

## Cross Country rail franchise

### Page 2: Responding

Q1. Are you responding:

on behalf of an organisation?

### Page 3: Organisation details

Q2. Name of organisation

Railfuture Ltd.

### Page 5: Awareness

Q8. How did you hear about this consultation?

Internet

### Page 6: Passenger survey

Q9. What are the particular services, routes and times of day where you think crowding on Cross Country services needs to be addressed most urgently?

Leicester to/from Birmingham  
Birmingham to/from Tamworth – Mon-Fri peak hours  
Birmingham to/from Oxford in morning peak, from mid-morning to evening evry day but especially on Fridays and Sundays  
Coventry/Birmingham/Wolverhampton - most times of day and days of week  
York to/from Leeds and Birmingham – most times of day and days of week  
Leeds/Wakefield/Sheffield - most times of day and days of week  
Cambridge/Ely/Peterborough – Mon-Fri peak hours and Sunday pm and evening  
North of Newcastle – morning and evening peak periods

Q10. Rank the following in order of priority for improvement for your future Cross Country services. 1 is most important and 6 is least important.

more frequent weekday services	4
more frequent weekend services	3
more additional summer only services	5
earlier times of first trains	6
later times of last trains	2
earlier Sunday morning services	1

**Which routes and stations and why?**

earlier Sunday services on all routes later trains Birmingham to all destinations more Sunday services on routes serving university towns

Q11. What changes would you like to see in the way Cross Country currently sells and provides tickets?

Passengers should be able to buy the full range of walk-on fares from the train conductor en route.

Walk-on fares for longer journeys should not exceed the sum of the fares for the sections making up the overall journey. Split ticketing is a major issue Railfuture is addressing in RDG's Easier Fares consultation

Q12. What changes would you like to see to the Advanced Purchase on the day (APOD) system?

We recognise that APOD tickers are generally of benefit to passengers. However, APOD tickets should be issued without a seat reservation, to minimise the risk of an existing passenger, particularly one that is elderly, less able or with children, being obliged to move to another seat.

Cross Country Trains also make available Reservations on the Day (ROD) for passengers already holding a valid walk-on ticket. This is a useful facility given the short trains used at present. However they should be limited to a small section of these trains and flagged accordingly - possibly with different coach/seat livery or red/amber/green seat information displays. The need for this facility would be eliminated if significantly longer trains were provided.

Both APOD and ROD purchases should be available by telephone or at booking offices as well through the web-site or mobile app - the present system discriminates against those with disabilities who find use of smartphones and tablets extremely difficult. This is not just a matter of hand flexibility. There are many over 50's with a level of dyslexia which makes them functionally illiterate. It is important to remember that there are many disabilities where assisted travel is not needed but travel is still difficult.

**Q13. What additional information would be useful to you when planning your journeys or making connections onto other services?**

When booking a ticket, information should be provided as to which trains are likely to be most crowded, based on recent periods.

Cross Country Trains have a page on their website about "Making your connections easier" showing alternatives to changing trains at Birmingham. However journey planners, even Cross Country's own, only enable Birmingham connections. Wherever feasible, trains booking systems should encourage connections to be made at stations other than at Birmingham New Street. Appropriate seat reservations should be included in this process.

On arrival at stations, Cross Country should provide information about the arrival platform and departure times and platforms of connecting services.

When connecting services are delayed, there should be a facility to change reservations easily. If advance ticket restrictions are eased due to disruption, the operator should make it clear what this means for passengers with tickets for journeys also involving other operators.

When connecting services are delayed, there should be a facility to change reservations easily.

**Q14. How would you like the information (in question above) communicated to you?**

Planning journeys - on-line, at TVMs and booking offices

Connecting services - train managers, on-board CIS

**Q15. How do you believe Cross Country staff could be more effective in providing service and assistance that passengers need on a modern railway network?**

Cross Country should be represented at all major stations where their trains stop, especially those with two or more trains per hour and where connections can be made – for example, Birmingham New Street, Bristol Temple Meads, Exeter St Davids, Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester Piccadilly

Staff should be more visible on trains. When formed of more than one unit without corridor connection, both (all) portions should have on-board staff.

When trains are crowded or just well used, the Train Manager needs to walk through the train and clear seats of any luggage.

Most important is providing accurate information on alternative routes when a train is delayed. Ideally enable on-train staff to arrange changes to reservations on connecting services.

**Q16. What comment do you have on improving the overall passenger experience before, during and after the journey?**

As Q10

**Q17. How could the way in which Cross Country deals with your complaints and provides compensation to you be improved?**

The present on-line system appears to be working reasonably well, although it can be an unduly protracted process.

Q18. Rank your priorities for improvement to the carriage layout for long distance inter-city Cross Country trains? Rank 1 for most important to 7 for least important.

<b>Extra room for luggage</b>	3
<b>Cycle storage</b>	6
<b>More seats</b>	1
<b>Greater leg-room</b>	2
<b>More table seats as opposed to 'airline' seats</b>	4
<b>Seats that align with windows</b>	5
<b>More comfortable room for short distance standing</b>	7

**Where and when do you think these facilities are most required?**

Items 1 to 6 are required on all long-distance trains Luggage space – located at both ends of each carriage and capable of taking very large suitcases and additional space in the centre of carriages for less large cases and bags In addition, there should be more priority seats near toilets, with passengers needing such a seat to have priority reservation.

Q19. Rank your priorities for improvement to the carriage layout for local trains on Cross Country? Rank 1 for most important to 7 for least important.

<b>Extra room for luggage</b>	3
<b>Cycle storage</b>	6
<b>More seats</b>	1
<b>Greater leg-room</b>	2
<b>More table seats as opposed to 'airline' seats</b>	4
<b>Seats that align with windows</b>	7
<b>More comfortable room for short distance standing</b>	5

Q20. What other comments or suggestions do you have about the on-board experience?

Seats should be at least as comfortable as those at present on Voyagers and IC125s – preferably more so

If Voyager trains are retained, resolve the smelly toilet issue and improve the quality of the seat reservation displays

If longer trains can be provided then a snacks/drinks bar and mini-shop should be included. A range of hot meals should also be available on all long distance trains spanning normal meal times, which require only 1 day's advance notice and included in the advance booking systems.

All trains should have reliable at-seat catering for snacks and drinks, with passengers knowing when to expect trolleys.

Catering should be available on long distance trains well into the evening, at least for drinks and snacks. This should include north of Edinburgh, west of Plymouth and south of Reading.

The best Cross Country conductors are very good, helpful, accessible and informative. Bringing as many as possible up to that standard and motivating them to stay there would solve more problems for people with special needs while enhancing the on-train experience for everyone.

Q21. Do you have any other views on how the future Cross Country franchise could be improved that have not been captured in the questions above?

Given that the majority of passengers on Cross Country currently are leisure/ optional travellers, future services and facilities should favour this type of passenger over those going to/from work. This implies continued and improved long distance connectivity and also improved on-board facilities, including seating layout, catering and travel information, as detailed in previous sections.

## Page 7: Qualifying question

Q22. The rest of this survey is mainly designed to be completed by rail industry stakeholder representatives, however you can complete this if you wish, do you want to:

continue answering the following technically focused questions?

## Page 8: Crowding issues and ideas to respond to

Q23. Which of the following potential measures do you think could overcome crowding caused by short distance commuters using long distance Cross Country trains, assuming that suitable alternative services are available?

Other:

Longer trains with many more seats OR local relief trains

**Provide specific instances where these may be applicable.**

Following discussions with our regional and national branches we have to conclude that the only really satisfactory solution is to use trains long enough to provide sufficient space (not necessarily all seated) for the expected demand at peak times. This might be achieved by splitting or joining multiple units at strategic points to enhance capacity without the need to run long trains with a majority of seats empty throughout the day. If the provision of longer trains is not possible then the local TOC should be incentivised to provide a relief train a few minutes before the Cross Country service with similar stops and running time.

Q24. If it were possible would you agree with transferring these local routes to the West Midlands franchise:

	Yes	No
Birmingham to Nottingham	X	
Birmingham to Leicester	X	

**Why?**

The Birmingham to Leicester and Nottingham services should be managed by a more locally orientated organisation rather than as an adjunct of a long distance operator. This would facilitate additional services and stations. Our opinion is that the best existing entity for this is Midlands Connect, as both West Midlands and East Midlands may be inclined to concentrate primarily on their respective local requirements. Note: Midlands Connect also have a strong interest in Leicester – Nottingham – Lincoln, Derby to Matlock, Derby to Stoke-on-Trent and a possible future Leicester to Coventry direct service. Railfuture would support these all being managed by a whole Midlands –focused entity. Remapping must not threaten the provision of the present Monday to Friday 1652 Birmingham to Cambridge, as this train is vital to those who work in Leicester and helps to make the service from Birmingham more attractive and useful for business and professional travel. Remapping also must not prevent an increased frequency in future between Leicester, Melton Mowbray, Oakham, Stamford and Peterborough. Previous studies have showed that increasing frequency between Birmingham and Cambridge would produce a good positive benefit to cost ratio.

### Page 9: To improve the service pattern and network to offer journeys that better meet your needs

Q25. Would you like to see any other routes or stations transferred to or from the Cross Country franchise?

Yes

### Page 10: Routes to transfer

Q26. Which routes and stations and why?

The present Birmingham-Leicester-Cambridge-Stansted Airport should be transferred to the East Midlands franchise. This franchise already operates the (Liverpool-)Nottingham-Norwich service. Adding the Birmingham to Stansted service would enable better co-ordination between the two routes to improve connectivity between East and West Midlands and East Anglia.

If this service is to be retained by Cross Country then it should become an express service, for the most part stopping only at Nuneaton, Leicester, Peterborough, Ely and Cambridge. Intermediate stations should be served by local operators..

### Page 11: Changes

Q27. If the network was unable to cope with all the service enhancement aspirations north of Northallerton on the East Coast mainline, would a:

	Yes	No
curtailment of one of the existing Cross Country services be acceptable (with the resources redeployed to enhance other existing or new routes)?	X	
diversion of one of the existing Cross Country services be acceptable (with the resources redeployed to enhance other existing or new routes)?	X	

#### Why / why not??

Either option would be acceptable as long as a hourly through service from Scotland to the Midlands (and beyond) is maintained. If only one service is retained then this must be that via Doncaster as providing the faster route between the Midlands and the North East. However other services via Leeds (especially that proposed elsewhere in this response for Cardiff and South Wales) might usefully continue as far as York to connect into the East Coast Main Line. This could be extended at suitable times to Stockton and Newcastle via Sunderland, or to Middlesborough, to provide new direct travel opportunities for these major conurbations.

Q28. Do you think the department's minimum specification should preserve exactly the existing pattern of services and station calls rather than offer an opportunity to change?

No

**Comments:**

The minimum specification should allow opportunity to change. We oppose the DfT's minimum specification preserving exactly today's pattern. Instead revisions should be made to improve inter-regional connectivity and for more services from towns served poorly or not at all, as detailed elsewhere in this response. Any opportunity to change must be for increasing and improving the services. One particular route that should be rationalised is that between Newcastle and Edinburgh and the stopping pattern should be revised with hourly stops at Berwick and two-hourly stopping at Morpeth, Alnmouth and Dunbar

## Page 12: Extremities of the network changes

Q29. Should bidders be given flexibility to make limited changes to the extremities to the network so that benefits such as reduced crowding in the centre of the network can be provided?

Yes, but only if alternative services are provided by other operators

**Comments:**

Flexibility should not encourage significant service reductions. It is essential that localities beyond the Cross Country 'core' can benefit from direct travel, for instance from stations between Aberdeen and Edinburgh to Yorkshire, the Midlands and the South West, or from Cornwall to the Midlands and beyond. Long distance passengers often favour a through train or as few changes as possible. Some will choose a through train even if it means travelling at an inconvenient time of day, It should be borne in mind that passengers travelling to the extremities of the network are not only making a long journey, but most likely paying a significant amount for it.

Q30. Do you agree that the current level of Cross Country services to the following routes are the minimum that must be specified for:

	Yes	No
West of Plymouth to Penzance?	X	
Exeter to Paignton?	X	
Newton Abbot to Paignton?	X	
North of Edinburgh to Aberdeen?	X	
Southampton to Bournemouth?	X	
Guildford?		X
Bath?		X
Cardiff to Bristol Temple Meads?		X

Q31. Do you agree that the changes to the following routes would be acceptable if a similar or improved service was provided by another operator:

	Yes	No
West of Plymouth to Penzance?		X
Exeter to Paignton?		X
Newton Abbot to Paignton?		X
North of Edinburgh to Aberdeen?		X
Southampton to Bournemouth?		X
Guildford?	X	
Bath?	X	
Cardiff to Bristol Temple Meads?	X	

Q32. Should bidders have some flexibility to make fewer calls at some stations, for example if that enabled them to accelerate services?

Yes

### Page 13: Bidder station stop flexibility

Q33. On what routes could this be introduced?

Stations that could have fewer regular stops – Totnes & Newton Abbot (1 train every two hours alternately), Macclesfield (1 tph). If 2 tph to Exeter, Tiverton Parkway only needs 1 tph, If 2 tph to Southampton, Winchester & Southampton Parkway only need 1 tph each alternately,

Flexibility for bidders to gear train stopping patterns to present and anticipated needs and stimulate demand would be advantageous and enable the operator to consider a wider range of options. Operators should be best placed to understand the market for their services.

### Page 14: Minimum specification

Q34. Should the minimum specification have the number of trains from each station to Birmingham but give bidders the flexibility to decide where the trains go after Birmingham?

Yes

Q35. Are there stations within the geography of the Cross Country network that should receive calls they currently do not receive (include examples and supporting evidence)?

Bromsgrove – Now that the West Midlands cross-city line has been extended to Bromsgrove it will serve as a connecting station for South-West Birmingham to Cheltenham and beyond. In addition, its car parking facility provides enough space to encourage its use as a starting point for long distance journeys for a far wider catchment area than the town alone. Trains would have to be pickup only southbound and set down northbound to discourage local travel to/from Birmingham.

Worcestershire Parkway – It is anticipated that this new station will generate significant footfall, particularly to Birmingham. As the only operator currently on this route passing north to south, Cross Country would need to provide an hourly service here, preferably on one of the Bristol services, rather than Cardiff. It is understood that West Midlands Railway may be interested in providing a regular service to Cheltenham and beyond via Worcestershire Parkway. If this is introduced then Worcestershire Parkway would still need a Cross Country service, but probably only every two hours to provide for travel to Bristol or Sheffield and beyond. Ideally this would alternate with stops at Bromsgrove to provide a similar facility.

Gloucester – Although served regularly on the Cardiff/Birmingham axis, only a very few Bristol and south west bound express trains stop here. We suggest that a service to/from Bristol and beyond should call at Gloucester every two hours.

Bridgwater – This town of over 40,000 with a substantial catchment area (North Somerset) is also a major industry centre. This will become even more important once Hinckley C power station opens. A regular stop here (say every two hours) would provide valuable travel opportunities to the Midlands and beyond. As far as possible the stop here should avoid the times/direction of peak commuting, to avoid further crowding on services to/from Bristol.

Cambridge North (subject to Birmingham-Stansted Airport remaining in XC franchise) – Many people live in Peterborough and work at Cambridge Business Park. Despite having a station on the Peterborough to Stansted route next to the office they drive to work because this service does not call at Cambridge North. Calling here would also provide opportunities for business visitors to the Business Park from West Yorkshire and the North East to use the train, connecting at Peterborough, rather than drive.

Q36. Are there stations beyond the geography of the Cross Country network that should receive calls they currently do not receive (include examples and supporting evidence)?

Liverpool, Preston/Lake District/Carlisle, Brighton, Swansea, Middlesbrough, Sunderland, