

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8 February 2023

NUCKLE 1.2 Update on Bay platform at Coventry station

1 Overview

- 1.1 NUCKLE 1.2 will enable an increased frequency of train service between Coventry and Nuneaton, made possible by a new bay platform at Coventry station and associated track and signalling works.
- 1.2 Coventry City Council (CCC) is the lead authority for the delivery of the NUCKLE 1.2 scheme.

2 Progress Update

Bay platform

- 2.1 An update to O&S in February 2021 outlined that Coventry City Council, in response to significantly over budget tender costs being received for the design and build contract for the bay platform project, were leading a piece of work to assess whether costs could be reduced by removing elements from the scheme.
- 2.2 Network Rail were commissioned to undertake this work and the specification included:
 - An option to remove the Arena turnback capability. This would mean any additional trains put on for major events at the Arena stadium would continue through to Nuneaton rather than shuttle between Coventry station and Arena station;
 - Reviewing whether a reduced platform length at Coventry would be acceptable and the savings this would give in terms of infrastructure works and costs;
 - Track and signal upgrades required to facilitate operation into the new bay platform. These interventions will be kept to a minimum to reduce the cost of the delivery of the scheme;
 - Consideration of how the bay platform is integrated with the rest of the station, in particular the relationship with adjacent transport interchange and Warwick Road pedestrian access tunnel.
- 2.3 The work has concluded that significant cost savings cannot be made. The revised costs are currently being finalised and will be used to update the business case for the scheme which will be shared with the Department for Transport (DfT) in due course.

Nuneaton to Coventry train service enhancement

- 2.4 The West Midlands Trains Ltd (WMT) rail franchise agreement awarded in 2017 specified a commitment for a service enhancement between Coventry to

Nuneaton from one to two trains per hour (subject to the completion of the bay platform). All commitments of train operators have been reviewed with the DfT following Covid and new contracts have been issued between the Secretary of State for Transport and WMT.

- 2.5 The new contract no longer includes the commitment to introduce the 2nd train per hour between Coventry and Nuneaton. The reason for this is that train operating companies were asked to find savings as part of the new contracts. At a time when operators are having to find savings and make service cuts across their networks, funding for new services cannot be justification.

3 Next steps

- 3.1 The provision of a bay platform at Coventry station and doubling of rail services between Coventry and Nuneaton remains a key aspiration for Warwickshire County Council. However, the current context of high costs for the bay platform combined with the removal of the commitment from the Train Operating Company to deliver the enhanced train service means that, in the short term at least, it will be difficult to progress the project.
- 3.2 There are ongoing conversations with Coventry City Council on how to proceed with NUCKLE 1.2, including a meeting with senior managers in February 2023.
- 3.3 In the medium term, opportunities exist for infrastructure enhancements to be brought forward as part of other projects, for example the Midlands Connect led project to introduce a direct rail service between Coventry and Leicester. Warwickshire County Council is represented at an officer level on the project group for the Midlands Connect Coventry-Leicester scheme and will continue to advocate the need and benefits of infrastructure to facilitate the doubling of services on the Coventry to Nuneaton line.
- 3.4 Network Rail are looking at the long-term needs of the Coventry Local Area Rail Network to understand the infrastructure upgrades needed to accommodate the aspirations for rail improvements in the area over the medium term. In parallel with this work, Midlands Connect are leading a piece of work to understand the economic benefits associated with the infrastructure changes.
- 3.5 The current rail contract between Secretary of State for Transport and West Midlands Trains Limited is due to end in September 2026. There is an opportunity as part of any contract renewal process for Warwickshire County Council to make representations to the DfT and West Midlands Rail Executive for the inclusion of the 2nd train per hour between Nuneaton and Coventry.

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