



campaigning
by the
**Railway Development
Society Limited**

Yorkshire

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Dear Sirs,

RESPONSE FROM RAILFUTURE TO THE INTER CITY EAST COAST FRANCHISE CONSULTATION

Introduction

Railfuture is long established and increasingly recognised as the UK's leading independent organisation campaigning for better rail services for both passengers and freight. Our local branches and volunteers campaign to get stations and lines opened for the benefit of the community, economy and environment. We have had a major part in getting over 350 new and reopened stations and over 500 miles of route to join the network over the past half century.

This document sets out our response to the Inter City East Coast Consultation and was compiled by Railfuture Yorkshire on behalf of the Society, with additional input from the following Branches: Scotland, North East, Lincolnshire, East Midlands, London & South East and East Anglia.

Objectives for the franchise

Q1 Do consultees agree that the proposed franchise objectives are an appropriate expression of the priorities that should apply to the new ICEC franchise?

Yes, but we feel there should be an additional objective, namely

- To contribute towards the UK's carbon emission reduction targets by actively targeting modal shift from both cars and aircraft through affordable walk-on fares, enhanced passenger comfort, and a timetable that encourages intermediate as well as end-to-end journeys.

Franchise length

Q2 Are there any other issues that consultees believe the Department should take into account in determining the length of the new ICEC franchise?

The Department should be satisfied that the franchisee can deliver the franchise, and should therefore award the franchise primarily on the basis of sustainability and quality, rather than on price. We do not consider that a purpose of the railways should be to make money for government, but rather to be actively promoted as an environmentally friendly and safe means of transport for all.

There must also be measures to enable the franchisee to invest in or lease long-life assets such as additional rolling stock, without on-going liabilities at the end of the franchise.

www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk
www.railwatch.org.uk

Franchise scope

Q3 What are consultees' views on the principle of the new ICEC franchise becoming a multi-purpose train operator along the route of the East Coast Main Line rather than focusing only on the InterCity services provided by the current operator?

We believe that the principle of the East Coast franchisee becoming a multi-purpose train operator is one that the Department should thoroughly explore. The main advantage we can see is that the operator would have more incentive to hold connecting services to enable connections from late-running services, especially at times of the day when local train services are infrequent (one hour intervals or worse). However, we believe that, for this franchise period at least, any such expansion should be confined to services operating wholly on the ECML (including the Leeds line), key 'connecting services' in non-metropolitan areas, and long distance routes that 'link in' to the ECML.

Q4 Do consultees have any comments on which services might be considered for inclusion in the new ICEC franchise and how they might be specified?

Wholly 'ECML' services that could become part of the franchise are the Leeds-Doncaster locals, Newcastle-Morpeth-Chathill, and the Peterborough – King's Cross semi-fasts (currently slated for Combined Thameslink). In addition, there is a strong case for Newark Northgate-Lincoln-Grimsby because of the importance of connectivity with northbound ECML services, and we consider the case should be explored for the Leeds – Settle – Carlisle services being transferred to the East Coast franchise, provided this does not jeopardise the introduction of a Manchester - Settle - Carlisle service at alternate hours to the Leeds service. We also want a direct semi-fast service from Leeds to Lincoln and Skegness via the 'Joint' line. There is also a strong argument in favour of incorporating the fast King's Cross to King's Lynn via Cambridge service into the ICEC franchise, as this does not sit well with the high density inter-urban services to be provided by the new Combined Thameslink franchise. We feel that there is a persuasive case to be made that this service belongs with ECML, although we would not advocate the deployment of new IEP stock on this service, as it would not be suited to the limited infrastructure north of Cambridge. However, an appropriate build of new rolling stock such as a derivative of the Class 379 would appear most sensible. This new build could also be utilised on the King's Cross to Peterborough semi-fasts as suggested above, thus making a business case for the new rolling stock more robust and value for money.

However, by the same token, we would not support the inclusion of non-Thameslink Great Northern Inner Suburban services (into London Moorgate) in this franchise as suggested as a possibility in Q14 of the Combined Thameslink Franchise consultation. Instead we see a very strong case for their inclusion, post-completion of the Thameslink Programme, in a TfL-managed concession.

Major schemes, stakeholder aspirations and other initiatives

Q5 Are consultees aware of any other rail or non-rail major development schemes that are likely to have a significant impact on the new ICEC franchise?

Budget airlines could cream off traffic with low fares, especially for travellers not travelling to city centres. Megabus may cream off passengers with low fares, although if Stagecoach win the franchise, this is likely to be mitigated by their transferring some Megabus passengers to train at less busy times. Other coach services may be introduced, including First Group's Greyhound service. Both these threats stress the need to affordable fares, including walk-on. We would like to see cheap 'stand-by' tickets (both Standard and First Class) introduced on less busy services.

Grantham, Newark and Lincoln are government-designated growth points.

Q6 Are there any research findings, evidence or other publications that consultees wish to bring to the attention of the Department as part of this refranchising process?

'Outline Business Case for Improving Rail Services between Lincoln and London', Lincolnshire County Council, March 2012.

The service specification

Q7 Consultees' views are invited on the train service specification, including which aspects should be mandated by the Department and which can be left to commercial discretion; and also on whether or not there should be a change in the specified minimum service level when IEP trains are introduced.

Later services are required north of Newcastle daily, and not on a Friday-only basis. Services to destinations beyond Leeds (Bradford Interchange, Skipton and Harrogate at present) should approach Leeds from the East, and call at Garforth. Harrogate requires an all-day service, given the appalling quality of the local Northern service (uncomfortable rolling stock, and often badly overcrowded). Major attention needs to be given to connectivity with local services (and with buses timed to meet trains to destinations where there is no rail services). This is necessary in all franchise specifications, and will involve close cooperation in timetabling between the different TOCs, Network Rail and the DfT.

Q8 Consultees' views are invited on the potential for the franchise to serve locations accessible from the East Coast Main Line, which currently have limited or no direct services to London.

There are a number of places that could benefit from a regular and frequent direct service to London. These are Lincoln/Skegness, Huddersfield, Grimsby/Cleethorpes, Middlesbrough and Scarborough. In addition, as mentioned previously, we can see the benefit in the East Coast franchisee running services on the Settle and Carlisle line. Once 5-car IEP trains have been introduced, the splitting of trains (as happens, for example at Faversham, Horsham and Haywards Heath) should be considered as a way of serving more destinations given pathing constraints on the ECML. Secondly, it is important that the place served by open access services continue to have a direct service to London. Whilst we believe that the open access operators currently offer a more customer friendly service than East Coast and we wish the operators to thrive, we believe that the franchise specification should include provision for the franchisee to take over these services if for any reason the current open-access operators are no longer delivering the service. Thirdly, some destinations need a more frequent service. Morpeth is an obvious example. Newark and Retford should be reconnected to Leeds by direct service – Retford residents commute to Wakefield and Leeds for work, and Leeds continuing success as a commercial centre may become increasingly important for Newark residents as well. Newark (like, but to a lesser extent than, Lincoln) has strong potential as a tourist destination. Retford stops should be linked to services on the Sheffield - Lincoln route.

Delivering improvements for passengers

Q9 Are consultees aware of any ways in which improved ticketing, smart ticketing and passenger information might be provided

The system chosen should be the most proven system from elsewhere in the world. It is vitally important that it retains the current flexibility to break journeys, and that it can cope with the full variety of ticketing options. Through tickets, including advance and other discount tickets, should be available to European destinations via Eurostar or other Channel Tunnel services (both to direct destinations and onward destinations).

Q10 Do consultees support the use of NPS scores to monitor and improve service quality of the ICEC franchise? Are there any other approaches that might be more effective in securing improvements in customer experience?

We strongly support the use of NPS scores to monitor and improve service quality.

Punctuality should be measured at principal intermediate stations as well as at the ends of journeys.

Separate scores should be published for on time, up to 10 minutes late and over 20 minutes late.

During engineering works and unplanned disruptions passengers prefer to travel throughout by train, even with extended journey times, rather than by replacement buses. The ICEC franchisee should have sufficient resources, including trained staff, to provide an adequate service of diesel-powered or diesel-hauled trains diverted between King's Cross and Peterborough via Cambridge and between Peterborough and Doncaster via Lincoln.

Q11 What are consultees' priorities for improvements to the stations managed by the ICEC franchisee?

There are a number of improvements we wish to see. We want high quality and an adequate number of toilet facilities at most stations. Most East Coast stations should have heated waiting rooms with comfortable seating, drink and snack machines, and adequate capacity. No one should have to wait for their train in an area of the station that is not protected against rain and snow. Snow and ice must be cleared before the first train, and cleared again as necessary during the day. There needs to be an adequate level of platform seating, which needs to be of comfortable design, and made from a material which is not cold to sit on in winter – wood comes to mind. Most stations should have cafes/refreshment rooms, as well as any take-away outlets. Awarding of catering franchises must take into account the quality of the offer as well as financial considerations. All stations should have adequate litterbins.

We are concerned that the cost of car parking puts off some potential passengers, and that they instead use their car for the journey. We therefore believe that off-peak car parking charges, and especially weekend charges, should be much cheaper, including a 'long weekend' (Friday to Monday ticket). At present, passengers who have a local train service are forced to drive to an east coast station because of a lack of local service. This applies if returning from London (or elsewhere) on a late train, and if wanting to catch an early service on a Sunday, and also if there is no Sunday service on a local line. We consider car parking should be seen as an integral part of a train journey.

Specifically, we consider that the portico area at Newcastle Central station is a danger to life and limb, due to the pedestrian vehicle mix. A Sheffield station type improvement is suggested. Our suggestion is to reserve the portico for retail and pedestrian use, with taxis only to the east of the portico, and a short stay car park to the west with a facility for rail replacement buses when needed.

We believe that Darlington requires an extra platform, on the east side.

At Retford the walkway to the low level platforms is bleak and the low-level platform facilities are minimal. There needs to be better lighting and shelter on the walkway, enclosed platform shelters, and step free access to the westbound low level platform.

We welcome the planned improvements at Wakefield Westgate.

Q12 What do consultees believe are the most important factors in improving safety and security (actual or perceived)?

Visible presence of staff. Gated stations should be the exception rather than the rule, as these can cause a lot of aggravation, both because of slow entry/egress and because of the ignorant behaviour of staff unaware of ticket conditions (for example the ability to break a journey on most tickets). Ticket checks on EC services are normally adequate.

On trains, it is important that luggage security is enhanced, both by the position of luggage areas, and by the presence of mirrors as on TPE. There should be the option of leaving luggage in a secure compound area of the train, at least for those making end-to-end journeys.

Q13 Are there any increments or decrements to the DfT's proposed specification that stakeholders would wish to see and would be prepared to fund?

Not applicable.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

We would also like to make the following additional comments that do not fit neatly into your questions.

We are concerned about the passenger experience when the IEP trains are introduced. They should not be claustrophobic like the Pendolinos, or cramped and with very uncomfortable seating like the Voyagers. Current ICEC stock (HSTs and IC225s) provide a reasonably high level of passenger comfort, and we are concerned that the IEP may not offer the same level. Seat design, and consequently comfort, is considered by many people to have regressed in recent years. Indeed, we would like better legroom in standard class (as on 175 and 180 trains), and full size tables (as on the HSTs) in front of standard class airline seats. We consider the number of toilets on the 225s to be inadequate, especially given that one is often out of order, and customer demand is high approaching London and other major destinations. Finally, we want new or refurbished stock to have adequate luggage room.

Boxing Day services. We would like to suggest that services are provided between London and Edinburgh and London and Leeds. As Boxing Day now hosts considerable sporting and other events, we would like to see the possibility explored of some level of service provision on the principle routes.

We trust you will find these comments of help.

Yours faithfully,



Christopher R Hyomes
Railfuture
Chairman – Yorkshire