

**The Borough of Darlington (Darlington Station Gateway)  
Compulsory Purchase Order 2021**

Town and Country Planning Act 1990  
Acquisition of Land Act 1981  
Compulsory Purchase Inquiries Procedure Rules 2007

**Proof of Evidence of**

**Tom Bryant**

**Strategic importance of the project to the Tees Valley**

29.11.21

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This proof of evidence has been prepared by Tom Bryant, Head of Transport, Tees Valley Combined Authority.

1.2 I lead the Transport Team at Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), which is delivering a multi-hundred million pound programme of investment to transform the Tees Valley transport system. The Darlington Station project is integral to this programme and I have been involved in the project since June 2019.

1.3 TVCA is a Mayoral Combined Authority and is located in the North East of England. Tees Valley comprises the 5 unitary authorities of Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees. The area is bordered to the north by County Durham and to the south by North Yorkshire.

1.4 Key strategic transport connectivity to the Tees Valley is provided by the East Coast Mainline (ECML) which is the main rail line through Darlington, the rail line between Northallerton and Teesside and the major A1(M), A19 and A66 highway routes.

1.5 The polycentric nature of the Tees Valley creates a unique geography and transport system, with multiple inter-connected towns, residential areas, employment sites and mix of urban and rural. This creates challenges around transport and accessibility.

1.6 The maps shown in Figures 1 and 2 below help to show Tees Valley in its national, regional and local context.

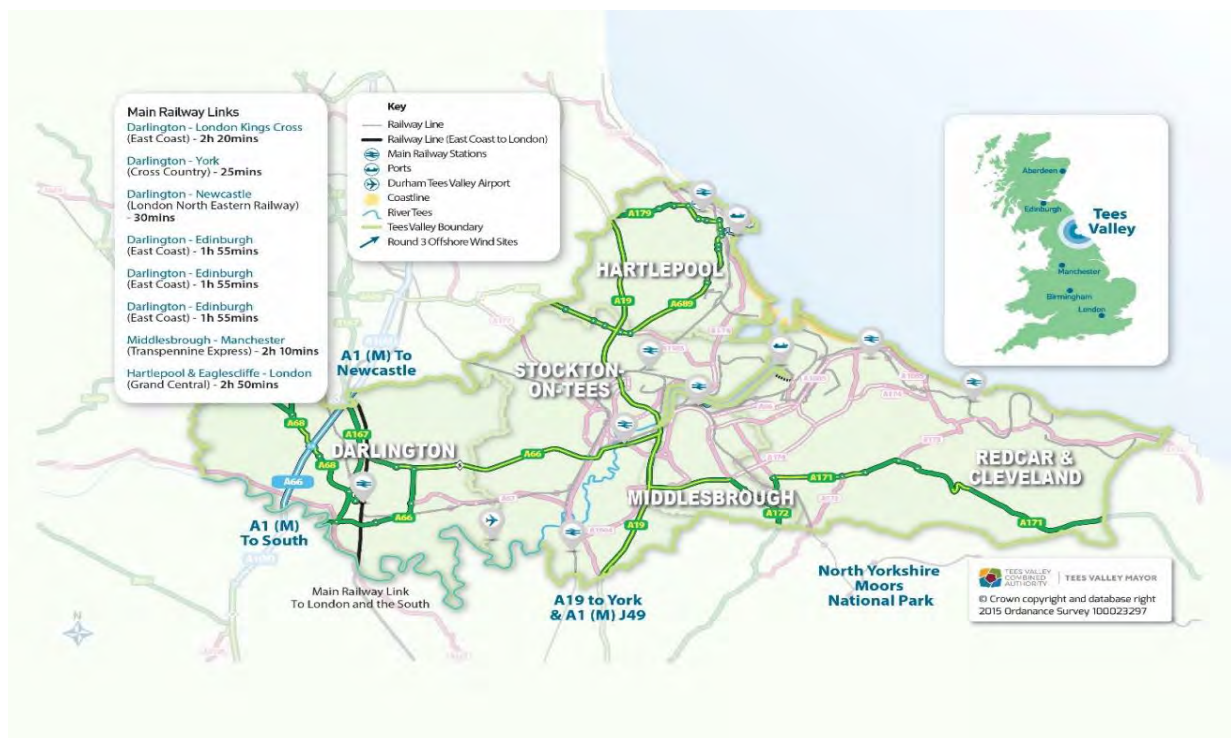
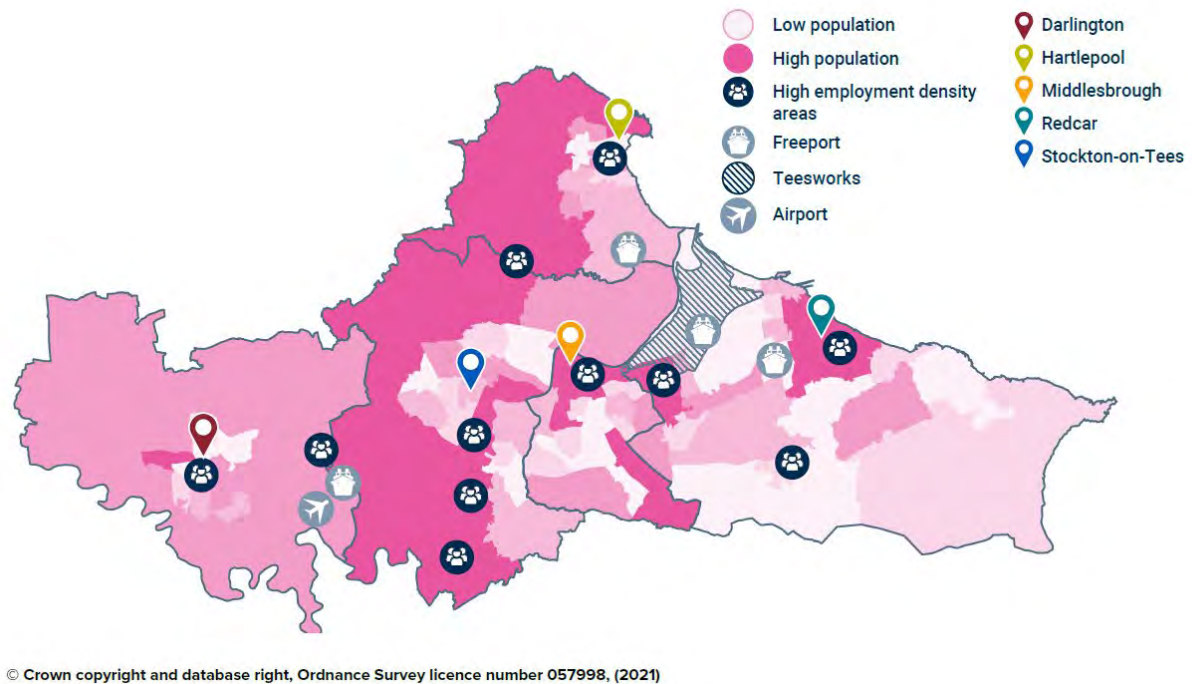


Figure 1 – Tees Valley – national and regional context



**Figure 2 – Tees Valley – local context**

## 2. SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

2.1 In this evidence I will explain why the upgrade of Darlington Station is of strategic importance to the Tees Valley and a key priority for Tees Valley Combined Authority.

2.2 I will begin by discussing how evidence from various transport and economic policies and strategies helps to underpin the scheme.

2.3 I will then outline the current problems and challenges from a strategic perspective, describe how the scheme will address these and highlight the benefits that the scheme will bring to the Tees Valley.

## 3. EVIDENCE

### 3.1 Strategic Policy Underpinning the Scheme

3.1.1 The Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan (STP) 2020 – 2030 sets out how TVCA will deliver a world-class transport system and provides the framework for transport investment.

3.1.2 This is critical to ensure that:

- everyone, no matter where they live in the Tees Valley, is connected to opportunity.
- existing business can grow, and the Tees Valley is able to continue attracting new businesses and inward investment.

3.1.3 Within the STP there is an aspiration to transform the Tees Valley rail system. This is underpinned by two objectives:

- delivering a 'metro style' passenger rail system with an aspiration for a minimum 30 minute service at every station in the Tees Valley.
- creating capacity for freight growth linked to Teesworks, the UK's largest Freeport.

3.1.4 The Darlington Station project is fundamental to delivering these objectives because it creates the necessary capacity for these transformational passenger and freight enhancements to be achieved. Without the investment these enhancements are not possible, and the Tees Valley will continue with a sub-standard rail network. This is explained further in Section 3.2 'Identifying the problems' below and on Page 14 of the STP's Rail Implementation Plan:

<https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Tees-Valley-Rail-Implementation-Plan-2020.pdf>

3.1.5 The rail network in the Tees Valley plays a key role in linking our main centres of economic activity and in providing crucial connectivity to other parts of the country.

