

An introduction to Rail Central



Rail Central is a proposal for a new strategic rail freight interchange (SRFI) where the West Coast mainline meets the Northampton Loop Line to the south west of Northampton and between the villages of Blisworth and Milton Malsor.

Over the last few weeks, we have been contacting local MPs, local councillors, parish councils, and representatives to introduce the scheme and explain how it could work.

Importantly, we have also been explaining the planning process we will be working within (the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects planning process) and how and when there will be detailed consultation on the draft proposals so that people can get involved and register their opinions.

This leaflet provides more information about Rail Central and the consultation process, and also includes some FAQs based on discussions at local community meetings to date.

This spring (April), we are proposing to have a comprehensive consultation so that people can find out more, input to the proposals and register comments and opinions which will then feed into the overall planning process. We will also be adding further information to our website (www.railcentral.com) over the coming weeks.

These proposals are still at an early stage. Our team will be developing the outline designs during January, February and March so that we are in a position to put forward a set of draft proposals for the consultation in the spring. This will involve public exhibitions in the local villages as well as a full programme of publicity about the scheme.

We are working towards submitting an application for development consent in early 2017 once we have completed consultation and other technical work.

We recognise that many people will want to know more about the plans.

At the consultation in the spring there will be draft proposals for people to review and comment upon. We will be putting forward more details at that point so people can understand what's proposed and formally register their views.

Why do we need more rail freight interchanges?

Moving goods and products around the country effectively and efficiently is crucial for the economy, for competitiveness, and for the environment.

Connecting manufacturers and suppliers to consumers quickly, safely and sustainably makes a big difference and is something the Government is encouraging through its planning policies (ie the National Policy Statement on National Networks).

Using rail to transport a greater percentage of UK freight is at the heart of the Government's vision for overall freight distribution. This means building more capacity and better facilities to encourage a shift from road-based logistics to seeing more freight travelling on the national railway network.

Northamptonshire is the UK's centre for logistics – it is strategically located in the middle of the UK and directly connected to the strategic road and rail networks. In response to this national drive towards increased freight on rail, proposals for Rail Central are being brought forward.

About Rail Central

Rail Central is an emerging plan for a new strategic rail freight interchange (SRFI) where the West Coast mainline meets the Northampton Loop Line to the south west of Northampton.

It would see the creation of a UK leading logistics and distribution capability on a site between Milton Malsor and Blisworth.

The rationale for this site is driven entirely by its strategic location and direct connections to key rail and road networks – Rail Central would connect into the West Coast mainline and the Northampton Loop Line as well as into the A43 trunk route within approximately 2 miles of the M1 motorway.

In addition to supporting the national policy move for freight on rail and creating a world-class logistics and distribution facility in South Northamptonshire, Rail Central would:

- Create circa 8,000 new jobs
- Channel significant and long-term investment into South Northamptonshire
- Attract businesses for which effective supply chain management is critical to competitiveness
- Reduce overall CO₂ emissions by shifting more freight from road to rail
- Underpin Northamptonshire's position as the UK hub for logistics and support local jobs and the county's economy

Planning and how might this happen?

We are in the early stages of introducing the Rail Central proposals and are currently developing the details for the plans.

Because Rail Central involves a rail freight terminal, it is classed as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) meaning that the decision on whether it is given planning permission will be made by the Secretary of State following an examination of the application by the Planning Inspectorate (PINs).

We intend to consult formally on the draft plans in April and there will be a comprehensive programme of public consultation in line with the requirements of the NSIP planning process.

This process specifically requires Ashfield Land (as the applicant for Rail Central) to carry out a statutory consultation in line with an approach agreed within a Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC). The SoCC essentially defines how, when and where the consultation will take place ensuring that it is straightforward for people who want to participate (whether for or against) to do so. South Northamptonshire Council will be consulted on the SoCC and asked to approve it and the approach to consultation proposed.

South Northamptonshire Council and Northampton Borough Council, plus others, will input formally into the consultation and plans too as part of the statutory planning process.

What we'll be focusing on as we develop the proposals

By definition, Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects are major projects which require a tremendous amount of careful planning and hard work.

