

Response to the InterCity East Coast Franchise consultation by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Authorities

Service Improvements and Effects of Engineering Works

We welcome the suggestion that service improvements will be in line with infrastructure enhancements linked to Network Rail Control Period 4 (2009 – 2014). We welcome the bringing together of franchise issues, control periods and Route Utilisation Strategy proposals.

As part of passenger service improvements linked to CP4 above, we would like to see the re-instatement of direct trains from Peterborough to Scotland, north of Edinburgh. We would also like to see an increased frequency of direct journeys from Peterborough to Edinburgh, ideally hourly throughout the daytime. Infrastructure enhancements should facilitate these types of improvements. It is our view that the 2016 timetable revisions that will be made possible through the Super Express trains should enable these services to be reinstated.

We would also like to see non-franchise operators (Hull Trains, Great Central) allowed to stop at Peterborough once the station capacity is increased to compensate for the reduction in service in May 2011. The number of journeys from Peterborough to Kings Cross in the May 2011 timetable has been reduced by 4 journeys with a reduction of 5 journeys in the opposite direction. This includes a reduction of one journey during the evening peak. We would like to see these journeys re-instated in the 2016 timetable revision when the Super Express trains are introduced at the latest.

It is noted that there will be significant levels of engineering work taking place throughout this franchise period such as Thameslink, the Hitchin junction grade separation and works to increase the capacity at Peterborough Station. We are surprised that the consultation document does not make specific references to these engineering works and how they may affect passenger services. We would want to ensure that a franchise holder has detailed plans in place for how it will deal with the inevitable disruption that will be created by engineering works. We are particularly aware that works at Peterborough Station may affect punctuality and that plans need to be in place to whilst the works are ongoing.

Timetable

The consultation document explains that there will be a new ECML clock facing timetable to be introduced in May 2011. From the diagram this appears to be services starting from Edinburgh, Leeds, York, Lincoln and Newcastle but it is not totally clear. It is also noted that this new timetable will be the subject of an additional consultation; however it is our view that the clarity on timetable issues is needed now. Rail Franchises and the timetables that the franchise holders work with have to be fully integrated. It is therefore our view that the timetable information is needed now and should have been consulted upon at the same time as this consultation to ensure a fully integrated approach.

We note that the consultation document also states that the off peak frequency of trains will go from 4 to 5 per hour on ICEC. It is therefore disappointing that Peterborough will only have 3 trains per hour on ICEC and 2 trains per hour on First Capital Connect during the off peak. We would like to see this level of service improved. Peterborough is a key interchange point for local residents in Cambridgeshire and we do not want to see opportunities for rail journeys reduce due to long delays in journeys as a result of limited connections.

Whilst journeys on ICEC are relatively evenly spaced on journeys from Peterborough to Kings Cross, the journey times from London are on the hour, five minutes past the hour and 30 minutes past the hour. We would like to see this service frequency improved and increased during the 2016 timetable revision.

As part of the consultation we have been asked to give views on the priorities for additional services and any other train service issues that should be addressed in future years. As discussed above it is our view that we would like to see direct journeys from Peterborough to destinations north of Edinburgh reinstated. We would also like to see later 'fast' journeys from Kings Cross to Peterborough. (These could be fast journeys on FCC, similar to peak time journeys, rather than ECML), especially on Saturday evenings.

Constraints

We welcome the acknowledgement that capacity and capability for more services are constrained south of Peterborough due to limited power supply. We also welcome that fact that Hitchin grade separation is included as a scheme that will come forward during the franchise. This area is a significant bottleneck and barrier to services that must be addressed. However this scheme does not address the power supply issues. We therefore hope that the power supply issues will be addressed by the works being carried out in preparation for Thameslink, where the new sub-station is to be built in the Hitchin area in time for the new build of 12 car trains in 2014. The power supply issues must be addressed along with the Hitchin-Cambridge Grade Separation project.

The above issues present constraints on future services and improvements; this therefore limits the ability to be able to address overcrowding issues at Peterborough. Peterborough to London is listed as being in the top 20 bi-directional flows by journey. Page 20 of the consultation document also states that the greatest crowding pressures are south of Newark to London (including Peterborough), where between 40% and 50% of seats are used throughout the day. Whilst we welcome the introduction of 12 car trains on First Capital Connect/Thameslink and Super Express trains which will see the seating capacity increase. It is important that there is sufficient capacity on ICEC, especially at peak times for commuters which currently results in passengers standing in excess of 45 minutes.

We note that this consultation invites consultees to identify specific local factors which will influence future levels of demands. Here are some specific details relating to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough:

- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough form part of the London – Stansted – Cambridge – Peterborough growth area. The Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England sets our targets for significant numbers of new homes and jobs, all of which are key factors in relation to the use of rail services. The population of Peterborough is due to increase by 25,000 by 2020 and there will be 73,000 new dwellings built in Cambridgeshire between 2001 and 2021. Peterborough City Council are also planning to open a Green Quarter next to the Rail Station and encourage workers to travel by rail.
- Timetable links are also important where a station is a key interchange. The level of interchange with Cross Country services and the level of waiting time is critical. We would want to ensure high levels of integration between ICEC and Cross Country Services at Peterborough. Limited services from rural areas also connect and interchange at Peterborough and again onward connection times play an important role in determining travel choice.

Super Express Trains

With regard to the proposed major timetable review in December 2016 we have already stated above that we would like to see increases in services to and from Peterborough. These service improvements should be south towards London but also to the north of England and Scotland. Improved services between Peterborough and London are particularly important for commuters.

In terms of our views about longer term service planning we think it is essential that bidders should give some indication of their plans. It is important that bidders are considering the longer terms now but any plans must not be flexible enough to take account changes in circumstances and new policy directions etc.

We would like to see the section of track between Yaxley and Huntingdon duplicated and a new station provided at Hampton (for FCC/Thameslink trains). It is also important that the speed of the slow line between Huntingdon and Hitchin is increased from the present 75mph to a minimum of 90mph. This will also affect FCC/Thameslink operations to Peterborough.

Accessibility Issues

As Local Authorities we would like to see greater recognition of access to stations, linkages with buses, car parking and cycle parking etc. We welcome the consideration of the related issues that you would like bidders to consider as detailed on p34 of the consultation document. It is our opinion that this list represents a step forward in ensuring accessibility issues remain covered. For our area access into Peterborough Station is important especially if you are walking from the town centre. The underpass to get to the station is also a security issue therefore any schemes such as the Peterborough Gateway proposal are important and there should be a requirement on the franchisee to work within Local Authorities on such schemes. We would want to see a successful bidder taking a key role in the Peterborough Station Quarter planning and the implementation proposals.

Other accessibility issues regarding Peterborough Station included ensuring there is a west entrance into the Station and a footpath from the west area over the station to North Westgate.

The consultation document isn't clear about what if any penalty there would be for operators who do not meet the standards. It is our view that if we are to get real improvements the potential for penalties is needed.

Variation to the DfT Base Case

With regard to our views on the length of the franchise, it is our view that a longer franchise will give the bidder more confidence to make long term commitments to infrastructure and rolling stock upgrades. However, there must be robust review mechanisms in the franchise relating to performance.

Stakeholder and passenger involvement

We want to see greater stakeholder involvement with the new operator, specifically with the changes over the lifetime of the refranchise in respect of timetabling and engineering works.

Given the number of operators and different services that stop at Peterborough, interchange is significant and local knowledge about the effects or implications for such changes have an important role. As key stakeholders working in the local area and having access to local communities we have an important understanding about how residents and businesses use services within our area. We would welcome greater opportunities to meet with rail operators.

We welcome the objective to align this franchise with Network Rail's RUS for the East Coast Main Line. Peterborough City Council would also support the transfer of Peterborough Rail Station from the bidder to Network Rail.