3.1.6 Rail contributes considerable lasting benefits to the productive potential of the Tees Valley, helping to reduce congestion on the road network and facilitating the development of clusters of economic activity around stations. More specifically, the Tees Valley rail network:

- supports commuting to/from urban centres and other economic clusters of activity, leading to an increase in the density of employment which raises productivity.
- allows the development of business links and market opportunities because of inter-city connectivity.
- increases output in other sectors of the economy, since rail services reduce transport costs relative to journeys made by road.
- delivers other productivity impacts such as enhancing trade between firms.
- supports the tourism and leisure economy by providing access to and from the airports and specific attractions.
- improves quality of life through improving access to education and training, improving social inclusion, lowering the number of people killed or seriously injured on the transport network and reducing environmental impacts of road travel.
- supports international connectivity by facilitating access to major ports and airports and helps to attract inward investment.
- supports the movement of goods in a sustainable way.

3.1.7 To support our future plans, we need a rail network that has high quality vehicles, frequent services and goes to where people will want to travel now and in the future.

3.1.8 Darlington Station is again fundamental to achieving this because as outlined above, due to the constraints it currently places on the local Tees Valley rail network, without the planned upgrade at Darlington, local rail service frequencies and calling patterns cannot be increased from today's levels.

3.1.9 As well as being pivotal in TVCA's STP, the importance of investment at Darlington Station is also recognised in several other regional, pan-northern and national strategies:

#### 3.1.10 Tees Valley Devolution Deal

<https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Devolution-Deal.pdf>

Paragraph 17 on Page 4 of the Devolution Deal document identifies Darlington Station as one of four key strategic transport schemes that are essential to facilitate growth in the Tees Valley.

#### 3.1.11 TVCA Strategic Economic Plan (SEP)

<https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/TVCA207-SEP-Document-Full-WEB.pdf>

One of the key priorities to improve connectivity within Tees Valley, across the Northern Powerhouse and the UK, is the Darlington Growth Hub, as outlined on Pages 7, 20, 37 and 39 in the SEP. The Growth Hub encompasses new platforms at Darlington rail station as part of a commercial redevelopment, delivering a 21st century rail gateway.

#### 3.1.12 TVCA Investment Plan

<https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Investment-Plan-Design-2020-8.pdf>

A key focus of this Plan is on improving the transport system for local people and businesses ensuring integration between different transport modes. To achieve this, it identifies significant local funding to develop and support key transport projects including on Page 10 of the document:

**“Darlington Station master plan improvements – £25million.”**

#### 3.1.13 Transport for the North (TfN) – Strategic Transport Plan

<https://transportforthenorth.com/wp-content/uploads/TfN-final-strategic-transport-plan-2019.pdf>

This key policy document, which covers the whole of the North of England makes numerous references to Darlington as a key transport/rail hub along the TfN's East Coast transport corridor. On Page 139 in the East Coast – Scotland section, it states that investment is required at rail stations including **Darlington**, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, York, Hartlepool, Morpeth and Sunderland to increase capacity and promote economic growth. There are existing capacity, operability, timetabling, and reliability constraints along the corridor, which is

limiting economic growth and the movement of people. Effectively resolving these competing demands is crucial to realising the potential of the rail network in this corridor, and the Darlington Station masterplan will help to achieve this.

#### **3.1.14 Department for Transport – Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) for the North and Midlands**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-rail-plan-for-the-north-and-the-midlands>

The IRP was published very recently, on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021, and presents the Government's vision for rail investment across the Midlands and North of England over the next 30 years.

Darlington Station is included in the IRP as part of a package of improvements on the ECML north of York that the Government wants to be developed further. The following specific references are made on Page 114, Paragraph 3.104 and on Page 136 respectively:

“The Government is therefore asking Network Rail to develop a package of interventions on the East Coast Main Line from London to Newcastle to deliver benefits earlier to the North East, and support 7 or 8 tph to Newcastle. This will involve assessing the case for:

- an additional through platform on the eastern side of Darlington station, with bays to reduce the number of local services that cross in front of fast trains. This is consistent with the existing proposals being developed by Network Rail with Tees Valley Combined Authority.”

“By around 2030 (at the end of Control Periods 7 and 8), passengers could see:

- Benefits from early upgrades to the East Coast Main Line to boost connectivity along the route from York to Newcastle, including station upgrades at Darlington, York, Newcastle and Northallerton.”

