

Appendix A: Proposed joint response by South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council Councils to Network Rail's consultation on the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement Scheme

The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSP), on behalf of Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council, thank Network Rail for the opportunity to comment Ely Area Capacity Enhancement Scheme. The comments provided are high level and the GCSP recognises that Cambridgeshire County Council's response (as the highway authority) will provide detailed comments on technical aspects.

The GCSP support the proposals to increase capacity for passenger and freight services through the Ely area. Increasing the use of rail for these journeys will reduce the amount of road traffic through the region, with associated benefits to affected communities, reduction in carbon emissions, improved air quality, improved access for communities to services and facilities. It would enable a greater number of trips to Cambridge and other locations on the line, including Waterbeach new town, to be undertaken from Ely by rail as a sustainable mode of transport. The improvements should support the local, regional and national economies and with the delivery of future growth. However, the Councils would also encourage further investment in improvements that would increase the number of services.

Network Rail should ensure the full impacts, across the whole EACE area, are duly considered and appropriately mitigated. There are a number of level crossings across the EACE area which could be impacted by the increase in rail traffic, particularly as a result of longer barrier down times.

In particular the GCSP would draw attention to the need to address the existing issues with the Chesterton Level Crossing on the northern fringe of Cambridge. Chesterton Level Crossing bisects Fen Road which provides the only vehicular access to residential and business uses, including a large Traveller community. The crossing is controlled by means of a full barrier. On weekdays there are currently at least six train movements an hour in each direction, resulting in the barrier being down for around 33 minutes out of each hour. This is having a negative impact on the Fen Road community and potentially leads to frustration and possibly encourages high risk behaviour with the associated implications for public safety. Any future increase in frequency in trains running along this line will likely further exacerbate the problems. The impacts of further increased downtime on both safety (at the crossing and in terms of emergency access) and community and economic wellbeing need to be fully recognised and an appropriate response identified and implemented.

The GCSP urge Network Rail to continue to work with the local planning authorities and the transport and highway authorities at the earliest opportunity to explore measures to address the Chesterton Level Crossing, in the short-term as well as the longer-term as the EACE scheme progresses. If Network Rail were to determine the crossing should be closed alternative vehicular access would need to be provided. The Planning Authority and County Council have sought to understand options to address this existing issue and would welcome further engagement with Network Rail's team to explore the feasibility of alternative access options available. EACE scheme development and future funding bids must in our view consider this issue further.

It is crucial that the impacts on existing and planned communities are considered and it is vital that all affected communities and businesses across the whole EACE area (not just in the Ely area) are fully engaged as Network Rail progress through future stages. This includes ensuring consultation methods are fully inclusive to everyone, and target 'hard to reach' groups.

The GCSP would urge Network Rail to accelerate planning and delivery of the EACE scheme to provide clarity and greater certainty for the local planning authorities in delivering future growth in Greater Cambridge and Cambridgeshire, and to realise the benefits to local communities.

The GCSP looks forward to working with Network Rail going forwards to deliver this important scheme.