

**REPORT TO:** 3MG Executive Sub Board

**DATE:** 19<sup>th</sup> April 2007

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Environment

**SUBJECT:** Rail Reception Sidings for 3MG – Mersey Multimodal Gateway

**WARDS:** Ditton and Riverside

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval to submit a planning application for the Rail Reception Sidings for 3MG - Mersey Multimodal Gateway.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

- (1) Members agree the submission of the planning application described in the report;**
- (2) Members approve the development of the scheme and delegate its implementation to the Executive Director for Environment in Consultation with the Executive Board Portfolio holder for Planning, Transportation and Regeneration.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The Executive Board on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2004 (EXB162) agreed to adopt the Draft Masterplan and for the 3MG - Mersey Multimodal Gateway (formerly Ditton Strategic Rail Freight Park).
- 3.2 Network Rail owns Ditton Junction Sidings and the Goods Branch which therefore form part of the regulated national railway network. The sidings are 'track circuited' and controlled from Ditton Junction Signal Box, which is located to the south side of the mainline and to the west of the road bridge. ('Track circuits' form part of some signalling systems and they allow a remote location, such as a signal box, to detect whether a section of track is occupied by a train.) Network Rail are consequently responsible for the safe day-to-day operation of the sidings and the Goods Branch together with their long-term maintenance. The existing rail facilities on *Site 255* are privately owned and operated (connected to Network Rail infrastructure through private sidings agreements). (See appendix 1 for location of Ditton Junction Sidings in relation to 3MG and WCML Liverpool Branch.

### 3.3 Operational Requirement for Ditton Junction Sidings

In terms of the safe and efficient operation of 3MG, there are three main requirements for Ditton Junction Sidings:

- 3.3.1 A) Trains need to depart from the mainline in order to enter 3MG's rail-served facilities. However, the height and alignment of the mainline in relation to the facilities means that connections directly into them are not possible where the mainline passes the facilities. Immediately after crossing Runcorn Bridge the WCML Liverpool Branch is elevated above ground level, initially on brick railway arches. Once clear of the river the line progressively drops towards ground level on a 1-in-114 gradient. However, the line only reaches ground level immediately to the east of Ditton Junction. Conversely the Widnes-Warrington line approaches 3MG partly below ground level in order to 'dive' under the Liverpool Branch, after which it begins to rise and only reaches ground level at Ditton Junction. Ditton Junction is therefore the earliest opportunity at which trains can leave both mainlines. However, at this point 3MG's rail-served facilities are located to the rear of any arriving train from the Runcorn or Warrington directions. A location is therefore required where trains can stop and 'reverse' into 3MG's rail served facilities. Ditton Junction Sidings performs such a role.
- 3.3.2 B) Due to pathing and timetabling constraints on the mainline, trains may need to arrive at 3MG well before they are scheduled to be unloaded. In such circumstances trains require somewhere to 'park' while they await their turn in the intermodal terminal or rail-connected warehousing. Ditton Junction Sidings performs this role.
- 3.3.3 C) Similarly, once a train has been loaded/unloaded and is ready for departure, timetabling constraints may mean that a departing train needs to wait for an available 'path'. Again, in such circumstances trains require somewhere to 'park' while they await a free path. Ditton Junction Sidings performs this role.
- 3.3.4 In addition, the existing sidings are also utilised for the following purposes:
- Trains en-route to distribution facilities in the wider Liverpool area (e.g. the Ford Cars' distribution depot at Garston) are 'held' at Ditton Junction Sidings while awaiting an available freight path; and

- Network Rail engineering trains (e.g. ballast and track laying trains) are stabled at Ditton Junction during maintenance/renewal works on the Liverpool Branch line.

3.3.5 Appendix 2 shows a sketched map of existing railway track layout at Ditton Junction.

### 3.4 **Planned New Sidings**

MDS Transmodal, on behalf of Halton Borough Council and 3MG, are currently designing a new set of sidings at Ditton Junction. These will be located adjacent to the existing sidings on land currently owned by Halton BC. The designs are currently being finalised and a planning application 'need case' is being prepared. The 'need' for these new sidings results from the following factors:

3.4.1 a) The standard length freight train currently operating on the national network is between 500-550m. On this basis, there is only **ONE** siding within the existing Ditton Junction sidings which can accommodate standard formation freight trains - Goods Siding 1 in combination with the Headshunt (see appendix 2).

b) When Goods Siding 1 and Headshunt in combination is occupied by a train it is neither possible to receive nor despatch other freight trains. Therefore, following the arrival of a train, the sidings have to be vacated (by means of shunting the train into the intermodal terminal or rail connected warehousing) before another train can arrive or depart. This severely restricts the daily freight train capacity at 3MG. Analysis by MDS Transmodal, taking into account the number of freight paths available to serve 3MG and the time it takes to unload a train, demonstrates that the existing sidings can only handle a maximum of **SIX** trains per 24 hour period. The commercial and environmental case for 3MG is predicated on a forecast of **16 daily train** services to/from 3MG.

3.4.2 Clearly, the proposed new sidings are crucial to the successful development and completion of 3MG.

3.5 The rail reception sidings design will be progressed and, subject to planning permission, the intention is to tender for the construction of the sidings later this year. The detailed timetable is attached in appendix 3.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Council adopted the DSRFP (now 3MG) Masterplan in December 2004.

3MG is heralded in the Council's Corporate Plan and LSP and HBC Urban Renewal Strategy and Action Plan, and supports the Council's Urban Renewal corporate priority.

#### **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Resource implications were considered as part of the Masterplan process. The Masterplan identified the cost for the rail reception sidings as £2,470,000. The latest estimate provided by MDS Transmodal is £2,425,000. This figure may increase by 17.5% to £2,849,375 if VAT is non-recoverable. Grant Thornton, the Council's VAT consultants, are advising on this matter. Funding has been secured from ERDF to support this scheme and we are in discussions with the NWDA to establish if this will be an eligible scheme under their regulations. The intention is for the Council to build the rail reception sidings and lease the asset into the 3MG Company at Market Value. This will generate a revenue income for the Council, the value of which will be based on usage.

#### **6.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

6.1 The main risk is that the 3MG Company would not require the use of the sidings and the Council would be left with an asset it could not lease out or utilise itself. As the sidings are being provided based on current and forecasted demand, the likelihood of the sidings not being required is remote. Before letting the Contract to construct the sidings it would be prudent for the Council to enter into a Contract with the 3MG Company for the lease of the asset. A further report will be tabled before Members detailing the proposal for this Contract.

#### **7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

None.

#### **8.0 REASON(S) FOR DECISION**

#### **9.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

#### **10.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

**(NB 8.0, 9.0 AND 10.0 ONLY IF KEY DECISION)**

**11.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
<b>3MG masterplan and delivery strategy</b>	<b>3MG Team, Major Projects Department, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Municipal Building, Widnes</b>	<b>Sally McDonald</b>