

West Coast Main Line South Capacity Enhancement Plan Report

Network Rail, Northwest and Central Region

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Part A: Executive Summary

This is the second report required by the Congested Infrastructure Code of Practice, in satisfaction of Regulation 28 'Capacity Enhancement Plan' of the Railways (Access, Management and Licensing of Railway Undertakings) Regulations, 2016. The report presents a capacity enhancement plan to alleviate the constraints identified in the West Coast Main Line South Congested Infrastructure (Capacity Analysis) Report, dated November 2020.

This capacity enhancement plan report recognises the factors driving the requirement for additional capacity, including outstanding access applications received from current and prospective operators, and future growth in demand for passenger and freight services up to and beyond HS2.

The capacity enhancement plan is built around recognition of two broad configuration states which impact the requirement for fast line capacity on the West Coast Main Line (WCML):

- Pre-HS2 demand recovery (c.2020s-2029): the period following COVID-19 (assumed to be from the mid-2020s) when demand for rail travel has recovered, and additional fast line capacity on the WCML south will be required,
- 2. **Post-HS2 long term (c.2029+):** the period post implementation of High Speed 2 where conventional intercity services have been transferred to the high speed infrastructure, and conventional main line capacity is accordingly 'released' for other use.

The following sections describe how additional capacity and improved performance on the WCML is being found at the configurations identified above, though it should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the performance and operational landscape of the railway in the short-term. The shift to offer a reduced timetable across the network comprised of a lower quantum of train services has been the rail industry's solution to match the considerable drop in passenger demand caused by societal restrictions linked to COVID-19. Consequently, performance of services operating on the West Coast Main Line has improved relative to the pre-COVID timetable. However, it is assumed that demand will recover and drive a return to a pre-COVID level of service. This Capacity Enhancement Plan report explains what Network Rail is doing to identify improvement in capacity and performance beyond a 'full', pre-COVID level and does not assume or suggest any change to the status of live access rights applications on the WCML.

At the **first** configuration state additional capacity and improved performance has been identified through the work undertaken by the West Coast Main Line Industry Planning Group (IPG) established in May 2020 following Network Rail's Declaration of Congested Infrastructure (Camden South Junction to Ledburn Junction inclusive, effective from 11-May 2020). The IPG has presented a series of options and recommended packages which establish the feasibility of timetable restructure to enable greater capacity provision and better performance using the existing infrastructure in the medium-term. The work was undertaken with wider industry collaboration and reported findings in January 2021, with a second phase underway in which Concept Train Plan outputs will need to be further developed to assure economic benefit, improvement in user experience and robust train performance.

At the **second** configuration state additional capacity and improved performance will be provided by the flagship investment made in HS2 and the release of capacity associated with the transfer of Intercity West Coast services from the conventional network. The specific utilisation of this capacity is subject to ongoing industry analysis and optioneering, though additional capacity will be available for more inter-regional, commuter and freight services once the HS2 Phase 2a service specification is in operation.



This report considers each of these major developments in turn, identifying how additional capacity on the WCML south can be made available up to and beyond the 2030s.



Part B: Introduction
B.01: Background

In 2013 the open access bids for a number of services from locations across the north via WCML to London prompted Network Rail to undertake a capacity and performance study for the WCML and Transpennine routes.¹ The study was undertaken and published at the end of October 2013. Focusing on the fast lines of WCML, it concluded that, at that time, there could be up to three extra paths (above a 12tph baseline) per standard hour on WCML fast lines. If one of those paths was taken up, Network Rail concluded there would be a small but not particularly material impact on performance and if two paths were used there would be a significant impact. If all three paths were used there would be a severe impact on performance. This had remained the last formal work on capacity and performance of WCML until last year when Network Rail and the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) became aware of further aspirations for additional access rights on the fast lines of WCML.

The ORR sent a letter to the industry asking those with aspirations to run additional services on the WCML to come forward. Five potential additional uses of the fast lines were identified and the ORR then asked Network Rail to carry out an appraisal of WCML capacity and the potential impact on performance that would result from running any additional services. It was agreed that this analysis would refresh the report written in October 2013.

The WCML Capacity Assessment 2020 found that since the 2013 report, access rights had been sold to Grand Central and Avanti to operate paths to Blackpool and various minor changes to already existing paths were made which eroded 2 of the 3 paths originally found in the 2013 report. It concludes that there is insufficient capacity to provide a consistently performing service plan within the existing timetable structure due to the consequent requirement for successive services to run on minimum headway. This means that there is insufficient capacity to support additional paths on the WCML without a restructured timetable.

