening. Completion and acceptance of these plans is expected in October.
 - Entry into service documentation is currently being compiled, this needs to be submitted to various bodies (including Network Rail, London Midland and ORR) for acceptance, and is taking longer than planned, but all need to be satisfied that the assets are built correctly and safe to operate before the stations can open.

Increased Capacity

- 3.9 The main purpose of the Arena railway station is to serve the day to day needs of the Ricoh Arena, the Arena Retail Park and local residents. The Ricoh is a very successful business and conference venue and the business case for the new station was made on this day-to-day demand, not the demand for major sports events. Matchday trips are expected to comprise no more than 10% of the total for the new station.
- 3.10 The ultimate aim of NUCKLE phase 1 is to achieve a two train per hour service between Coventry and Nuneaton formed of (a minimum) of two coach trains. This would quadruple capacity and would offer a credible service for most events. The issues described above have meant that the ability to run regular services any more frequently than once per hour

is on hold until NUCKLE 1.2 (bay platform) is complete. It is expected that this will be Autumn 2017.

- 3.11 The other constraint of a full NUCKLE phase 1 is the availability of diesel rolling stock. London Midland warned of the difficulties of freeing up capacity to enhance services some time ago. However, the expectation was that electrification projects across the country would have allowed the release of diesel rolling stock by now; what could not have foreseen at the time was the extent of issues and delays that would be encountered on these electrification schemes meaning that the cascade of diesel rolling stock has not happened yet. The problem has been exacerbated by the fact that in anticipation of electrification no new diesel trains have been ordered for the last few years. By the time NUCKLE 1.2 is complete, we expect additional stock will be available to provide the uplift to two trains per hour.

Events traffic

- 3.12 Although NUCKLE 1.2 will enable the provision of more frequent events services, the current Arena Station, as provided through NUCKLE 1.1, is physically capable of supporting sufficient services to move over 3,000 people to and from events. A 6 coach platform has been provided along with the queuing facilities required to safely manage the crowds anticipated at large rugby and football matches. To move this number of people a 6 coach train is required and it is the lack of train capacity, not station design, which prompted the Safety Advisory Group's decision that the station be closed for an hour after major events.
- 3.13 The provision of any additional trains to enhance normal services is a commercial decision for either the train operator or event organizer or both. The City Council does not, and never has, subsidised train services; its role is that of an infrastructure provider. Nevertheless the City Council has worked with London Midland to try to find a solution, but they do not have sufficient diesel rolling stock to provide events trains.
- 3.14 However, event organizers can charter trains if they choose – there are a number of companies that provide charter trains. To encourage this, the City Council has offered to forego any operating revenue that it would be due arising from the use of the station by passengers on the events trains. (The arrangement for NUCKLE 1.1 is that the City Council and Warwickshire County Council have taken on the operating 'risk' of the two new stations in return for retaining the income generated by passengers using the stations).
- 3.15 As things stand we cannot say for certain that special events trains will be provided on match days. That is still the aim of all parties and a lot of work is going on to achieve this. It should be noted that to be allowed to open the new stations we had to have robust safety plans in place. The possibility of there only being a single coach 75 seat train every hour had to be considered and a robust safety plan put in place to cover this eventuality. The Safety Advisory Group considered that in the event of no additional trains being provided, the only course of action would be to close the station; recent events at Twickenham bear this decision out.

Moving Forward

- 3.16 The priority is to open the new stations so that the business case demand can be realised.
- 3.17 There are three further actions being pursued to ensure that the Arena Station fulfils its objective of supporting the ambitions of ACL/Wasps:

- In the short term supporting and encouraging the provision of events trains as described above;
- Ensuring the earliest possible delivery of the bay platform and associated infrastructure (NUCKLE 1.2) to enable the operation of more frequent service: Autumn 2017 is the earliest practical completion date;
- Engaging with partners (including Centro, Warwickshire CC and London Midland) to investigate alternative diesel rolling stock options such as the refurbished tube trains being offered by Vivarail based at Long Marston.

Colin Knight
Assistant Director Planning Transport and Highways
Place Directorate
024 7683 4001