#### **3.1.15 Network Rail – East Coast Main Line Route Study**

<https://sacuksprodnrdigital0001.blob.core.windows.net/regional-long-term-planning/Eastern/East%20Coast%20Main%20Line%20Route%20Study.pdf>

This key document was designed to offer an investment strategy for the ECML. It clearly covers the whole ECML route, but it makes some very important observations and recommendations for Darlington within the York to Newcastle route section, including the following on Page 39 of the document:

“A large programme of rail investment takes time to put in place and there is a need for a stepped delivery of improvements.

A good example of the sort of improvement that fits this model is a station improvement master plan for Darlington station. Darlington is a hub on the ECML, and trains from the Tees Valley must cross the mainline to stop at the station. This uses up line capacity, and as a result, the train service between Middlesbrough and Darlington cannot grow alongside the mainline service levels. Recent increases in franchise services on the main line and Tees Valley routes make this a pressing issue.

By adding platforms on the east side of the ECML, the Tees Valley train service could be more frequent, attracting more travellers currently using cars, and driving growth through better connections for business, leisure and skills. It would also pave the way for any future increase in ECML traffic.

Putting in new platforms would also provide a spur to redeveloping the station building and its surroundings, making Darlington a key part of the national network. This sort of improvement would drive growth further and align with the strategic economic plans for the Tees Valley.”

The Darlington scheme is then included as an ECML investment priority on Page 44 as follows:

**“Darlington. Make Tees Valley services independent of the ECML.** Tees Valley trains between Darlington and Middlesbrough currently must cross the mainline, which is a significant constraint to ECML line capacity. This option would put platforms on the east side of the mainline at Darlington station. This would increase line capacity and operational flexibility at Darlington station and allow the increases in Tees Valley services needed to drive growth.”

### **3.1.16 Network Rail – Continuous Modular Strategic Planning (CMSP) – Church Fenton to Newcastle**

<https://cdn.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Church-Fenton-to-Newcastle-Strategic-Advice-2020.pdf>

This followed on from the ECML Route Study to answer the strategic question – “What is required to make the rail network between Church Fenton and Newcastle ready for the 2030s and beyond?”

The CMSP undertook more detailed analysis of growth and capacity on this section of route and produced a set of recommendations on required infrastructure interventions. As in the previous ECML Study, Darlington Station featured prominently and this time the document contained significant scheme detail including outline layout plans. The CMSP contained the following specific recommendation on Page 23 of the document:

“F.04.01 Progression of two additional through platforms and one south-facing bay platform at Darlington.”

This was accompanied by the following narrative:

“Network Rail supports TVCA’s proposals at Darlington with the option to deliver two through platforms and at least one south-facing bay on the east side of the alignment, shown indicatively in figure 20. This option also allows more efficient platforming, improving capacity by reducing train crossing movements at Darlington South Junction. It is important to note that the tested scenario with the fewest passenger trains found that only one additional through-platform and one additional bay would be required. Despite this, the two through platforms are recommended due to the expected cost efficiency of delivering both planned through platforms concurrently and the operational resilience benefits of the second through platform.”

**3.1.17 In summary, this section shows that the current constraints at Darlington Station, and the investment required to resolve these for the benefit of the rail network, are recognised and supported in key policy and strategy documents at the regional, pan-Northern and national levels.**

## 3.2 Identifying the problems

3.2.1 The economic geography and peripheral nature of the North East region is one of the greatest challenges, and this is particularly true for the Tees Valley as it contains several centres within a small geographical area. Much of the recent activity from TVCA and the Local Authorities has been aimed at addressing the challenges of job losses in the industrial economy, issues of high unemployment and social exclusion and the difficulties within the local housing market. However, whilst the local economy now has stronger foundations as a result, further targeted intervention is required to achieve the ambitious growth targets.

3.2.2 The lack of a single dominant commercial centre has transport implications and means that good interconnectivity is vital for the Tees Valley to function effectively. The Tees Valley SEP and STP both clearly articulate the need for better transport connections across the City Region, providing businesses and residents with a high-quality public transport network (including rail) that is frequent, integrated, reliable and offers a real alternative to the private car to be cleaner and more sustainable.