Accordingly, Network Rail has declared Congested Infrastructure at the south end of WCML between Camden Junction South and Ledburn Junction on the fast lines, effective from 11-May 2020. A capacity assessment has been undertaken and Network Rail has also started the process of looking at potential solutions, initiating the WCML Industry Planning Group (IPG) in May 2020 to consider options for generating additional capacity and improved performance.

The long term solution is HS2, however HS2 is unlikely to bring about released capacity on the fast lines until 2029. This means there could be the same timetable structure from December 2008 to 2029. IPG has delivered feasibility outputs looking at options to restructure the timetable ahead of HS2, and following submission of a feasibility recommendation is now continuing work to robustly test these findings and inform future timetable change accordingly.

Network Rail has concluded a revised access rights policy, which indicates that Network Rail does not support any additional access rights on fast lines of WCML between Euston and Milton Keynes unless there are mitigating reasons to permit them, for example; running during a time of day/weekend when capacity is not at the same premium as it is during peaks or in a standard hour weekday.

¹ West Coast Main Line and Trans-Pennine Capacity and Performance Assessment (2013)

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B.02: Purpose

The purpose of this Capacity Enhancement Plan report is to demonstrate how improved performance and sufficient capacity to accommodate future growth can be accommodated on the WCML in response to the findings of the West Coast Main Line Capacity Assessment, 2020. The Capacity Enhancement Plan explains Network Rail's position on generating sufficient main line capacity and performance improvement from the present to the mid-2030s, though it is not linked to specific access applications but where those outstanding at 2020 could be incorporated.

The Capacity Enhancement Plan is based on providing sufficient capacity and improved performance on the WCML south at two basic configuration states. The work packages that this report identifies all contribute to a direction of travel outlined below:

- Pre-HS2 demand recovery (c.2020s-2029): Following the short-term impact of the COVID pandemic, additional capacity is assumed to be required at some point in the mid-2020s to accommodate the return of a pre-COVID level of demand for rail travel and subsequent growth, along with additional East West Rail paths; this has been shown to be feasible through the IPG's ongoing timetable analysis which will now form the basis of further Concept Train Plan development,
- 2. **Post-HS2 long term (c.2029+):** Fast line capacity will subsequently become available over the long-term as HS2 permits the transfer of conventional intercity services, though options to utilised this 'released' capacity are currently being developed by the industry.

The subsequent sections of this report detail how capacity and performance has been identified in the above configurations.

B.03: Consultation with interested parties

The collaborative approach demonstrated by the WCML IPG has presented the opportunity for interested parties to engage in the process throughout 2020. The following organisations have been represented at IPG:

- Department for Transport,
- Network Rail.
- Avanti West Coast,
- West Coast Partnership,
- West Midlands Trains,
- CrossCountry,
- Grand Union Trains,
- Grand Central Rail,
- West Midlands Rail Executive,
- GWRR / Freightliner / GB Railfreight (acting Freight representatives),
- Office of Road and Rail.

The first phase of the IPG was undertaken throughout the second half of 2020 and concluded in January 2021 with a feasibility recommendation for generating improved performance and additional capacity.

A second phase of development is now underway which will seek to build IPG's phase 1 options and recommendation into a Concept Train Plan to inform future timetable change. Further development work is being pursued in this second phase to provide an adequate level of assurance of the outputs against economic appraisal, protection and improvement of user experience, and robust performance modelling.



Part C: Factors Driving Congestion

C.01: Reasons for the congestion

Network Rail Capacity Analysis has undertaken a number of assessments which identified the extent to which capacity on the WCML south had become fully utilised prior to the COVID pandemic. A summary is provided below in Table 1:

Study	Findings
West Coast Main Line and Trans-Pennine Capacity and Performance Assessment (2013)	The capacity assessment undertaken in 2013 identified that sufficient capacity existed on the WCML to accommodate 3 additional fast line paths into London Euston, with utilisation of more than 1 of those paths likely to result in a severe negative performance impact.
West Coast Main Line Capacity Assessment (Feb 2020)	The 2020 capacity assessment reviewed the findings of the 2013 study on the basis that the fundamental structure of the train service has not substantially changed. The 2020 study found that none of the 3 paths existed consistently across the May 2020 timetable, and that a timetable restructure would be required to accommodate additional fast line services in a standard hour.
West Coast Main Line Congested Infrastructure Report (Nov 2020)	The November 2020 congested infrastructure assessment identified the constraints on the WCML south which contributed to the Declaration of Congested infrastructure on the fast lines between Camden and Ledburn Junctions. The report reiterated that, of the access requests still live, none could be accommodated within the existing timetable structure.

Table 1: Network Rail WCMLS capacity assessments 2013-2020.

The February 2020 WCML Capacity Assessment was undertaken following a request from ORR to review five access applications, outlined below in Table 2:

Operator	Access Requested	Status (at May 2021)
First Trenitalia West Coast Rail Limited	1 additional 125mph-capable (Cl 390) hourly fast line path London Euston-Liverpool Lime Street, from December 2022	Live
Virgin Trains (Open Access)	1 additional 125mph-capable (Cl 221) hourly fast line path London Euston-Liverpool calling Trent Valley stations, from December 2022	Withdrawn 27- Feb 2020
Grand Union Trains (<i>Open</i> <i>Access</i>)	4 return services per day, 110mph-capable (Cl 91) London Euston-Stirling, from May 2021	Live
West Midlands Trains	1 additional 11mph-capable (Cl 350) hourly path London Euston-Northampton, from December 2020	Withdrawn 12- Nov 2020
Grand Central North West (Open Access)	Turn the contingent right held to run a fifth service on Wednesday every 8 weeks London Euston-Blackpool, 110mph-capable (Cl 91) into a firm right	Withdrawn 09- Sep 2020

Table 2: Known access applications for WCMLS as of April 2021.



Network Rail issued a Declaration of Congested Infrastructure with effect from 11-May 2020, and provided a supporting WCML Congested Infrastructure Report in November 2020 which reviewed and reiterated the findings of the earlier assessment, finding that "an increase in the quantum of trains running on the fast lines between Camden South Junction and Ledburn Junction cannot be achieved to a point that would satisfy all the fast line access proposals for additional services" and that withdrawal of the Grand Central London Euston to Blackpool service would not provide sufficient capacity for two faster (125mph) paths.

In sum, Network Rail's capacity analysis assessments have shown that of the potential paths identified in 2013, all three had been utilised or degraded and there is insufficient fast line capacity to accommodate any of the applications identified in Table 2.

C.02: Likely future development of traffic

At present, the demand for train services (as per live access applications or otherwise) is not certain due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated reduction in demand for rail travel generally. The DfT has convened the Rail COVID Forecasting Group (RCFG), with industry-wide representation, dedicated to monitoring and forecasting the recovery in national demand for rail travel both over the short-term as Britain transitions from COVID restrictions, and over the medium/long-term where permanent changes to working patterns are likely to impact the rate and distribution of the recovery. The RCFG has identified a number of scenarios for COVID recovery which are being used by the industry to plan when trains service will be required to be uplifted to match demand.

Assuming a central, 'medium' growth scenario it is likely that bulk demand for rail travel will have returned to a pre-COVID level by the middle of the 2020s. While the distribution of this demand could differ from that prevailing pre-COVID, it is assumed that a return to a pre-COVID level of train service will be required before this point, and that subsequent growth in demand on the WCML south will determine a need for additional fast line services.

Further, the currently remitted base service specification for East West Rail includes an additional three trains per hour presenting on the West Coast Main Line at Bletchley, terminating at Milton Keynes. There will also be continued growth in demand for rail freight on the West Coast Main Line following a strong recovery during and post-COVID. While this growth is likely to be focused on the slow lines, it will need to be factored into options for increasing capacity on the WCML beyond the pre-COVID timetable.

Over the longer-term, growth in demand for intercity rail travel will be abstracted in large part to HS2 (described in section D.03). This leaves conventional capacity available for use by more interregional, commuter and freight services in the subsequent decades. How this capacity will be utilised specifically is the subject of long-term planning activity undertaken by Network Rail, the West Coast Partnership and the wider industry.



Part D: Options and Costs for Enhancing Capacity

D.01: Timetable changes to drive improved performance

Network Rail is currently engaged in collaboration across the industry (including via the WCML IPG, described in section B.03) to plan changes to the WCML timetable as the network transitions from reduced COVID timetables:

Time Frame	Performance Impact
Short term (2020-c.2025)	The reduction in service quantum elicited by the COVID pandemic has demonstrated the improvement in performance associated with a lower utilisation of capacity. This is likely to continue from the December 2022 timetable change which IPG and the wider industry are working toward, as that timetable is intended to be based on the same structure and scalable toward a 'full' utilisation of capacity in the mid-2020s.
Medium term (c.2025-2030)	IPG has shown through its phase 1 feasibility assessment that improved performance could be generated through a number of timetable restructuring options (described in detail in section D.02). While the analysis has found additional capacity beyond the pre-COVID level, initial findings suggest that performance on the WCML could be improved by implementation of a combination of the options drawn from the feasibility assessment, though IPG will need to deliver further analysis as part of its second phase of work to assure resulting Concept Train Plans are robustly performance modelled and compliant.
Long term (c.2030+)	HS2 will release capacity on the conventional network (outlined in section D.03). Network Rail, the West Coast Partner and the wider industry are developing options for utilisation of this capacity in a way that provides an improved passenger and freight offer and improves performance. This will be achieved initially through less intense usage of conventional capacity, and over the longer-term by operating a train service in which, for example, speed profiles are more uniform. Industry options to utilise released capacity will be subject to robust performance modelling as development continues.

Table 3: WCMLS train performance impact at each major configuration state, 2020-2030+.



D.02: Timetable changes to generate additional capacity

Additional fast line capacity is not likely to be required until bulk demand for rail travel on the West Coast Main Line has returned to a near pre-COVID level. The WCML IPG in collaboration with DfT and the wider industry is monitoring the return of demand, but current assessment suggests that 2025 is an approximate date at which additional capacity on the WCML South will be required.

IPG's phase one feasibility analysis² focused on the WCML south, between London Euston, and Weaver, Wavertree and Cheadle Hulme junctions (shown in figure 1).



Figure 1: Geographical scope of the IPG Phase 1 feasibility analysis

The analysis tested a base Train Service Specification (TSS) drawn from a standard hour in the pre-COVID (December 2020, pre-offer) timetable, and included:

- An additional hourly fast line path,
- Three hourly paths Bletchley-Milton Keynes (per East West Rail configuration state 2.5),
- Uplifted additional slow line freight path and timing loads.

The outputs from the feasibility study have identified options that may increase the quantum of paths available without additional infrastructure. This included passenger services assumed in the base (freight uplift could not be accommodated in full in the feasibility recommendation) and produced a number of feasibility recommendations to be developed into a concept train plan.

Full utilisation of the additional fast line capacity has not been subject to in-depth performance analysis. Initial performance assessment as part of the feasibility study has shown potential for improvement alongside provision of additional capacity.

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² WCML Feasibility Analysis Overarching Report (Feb 2021).



Outputs of the phase 1 feasibility assessment from IPG were organised around a series of questions which were answered through timetable analysis. The answers to these questions then formed options which could generate additional capacity and improved performance beyond the pre-COVID base. Options considered included:

- Moving from the 20-minute flighting pattern for fast line services from Euston to Birmingham and Manchester,
- Removing some fast line calls at Watford Junction,
- Making crossing moves at Ledburn Junction parallel,
- Changing the location of crossing moves,
- Separating slow line service groups at Northampton,
- Changing the flighting pattern between Weaver Junction and Crewe,
- Making more parallel moves between Whitehouse and Colwich Junctions,
- Standardising freight paths on the slow lines,
- Reducing provision of Postal and Blackpool services to two-hourly,
- Re-gearing Class 730 rolling stock to match Class 80X 125mph capability,
- Uniform reduction in maximum permitted speed to 110mph.

Some capacity or performance benefit was identified in all options, though a combination is required to unlock benefits in some instances. It is also recognised that some options in this long list drive a wider disbenefit by reducing quantum of calls at particular locations or increasing headline journey times.

Having assessed all options, the IPG has made an **initial feasibility recommendation** which packages a combination of options for further analysis, aimed at realising the maximum potential for unlocking additional capacity while protecting pre-COVID performance, connectivity, journey times and freight operation.

The feasibility assessment recommended **Package 10a** be progressed to a second phase of concept train planning (underway as of May 2021). Timetable options which form package 10a, and the consequent train service/capacity impacts identified by the analysis, are summarised in table 4:

WCML Industry Planning Group (IPG) Phase 1 Recommended Package 10a

- More parallel moves at Ledburn Junction,
- Altered base calling pattern,
- Standardised freight and passenger paths.

Anticipated Train Service and Capacity Impact (15tph Euston-Rugby)

- 1 additional fast line path (Euston-Crewe),
- 1 additional fast line path (Euston-Rugby),
- 3 East West Rail paths (Bletchley-Milton Keynes).

Table 4: WCML IPG feasibility analysis recommendation (10a) capacity outputs. Train service and capacity impact is compared to the pre-COVID base timetable (Dec 2020).



The benefits outlined in Tables 4 and 5 are subject to ongoing development within the IPG and must be fully verified before a commitment to the change is made.

The 10a package of options would provide the following indicative train service, incorporating East West Rail paths and providing 15 trains per hour London Euston to Rugby:

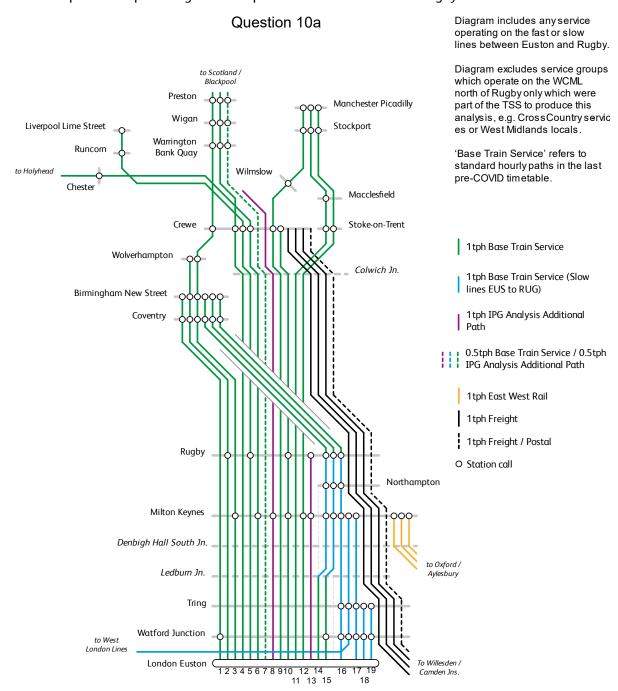


Figure 2: WCML IPG feasibility analysis recommendation (10a) indicative train service specification. One line = one train in each direction in an off-peak standard hour.



In addition, it is recommended that an option to remove fast line calls at Watford Junction and one call at Milton Keynes be explored to create capacity for another fast line path, Euston to Crewe (**Package 10b**), per table 5 below:

WCML Industry Planning Group (IPG) Phase 1 Additional Package 10b

- More parallel moves at Ledburn Junction,
- Altered base calling pattern,
- Standardised freight and passenger paths,
- Removal of a fast line stop in both directions at Watford Junction, and one down direction fast line stop at Milton Keynes.

Anticipated Train Service and Capacity Impact (16tph Euston-Rugby)

- 1 additional fast line path (Euston-Crewe),
- 1 additional fast line path (Euston-Rugby),
- 1 additional fast line path (Euston-Hanslope Junction),
- 3 East West Rail paths (Bletchley-Milton Keynes).

Table 5: WCML IPG feasibility analysis additional package (10b) capacity outputs. Train service and capacity impact is compared to the pre-COVID base timetable (Dec 2020).

The 10b package identified in the IPG feasibility analysis is considered <u>additional only</u> to the 10a recommendation as the output could present a performance impact and would directly reduce connectivity/quantum of service at Watford Junction and Milton Keynes Central.

The IPG feasibility analysis recommended that the 10a package form the basis of a second phase of concept train plan analysis to inform future timetable development, aimed at securing improved performance and additional capacity.

There remains scope to revise the recommendation through a repackaged suite of options should changes proposed on interfacing areas of the network require realignment in the second phase of work.

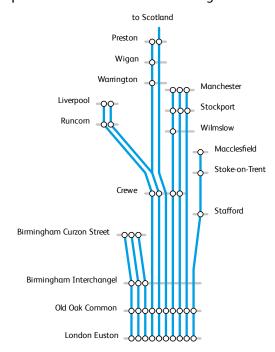


D.03: Infrastructure changes to generate additional capacity

Major infrastructure change to the network will be provided by investment in HS2 Phases 1 and 2a, which are anticipated to be delivered in stages from 2029. Phases 1 and 2a now have royal assent and construction has begun. At Phase 2a, the currently remitted HS2 train service specification will provide 10 trains per hour from the HS2 Euston station, with a mixture of captive services (utilising only the HS2 infrastructure) and classic-compatible (where both the HS2 and conventional infrastructure is used). The Phase 2a train service specification is shown below in figure 3:

HS2 Phase 2a Current Train Service Specification
3tph Euston-Birmingham Curzon Street (<i>captive</i>)
3tph Euston-Manchester
2tph Euston-Liverpool
1tph Euston-Preston (<i>splits with 1tph Eus-Liv at Crewe</i>)
1tph Euston-Glasgow
1tph Euston-Macclesfield

Figure 3: HS2 Phase 2a Service Specification. Each line represents one HS2 train in each direction per hour.



Operation of HS2 services will release fast line capacity on the West Coast Main Line South through the transfer of intercity services from the conventional network to HS2. The fast line paths that are released by HS2 are shown below in figure 4:

How this fast line capacity is utilised is subject to wider industry planning, with West Coast Partner Development acting in their capacity as Shadow Operator to develop TSS options for both the high speed and conventional West Coast network.

It should be noted that the construction sequencing for the HS2 infrastructure means that the transfer of intercity services from the conventional WCML network may result in capacity being released in stages before the 'full' released of capacity at Phase 2a. At present, the Phase 2a service specification would require the HS2 Euston station and the Crewe South connection to be available at the same time.

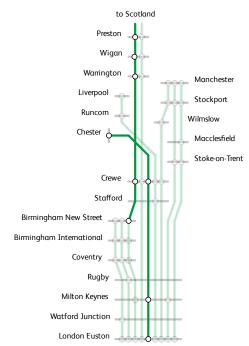


Figure 4: Released capacity on the WCMLS at HS2 Phase 2a. Transparent lines represent standard hourly paths which are transferred to the HS2 network.



While this Capacity Enhancement Plan report assumes that fast line capacity on the WCML south will become available at the implementation of the HS2 Phase 2a service specification, it should be recognised that there is potential for some capacity to become available should captive operations begin before the Crewe South or Handsacre connections are available, or should Old Oak Common be made available as a terminus before the Euston HS2 station. Implementation of the captive (Phase 1) network will release three conventional fast line paths from London Euston-Birmingham New Street, though some of this capacity will be required to provide a 'comparable level of service' to intermediate locations including Coventry, Rugby and Milton Keynes.

As such, the infrastructure associated with HS2 Phase 1 and Phase 2a are the primary interventions which will release conventional network capacity on the WCML south, securing additional capacity and improved performance for the long-term.

The Railways (Access, Management and Licensing of Railway Undertakings) Regulations, 2016, also require this Capacity Enhancement Plan to provide cost assessment for enhancement options which are presented. HS2 is not funded by Network Rail and is being delivered by HS2 ltd. The HS2 Chairman's Stocktake (2019) identified combined cost for Phases 1 and 2a and can be found on the HS2 ltd. website.

This Capacity Enhancement Plan does not propose any additional major infrastructure investment to create additional capacity on the WCML conventional network before entry into service of HS2.



Part E: Conclusion

Network Rail Capacity Analysis has undertaken a number of studies which identified that as of February 2020, there is insufficient capacity on the WCML south to accommodate outstanding additional access applications within the existing timetable structure.

This finding led Network Rail to formally declare the West Coast Main Line between Camden South and Ledburn Junctions as Congested Infrastructure, effective from 11-May 2020. This Declaration of Congested Infrastructure triggered the process for Network Rail to outline its Capacity Enhancement Plan, which this document has described.

Network Rail has convened a West Coast Main Line Industry Planning Group (IPG) which is tasked with identifying the feasibility of providing additional capacity and improved performance. IPG reported in January 2021, as a result of its first phase of work, that a restructure of the timetable could provide additional capacity and improved performance. Phase one findings are now informing a second phase of Concept Train Planning work which will verify and propose restructure options for future timetable change, targeting the December 2022 timetable.

Over the long-term additional capacity and improved performance will be provided by the investment in HS2 infrastructure which will permit the transfer of the majority of Intercity West Coast services *from* the conventional network. How this 'released' conventional capacity is planned to be utilised is subject to ongoing development work undertaken by Network Rail, West Coast Partnership Development and the wider industry.

This Capacity Enhancement Plan report is provided on the basis that sufficient options to provide additional capacity and improved performance have been identified in accordance with Regulation 28 of the Railways (Access, Management and Licensing of Railway Undertakings) Regulations, 2016.