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GB Railfreight calls on Network Rail to safeguard capacity, not wires, in CP5

GB Railfreight's Managing Director, John Smith, has today called for Network Rail to safeguard vital four-tracking schemes on the Midland Main Line for CP5.

Following the recent Government announcement of a review of Network Rail and its CP5 programme, concerns have been expressed over delayed electrification plans to both the MML and TransPennine routes.

In contrast, in a letter published in Issue 779 of RAIL Magazine today (22nd July 2015), Mr Smith welcomes the Government's announcement, provided key capacity enhancements are safeguarded.

"If a delay to these electrification programmes is accompanied by continued investment in CP5 capacity enhancements – particularly on the MML – then I welcome the Government's announcement. It is capacity that is important, not wires above the tracks."

In particular, Mr Smith identifies two schemes currently set out in CP5 as critical – the four-tracking from Kettering to Corby, and from Bedford to just north of Kettering.

In terms of the latter, he writes: *"The combination of stopping and non-stopping passenger services is a major constraint for freight paths. Four-tracking this route would tackle many of the bottlenecks along the line and cater for future freight and passenger growth. This is far more valuable in the short-term than overhead wires."*

Mr Smith has also publicly called for a re-evaluation of timetabling for the MML in order to free up more freight paths, stating: *"Industry markets fluctuate and timetabling must be regularly updated to reflect that."*

The letter can be read in full below:

It is capacity that is important, not wires above the tracks

Political, industry and media figures alike have voiced their concerns over the delayed electrification plans announced in the Transport Secretary's speech to the Commons last week.

While I can see the benefits both the Midland Main Line (MML) and TransPennine electrification plans will bring to passenger and freight services, I think people are looking at this incorrectly.

If a delay to these electrification programmes is accompanied by continued investment in CP5 capacity enhancements – particularly on the MML – then I welcome the Government's announcement. It is capacity that is important, not wires above the tracks.

There are CP5 projects still in place that will provide more extensive capacity improvements in the short-medium term. Two schemes that are particularly important are the four tracking from Kettering to Corby and from Bedford to just north of Kettering.

Take the line to the north of Bedford, for example. The combination of stopping and non-stopping passenger services is a major constraint for freight paths. So is the mixture of four, three and two-track alignments. Four-tracking this route would tackle many of the bottlenecks along the line and cater for future freight and passenger growth. This is far more valuable in the short-term than overhead wires.

The Secretary of State has made it clear that further changes will be made to fundamental CP5 projects. As the incoming Sir Peter Hendy and Dame Colette Bow develop their proposals for better investment in and operations of the rail improvement programme, it is vital that capacity enhancements such as four-tracking plans are taken forward to safeguard freight services.

Another policy I would publically call for is a re-evaluation of timetabling for the MML, in order to free up more freight paths. In RAIL's Issue I775, GBRf's very own Phil Amos described the restrictions that exist on our services for Aggregate Industries. It needs to be recognised that industry markets fluctuate and timetabling must be regularly updated to reflect that.

With Network Rail due to report on CP5 projects in the autumn, let's put electrification to one side and urge the infrastructure provider to safeguard these key capacity enhancement projects to cater for short-term freight and passenger growth.