3.2.3 This will also boost competitiveness through improved connectivity across the North, as identified in TfN's own Strategic Transport Plan, linking key sectors and leading industries with other centres of expertise outside of the Tees Valley. An improved rail network to, from and within the Tees Valley will also provide more access to global markets, increasing the capacity for growth and creating more jobs for the people of the City Region – this is particularly important as 70% of major local businesses are internationally owned.

3.2.4 Whilst the rail network is extensive, it is still based, to a large extent, on historic patterns of development and travel demand and it does not necessarily fully meet our future needs. Passenger service levels, quality and connections are also not up to a sufficient standard to fully support our ambitious plans: most existing local timetables were designed many years ago and connections between services are often far from ideal; services do not always start early or run late enough; Sunday services are often poor; and there are even gaps in service at the busiest weekday peak times.

3.2.5 The existing Tees Valley rail network, including which services operate where, is shown in Figure 3 below.



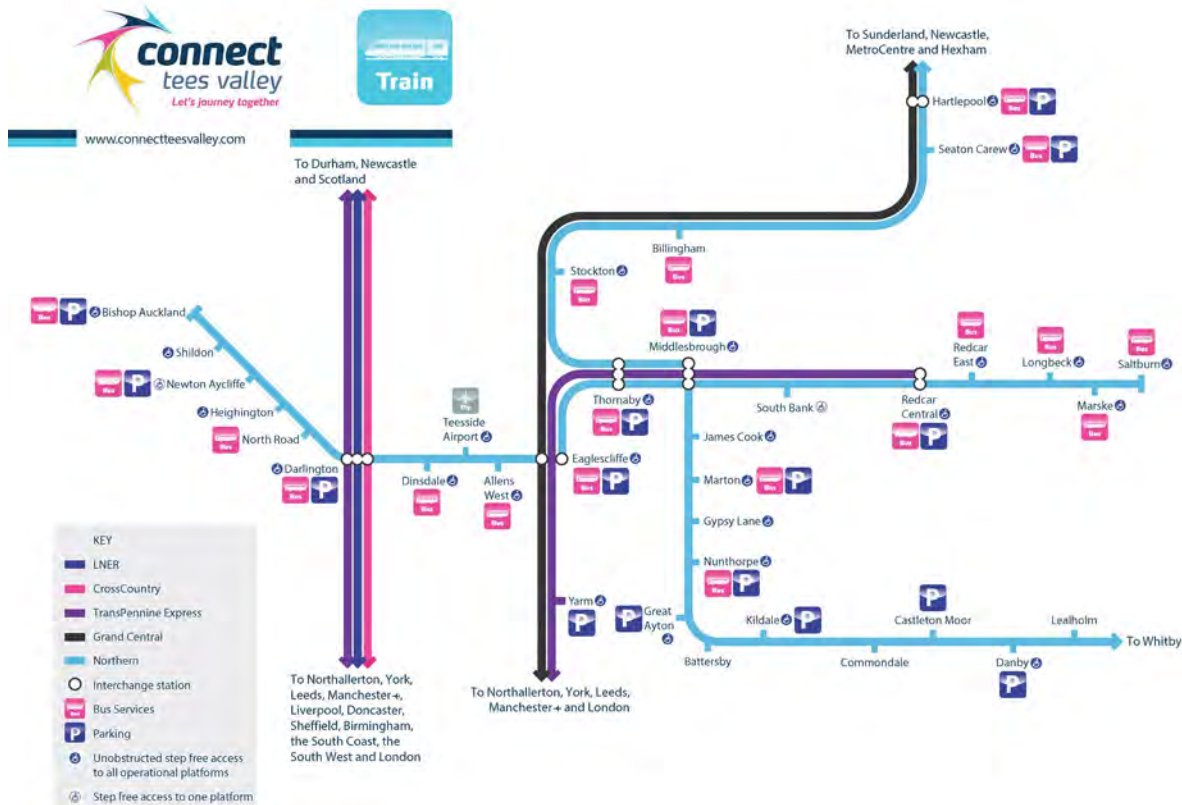


Figure 3 – The Tees Valley Rail Network

3.2.6 The capacity and capability of the passenger and freight rail networks that serve the Tees Valley is now becoming a serious concern in terms of the impact this will have on future economic growth.

3.2.7 The ECML north of York and in particular north of Northallerton, where it becomes 2-track only, is now at or very close to capacity and we are witnessing train operators now struggling to deliver contractual commitments as a direct result.

3.2.8 Station facilities at Darlington are limited for such an important gateway to a city region the size of the Tees Valley. Given its strategic location on the ECML, Darlington Station is not currently fulfilling its potential due to capacity issues and a lack of appropriate facilities. This adversely impacts on both mainline services and those local services which either terminate or cross the mainline at Darlington.

3.2.9 **Mainline passenger services:** The key issue is lack of capacity, as access to the main platforms within the station involves inefficient early deceleration and diversion off the mainline. As part of its East Coast Route Network Study, Network Rail identified Darlington as one of the priority locations for investment to increase capacity on the ECML.

3.2.10 There are very real examples of where this is now having an impact. Prior to the Covid pandemic, TransPennine Express (TPE) was unable to make certain planned calls at Darlington on one of its routes due to the lack of capacity to fit all services in on that section of the ECML. Very recently, the ECML May 2022 timetable consultation concluded that the only

way to fit the new third LNER train per hour (which will not serve Darlington) was to lose one of the two TPE trains per hour and reduce the number of existing LNER calls at Darlington. This would have reduced the number of hourly calls at Darlington from 6 trains per hour to 4.5 trains per hour in each direction. Although this timetable was challenged by many stakeholders, including TVCA, and is now being reviewed, the precedent is concerning.

3.2.11 These short-term capacity concerns were clearly foreseen by Network Rail in its ECML Route Study which contains the following stark summary of the situation north of York on Page 41 of the document:

*“Assuming today’s infrastructure, no increases in the number of services would be possible on this section of railway. Changes to service levels would have to be made using trade-offs between trains in different service sectors, and/or by adjusting stopping patterns and the destinations served.”*

This is not an acceptable scenario considering growth forecasts.

3.2.12 Tees Valley is at the heart of the Government’s flagship levelling up agenda. £1.6bn of investment is planned in the region’s economy, including £280m of Government investment. The growth forecast is for 100,000+ new jobs, 35,000+ new houses and 24m additional visitors. This transformation of the Tees Valley economy will drive travel demand and high-quality rail links are a critical enabler of this economic transformation.

3.2.13 The Tees Valley, and Darlington in particular, are expected to have above trend economic and population growth because of two recent major inward investment announcements: development of the Treasury Campus in Darlington (with circa 2,300 direct jobs) and the wider Teesside Freeport (with circa 41,700 direct jobs). Cumulatively these two investments will add circa £4bn to the local economy on completion, increasing economic growth by circa 24% or approximately 3% over the next 8 years. This is double the existing rate of growth projected by CEBR and used in the original Darlington Station Business Case.

3.2.14 The application of this enhanced growth projection to Darlington’s anticipated passenger numbers could result in an additional 340,000 passengers by year 8, with the Treasury alone contributing circa 160,160 additional passenger movements per annum, with circa 68,640 of those being a weekly long distant commute and the remainder being daily commutes in support of hybrid working.

3.2.15 Rail demand is therefore likely to grow significantly so we need the rail infrastructure and service levels to support this.

3.2.16 There are also on-going issues of service resilience, which have widespread network implications. The ECML is critical to virtually all passenger and freight connectivity aspirations for the Tees Valley both short and long-term.

3.2.17 The local rail network is also constrained meaning that without interventions to free up known capacity pinch-points, at Darlington and Middlesbrough stations, and at other likely pinch-points such as Hartlepool, no further train services or station calls are possible with the current infrastructure. This is clearly not sustainable given the levels of growth that are forecast and the increased service levels that are already committed.

3.2.18 **Local services:** The key issue is lack of capacity as services need to cross the mainline north and south of the station to stop here. This is constraining important rail links into the heart

of the Tees Valley and into South Durham along the Bishop Line, both key development corridors. Without the investment at Darlington, no new stops are possible at any stations on the route to Saltburn. This will include currently unused stations that will be needed in future to service major development opportunities at Teesside International Airport and Teesworks. It will also not be possible to go beyond the current 2 trains per hour frequency east of Darlington or the 1 train per hour frequency to the west to Bishop Auckland.

**3.2.19 Southbound freight services:** The key issue is lack of capacity as some services, particularly large containers, are required to travel north into/through the station before then going south. This is due to the current lack of gauge clearance on the preferred route for the freight industry/operators to the ECML/South which is the line via Yarm to Northallerton. The route via Darlington is inefficient and uses up capacity at the station and on the ECML unnecessarily.

3.2.20 The other main issues with the current Darlington Station are the lack of high-quality station facilities and access options and the lack of integration with Darlington town centre and with the growing Central Park Enterprise Zone site immediately adjacent on the North East side of the Station.

**3.2.21 In summary, this section highlights the transport challenges faced by Tees Valley due to the peripherality and polycentric nature of the region. There are major plans to address this, to support economic growth ambitions, but these are hampered by existing constraints on the rail network, particularly at Darlington Station. This is now affecting the provision of existing rail services and preventing the delivery of additional services that are required to support growth.**

### **3.3 Why the Scheme will deliver significant benefits**

3.3.1 Overcoming these issues by providing a high-quality rail gateway for the Tees Valley will be imperative to the future strategy, particularly as local rail timetables and operations are fundamentally linked to the capacity and throughput of Darlington Station.

3.3.2 The major upgrade to Darlington Station will provide a range of improvements to the station and its immediate surrounding area. These will include additional platform and track capacity to overcome the existing operational constraints, a significantly enhanced station building including improved retail and commercial opportunities as well as much improved accessibility and integration. A new station building will be constructed on the east side of the station, which will link to the existing building by a new, fully accessible purpose-built footbridge. Car parking and public transport interchange facilities will also be improved as will the approaches to the station and the wider public realm.

#### Direct Benefits from the CPO Scheme (the 'Station Gateway')

3.3.3 The Station Gateway scheme element, which is covered by the CPO, comprises the new station building, with multi-modal connections, to the east of the existing station, a new transport interchange and multi-storey car park adjacent to the new station building and improved transport interchange facilities on the western side of the station. This will deliver significant direct benefits including:

- Increasing the visibility and accessibility of the station from all key approaches.

- Providing much better links between the station and Darlington town centre.
- Providing much better links between the station and the adjacent Central Park, a major centre for employment and education.
- Providing the opportunity for much improved bus interchange by the removal of significant existing constraints that currently prevent this.
- Providing much better links with the surrounding pedestrian and cycling networks and improved cycle parking facilities.
- Providing a more fit-for-purpose Station Car Park that is much more integrated within the Station than the current parking provision.

#### Wider Benefits that are unlocked by the Station Gateway Scheme

3.3.4 The Station Gateway scheme will then be followed by the improvements to the existing station and track infrastructure including refurbished existing station buildings, the new footbridge, new platforms and track reconfigurations.

3.3.5 This investment is now essential if existing mainline service provision and connectivity is to be maintained and grown at Darlington. Current constraints are threatening this connectivity, which is contrary to the Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan and wider economic growth ambitions.

3.3.6 The Station Gateway is a critical first step in delivering the major upgrade for the station that will then unlock the further benefits as outlined below. These wider benefits do not directly relate to the Station Gateway element, but without the CPO they cannot materialise.

- The scheme will help ensure that existing mainline connectivity at Darlington can be retained in the short-term meaning that 6 trains per hour can continue to operate (2xLNER, 2xCrossCountry and 2xTPE). Beyond this, Darlington Station is a fundamental part of the investment programme north of York which is required to facilitate new long-distance services in the future.

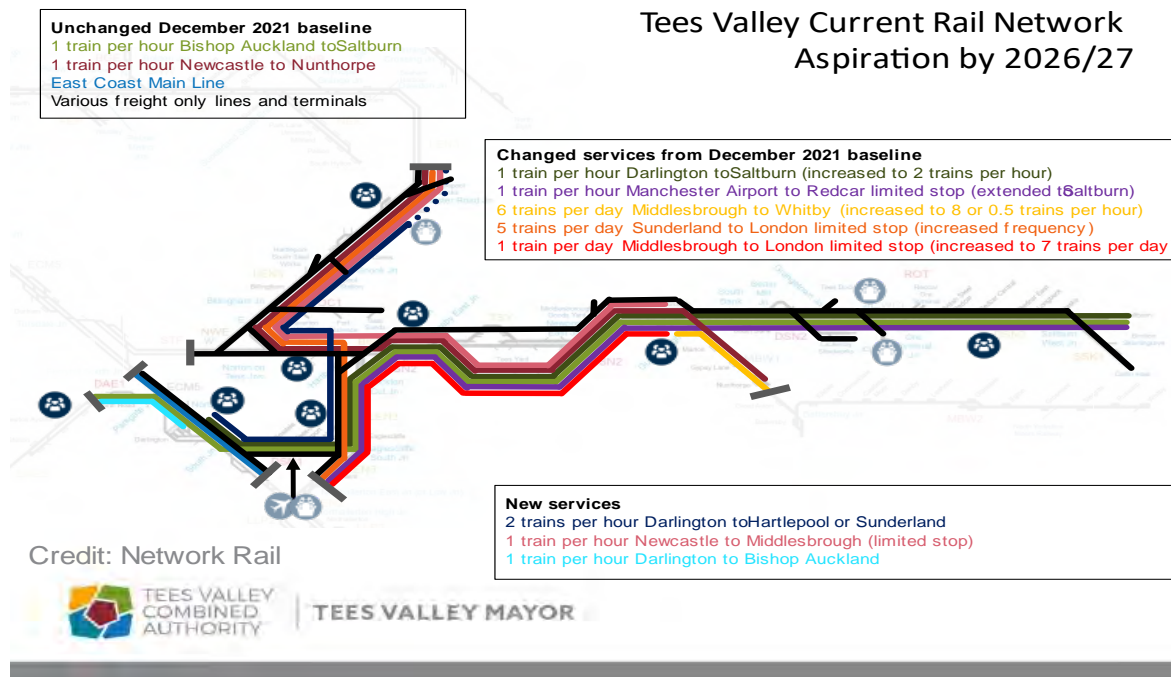
3.3.7 Crucially, the Darlington scheme is also fundamental to the delivery of TVCA's vision for rail service improvements right across the Tees Valley. The benefits include:

- A minimum of 2 trains per hour operating on all rail lines wholly within the Tees Valley. This is consistent with the desirable minimum standards that have been set out by Transport for the North in its Strategic Transport Plan.
- Further frequency enhancements, starting on core east-west routes.
- Improved connections between all local/regional and national services, particularly at key interchange points, and revisions to service patterns.
- Provision of sufficient network capacity to support our growth ambitions for both passenger and freight services.

3.3.8 It will do this by separating most local (East-West) services from the mainline (North-South) services, thus removing various inefficient conflicts between them that currently exist and which limit capacity and timetable planning. This will then enable local services to be planned and grown around the needs of the Tees Valley, not dictated solely by when these services can cross the ECML to access Darlington Station as is the case now. This will facilitate the

delivery of additional stops on existing routes and the delivery of new routes, including linking key economic centres in the Tees Valley that do not currently have direct rail services.

3.3.9 Darlington is therefore a fundamental part of a wider programme of rail investment right across the Tees Valley which includes, for example major investments at Middlesbrough and Hartlepool, which are all critical to unlock future growth. This investment will remove current constraints to enable the delivery of our rail vision for higher frequency rail services and more stops across the Tees Valley as shown in Figure 4 below. This will increase the accessibility of rail, improve connectivity for our residents and businesses and support our economic growth ambitions.



**Figure 4 – The Future Tees Valley Rail Vision that investment at Darlington will enable**

3.3.10 In summary, this section shows that the major upgrade of Darlington Station is needed now. The Station Gateway is a critical starting point for the upgrade and will deliver a wide range of direct benefits in its own right. Crucially the Station Gateway scheme is also essential in unlocking numerous further benefits that will be delivered by the full upgrade, thus enabling significant transport and economic growth across Tees Valley.

## 4. CONCLUSION

4.1 The current constraints at Darlington Station, and the investment required to resolve these for the benefit of the rail network, are recognised and supported in key policy and strategy documents at the regional, pan-Northern and national levels.

4.2 The peripherality and polycentric nature of the Tees Valley creates a number of significant transport challenges. There are major plans to address these challenges, to support economic growth ambitions, but these are hampered by existing constraints on the rail network, particularly at Darlington Station. This is now affecting the provision of existing rail services and preventing the delivery of additional services that are required to support growth.

4.3 The major upgrade of Darlington Station is needed now. The Station Gateway is a critical starting point for the upgrade and will deliver a wide range of direct benefits in its own right. Crucially the Station Gateway scheme is also essential in unlocking numerous further benefits that will be delivered by the full upgrade, thus enabling significant transport and economic growth across Tees Valley.

## **5. DECLARATION**

5.1 I confirm that I have made clear which facts and matters referred to in this proof of evidence are within my own knowledge and which are not. Those that are within my own knowledge I confirm to be true. The opinions I have expressed represent my true and complete professional opinions on the matters to which they refer and I confirm that I have understood my overriding duty to the inquiry in this regard.

5.2 I confirm that my evidence includes all facts which I regard as being relevant to the opinions I have expressed and that attention has been drawn to any matter known to me that would affect the validity of those opinions.