

### **SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE**

Date: 23 May 2001

Subject: **Strategic Rail Authority – “A Strategic Agenda”**

Report of: Head of Regional Transport Planning

#### **Recommendation:**

That the publication of the Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Agenda is noted and the Committee agree the following issues to be raised with the SRA in their development of their Strategic Plan:

1. The need for a strategic vision for rail at the earliest opportunity;
  2. The need to build the vision of the South East, from RPG9, into the development of future London orbital and radial rail services;
  3. The need for a clear programme of investment priorities for rail services;
  4. The need for the Strategic Rail Authority and the Regional Assembly to work together on developing the South East regional dimension of the rail freight strategy.
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#### **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) published the document “A Strategic Agenda” in March 2001. Due to the postponement of the Strategic Plan, the SRA released the Strategic Agenda as an interim statement outlining the Authority's intentions for the delivery of services and infrastructure in Britain. The delay in the release of the Strategic Plan was a result of an in-depth review of the industry by the SRA, Railtrack and Train Operating Companies (TOCs) following the incident at Hatfield in October 2000. The Strategic Plan is currently anticipated for release in the autumn of 2001.

#### **2.0 The Strategic Agenda**

- 2.1 The report is split onto four parts. The first part, “The Context” provides a background to the creation of the SRA as a new authority to provide a focus for

strategic planning in the rail industry, the delegated powers it holds, its structure and objectives. The second part, "The Challenges", outlines the areas of the industry the SRA looks to influence and the focus for future development of rail in the wider transport system. The main areas identified centre around:

- Improvements to safety;
- Improvements to performance;
- Providing the potential for growth;
- Improving current and facilitating additional passenger and freight services;
- Improving existing and developing new infrastructure;
- Fostering public and private partnerships.

2.2 Section three, the main focus of the report, is a progress report on what the SRA is looking to achieve in offering an integrated network of services, both passenger and freight, as part of Britain's transport system. This can be summarised into three main areas of work:

- Refranchising;
- Development of Freight;
- Infrastructure Enhancements.

2.3 The priorities the SRA have identified in order to deliver the vision of an integrated network set out in the 10 Year Transport Plan are:

- Continuous improvement in safety;
- More punctual, less crowded trains throughout the network;
- Improving accessibility to, on and from the network;
- Removing bottlenecks in order to increase capacity and enable higher frequencies and improve journey times, particularly along main lines to and from London;
- Increasing rail freight through investment in the core freight network and freight interchanges;
- Better stations and rolling stock;
- A more resilient and flexible operational structure;
- Better information for operators and users of the network.

2.4 The final section of the report, "The Schemes", provides a list of projects. The SRA intends this list to act as a menu for discussions currently being held with Railtrack, the TOCs and other interested parties. The Authority does not commit itself to everything listed, though states the preliminary results of the discussions and initial work taking place will be outlined in Railtrack's Network Management Statement.

### **3.0 Issues to be Raised**

- 3.1 The publication of the Strategic Agenda as a pre-cursor to the Strategic Plan is to be welcomed as an indication of the SRA's intent to improve the rail network and services. It is not intended to be a consultative document, though in light of further work being undertaken to prepare the full Strategic Plan there are a number of issues, which in relation to rail system in the South East the Regional Assembly wishes to raise with the SRA.

#### *Strategic Vision*

- 3.2 There is the need, at the earliest opportunity, for the SRA to set out a clear strategic vision for the future shape of the rail system. PPG11 stipulates that a Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) should provide a strategic steer on the role and future development of railways in the region, both for passenger and freight, in accordance with national policy. To ensure the Regional Assembly delivers this requirement, the proposals and vision of the SRA, as a national body assigned to providing strategic planning on rail, are critical in terms of consistency to achieve deliverable improvements. PPG11 also refers to the need for the SRA to work on close liaison with Regional Planning Bodies. The Regional Assembly looks forward to working with the SRA in developing policies and investment programmes for the region.

#### *Refranchising*

- 3.3 The majority of franchises were initially short-term, which has resulted in under investment in the network and consequently lower quality and less reliable services. The SRA aims to replace all existing short-term franchises with long-term contracts and upgrade current long-term franchises, targeted to support much needed investment and improvements for the end user.
- 3.4 Within the South East agreement has already been reached in respect of the extension of the Chiltern franchise, and preferred bidders have been identified for both the South Central and South West Trains franchise. A short-term extension of the Island Line franchise has been agreed, leaving the Thames Trains franchise at the remaining short-term franchise requiring replacement.
- 3.5 The identification of a clear strategic vision at a national level is essential in order to ensure that the replacement franchise process realises its potential to improve overall level of service to the customer. More specifically, the Regional Assembly will continue to work closely with the SRA in developing the passenger sector serving the Region.
- 3.6 Orbital links around London and commuter corridors serving London are important. Improvements in inner and outer London services, such as those proposed as part of ORBI Rail, will undoubtedly affect long-term long distance

movements. The South East is an important feeder to London in relation to goods, services and skills. It is critical to build in the vision of the South East, as outlined in RPG9, into the development of future orbital and radial services.

### *Freight*

- 3.7 To increase the level of freight moved by rail, the SRA acknowledge that rail has to become more competitive against road freight. In looking to achieve this, the Authority is seeking to overcome operational constraints on the network that act as a barrier to growth, particularly congestion. New freight interchanges are required, which are fully intermodal and open to all operators. To finance the expansion of rail freight, significant amounts of funding are required to act as an incentive to use and to counter-balance the financial advantages currently held by the road haulage industry.
- 3.8 Within the North East the SRA has already indicated its desire to work closely with the Regional Assembly in developing the regional dimension of the rail freight strategy. In addition, the SRA will be providing valuable advice to your officers in the development of detailed policies and proposals for the RTS relating to the development of the distribution system.

### *Infrastructure Enhancements*

- 3.9 The SRA are to work closely with Railtrack, as owners of the network, to ensure their core business of operation, maintenance and renewal of the network remains a priority and plans for expansion are realised.
- 3.10 The need for a clear strategic vision for the rail system is also essential to develop a clear programme of investment priorities for rail services. These must complement those outlined in the RTS. This is particularly important to the rail network in the South East, as congestion and overcrowding are commonplace. Value for money in new infrastructure and service delivery is paramount to guarantee the best enhancements to the greatest number of people and businesses. However, the Regional Assembly is keen to ensure that full advantage is taken of the ability for investment on the rail system to support the delivery of the wider regional policy framework. The Regional Assembly therefore looks forward to working closely with the SRA in developing a detailed programme of investment priorities for the region.

## **4.0 Next Steps**

- 4.1 The full Strategic Plan is scheduled for publication later this year. Programmes of schemes and processes for delivery will be included, providing local authorities and other transport infrastructure providers with a framework for development of the rail network. The SRA are continuing to involve stakeholders through consultation as they develop strategies for passenger services, freight services

and infrastructure enhancements. The first of these strategies on freight has just been released for consultation and the Regional Assembly will be responding on issues relating to the South East, which will feed into regional freight strategy currently being developed.

**Martin Tugwell**  
**Head of Regional Transport Planning**

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