West coast main line

Increasing and rationalising the capacity on the route, one of Europe's busiest rail lines, will allow higher speeds for both passenger and freight services, and will strengthen cross-border connections and facilitate trade for the EU's north-western regions.

What is the axis?

The west coast main line (WCML) is the most important trunk route in the United Kingdom's rail network with some 2 000 train movements every day. It links London and the south-east with England's largest conurbations (Birmingham and Manchester), as well as with Liverpool, North Wales, the North-West, Cumbria and Scotland, covering a distance of 850 km. The route is the core national long-distance freight route and 43 % of all UK rail freight traffic uses the WCML for some or all of its journey. There are also significant commuting flows on the route around London, Manchester, Glasgow and Birmingham.

The WCML project will modernise the line, renewing and enhancing the infrastructure to provide improved journey times, greater capacity for trains, and better and more resilient performance of track, signalling and other assets.

In London, the upgraded line will connect with the Channel Tunnel rail link *(see axis No 2)* to provide a high-speed service, for freight and passengers, from Scotland to mainland Europe.

What are its expected benefits?

The project will cut passenger and freight journey times between Ireland, Scotland, the north of England and France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. Improved speed and convenience are expected to attract new users on these international routes, helping to shift traffic from the roads.

What is its current status?

Work began in 1994, and extensive renewal and enhancement works have already been completed. For example, re-signalling and re-modelling at London's Euston Station, Willesden and in the Stoke-on-Trent area have all been completed, along with line-speed upgrades between Euston and Crewe. The overall cost of the work being carried out by the Strategic Rail Authority and its successor Network Rail totals EUR 10.8 billion (GBP 7.6 billion).

Improvements already delivered include doubling the frequency of trains between London and Manchester and reducing journey times by around 30 minutes, along with other journey-time reductions to key destinations in north-west England. Pendolino tilting trains are now operational, taking full advantage of the 201 km/h (125 mph) running speed.

Additional work is planned, including improvements to line speeds along the northern section of the route through to Preston, Liverpool and Glasgow which are due to be completed by December 2005. Further important work along the southern section of the line is also planned up to 2008 to increase capacity in the Trent Valley and at Rugby.

The culmination of this work will bring two-hour London–Manchester journey times, with a frequency of up to three trains an hour and a London–Glasgow time of around 4 hours and 15 minutes by 2008. It will also provide the capacity for increased freight traffic and for the expansion of both long-distance and regional passenger services.

Priority section	Type of work/status	Distance (km)	Timetable [1]	Total cost as of end 2004 (million EUR)	Investment up to 31.12.2004 (million EUR)	TEN-T contribution, including studies, up to 31.12.2004 (million EUR)
West coast main line	Rail (upgrade)	850	1994–2008 (2007)	10 866	9 680	77.8
TOTAL		**850**		**10 866**	**9 680**	**77.8**

[1] In brackets, completion date listed in the 2004 Guidelines, if different from the date notified in 2005 by the Member State.