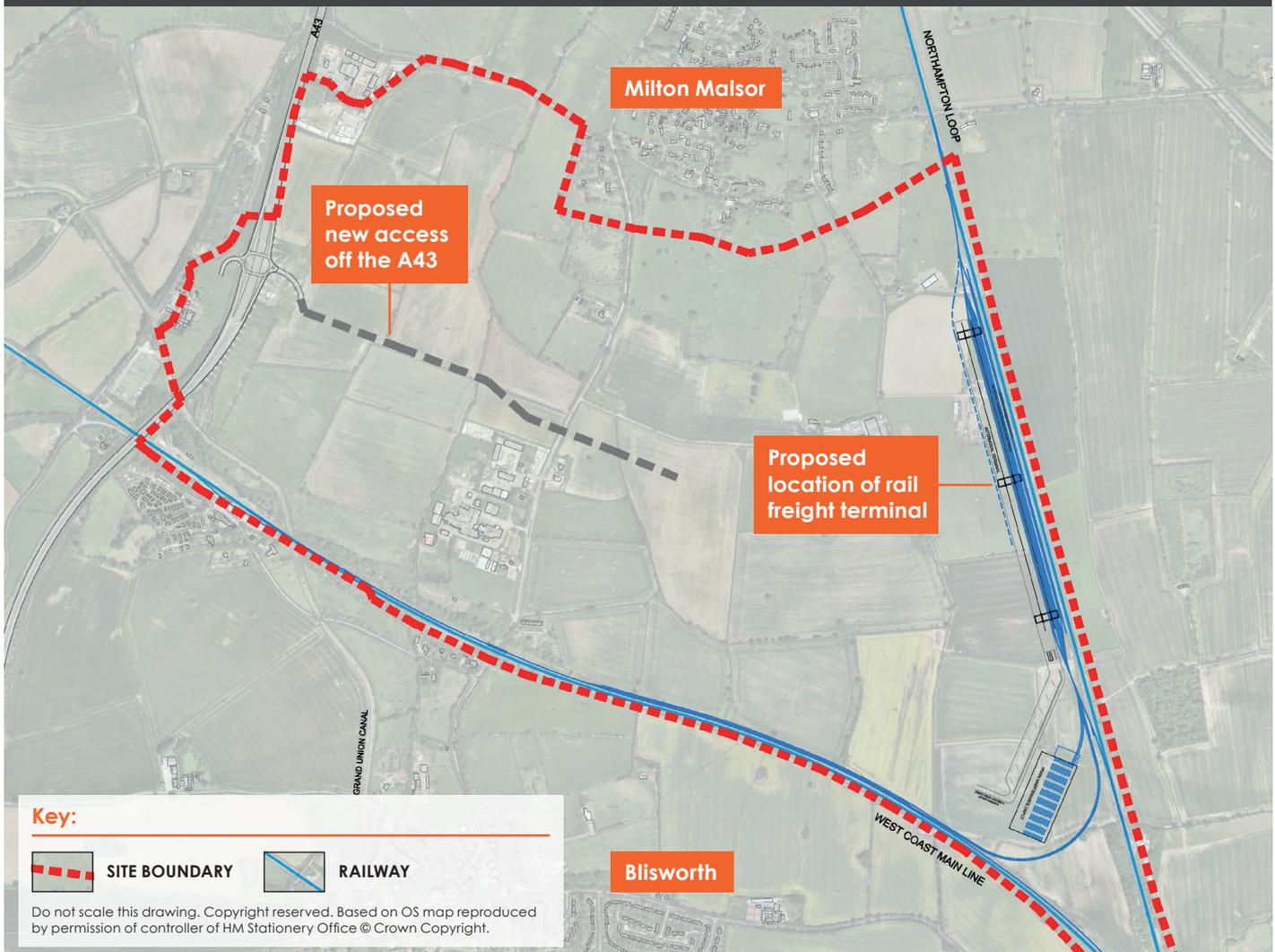
We will be looking closely at everything from landscaping and transport to drainage and the environment. We have an experienced team working alongside us and will be focused on preparing the best, most appropriate and most sustainable plans.

The relationship between what's being proposed (ie Rail Central) and what is currently near by (ie the local villages including Milton Malsor and Blisworth) is going to be one of the most important considerations for us as we develop the scheme.

The site is a key transport node (ie West Coast mainline, Northampton Loop Line, A43, M1) which makes it viable, deliverable and appropriate for rail-connected logistics in line with national policy.

Our job – and the job of the consultation and planning process through which we will be working – is to balance national need with local impact.

Fig 1: Indicative site context showing strategic infrastructure and key connections to rail and road



FAQs

In our meetings to date, a number of questions have been raised. Ahead of the full consultation in the spring, here are some details on those and some additional information which we hope will be useful:

Why here?

The intersection of the West Coast mainline and the Northampton Loop Line at this point close to the M1 and with direct access to the A43 makes this, operationally, a highly suitable location for a strategic rail freight interchange. Government policy (the National Networks Policy Statement) supports additional development of rail freight interchanges to enable higher proportions of freight to travel by rail rather than road. Together these factors make this an appropriate location for a new strategic rail freight interchange.

What are the benefits of Rail Central?

Moving goods and products around the country effectively and efficiently is crucial for the economy, for competitiveness, and for the environment which is why national planning policy supports investment into more freight on rail. As well as benefits to the economy and to business, Rail Central would help to make supply chains more sustainable (moving freight by rail creates fewer emissions than moving freight by road) and the scheme could create approximately 8,000 jobs.

Northamptonshire's economy benefits significantly from the distribution and logistics industries – Rail Central would further reinforce this competitive advantage and contribute to the local and regional economy. We will have full socio-economic data within the consultation in the spring.

What stage are the proposals at and what has been done so far?

The proposals are at an early stage and we are at the beginning of a clear and prescribed process for how they should be taken forward (the NSIP planning process). At this point, we have carried out initial Environmental Scoping and that scoping document is available on the National Infrastructure Planning website (www.infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk).

This scoping details the technical work we will be doing and sets out the full range of environmental aspects we will be addressing as we develop the proposals ready for consultation in the spring. We have also started contacting and introducing the scheme to local councillors, parish councils and representatives ahead of the full public consultation that is proposed for the spring.

What about the impact this will have on the local villages? What about noise, light and traffic?

We are very aware we need to balance the provision of new national infrastructure with its local impact. Through our planning and technical work, we intend to landscape, position and design the components that would make up Rail Central so that they work operationally but minimise impact locally. We will need to demonstrate we have achieved this balance within our application for development consent in order to achieve permission. It will be the job of the Planning Inspectorate (and the Secretary of State) to make that decision having examined the application in detail.

How does consultation on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) work? Does the local community have a voice?

We will be asking for views and comments on the proposals so we can make them the best that they can be – and local views will contribute to that process.

Consultation is a central part of the NSIP planning process and a statutory requirement for the applicant. The applicant (Ashfield Land) will need to follow the requirements set out in the NSIP process for the application to be compliant (and accepted by the Planning Inspectorate for examination).

The views of local residents and local stakeholders must be sought and used to inform the scheme which is submitted. This means that the local community and local residents have a clear and defined way to input to the decision making process.

Read more at: www.infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/application-process/participating-in-the-process/

What land does Ashfield Land control and will there be a need for any Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs)?

Ashfield Land has acquired or has options on the significant portion of the land expected to form Rail Central (subject to consent). We intend to negotiate on land where we don't currently have control and seek to agree any arrangements through negotiation wherever possible.

When will there be full information on the project and when can people expect to have detailed answers to questions about what's proposed?

At the public exhibitions we are proposing for April, we will have a full set of information and a properly defined scheme to show and discuss. The public exhibitions will be staffed by a range of professionals including our architects, highways consultant, environmental advisers and so on.

Information on the consultation and the dates, times and venues for the public exhibitions will all be publicised widely and in advance. This will include letters to local properties.

What is the overall timetable?

Rail Central is a long-term project and we are in the very early stages. The provisional timetable is for consultation this spring (April) and submission of our application for development consent in early 2017.

If the application is accepted by the Planning Inspectorate, it then enters the examination process which would take approximately 12 months. The earliest any work would be likely to start would be 2019. If this is the case, we anticipate the first occupier to be in by 2021.

Is Rail Central needed when DIRFT is just up the road?

Aside from the Government policy point setting out a requirement for further investment into strategic rail freight facilities, the DIRFT scheme is on a different timetable (ie DIRFT is operating now and DIRFT III is consented and being built now) and Rail Central is on a later timescale. The earliest the first phase of Rail Central would be open and operating (subject to planning consent) is 2021. The demand for rail freight and rail freight interchanges is expected to be significantly higher by then in line with annual increases.

Crucially Rail Central could also serve a different type of customer because the potential for direct access to the West Coast Mainline that is possible from Rail Central creates a point of difference with DIRFT (which only connects into the Northampton Loop Line).

More information

In line with the development of the draft proposals, we will be adding more information to our website: www.railcentral.com

You can also e-mail us via railcentral@camargue.uk or telephone our information line (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5.30pm) on 0845 543 8967 (please note calls are charged at local rates).

There is further information on the planning process on the National Infrastructure Planning website at: www.infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk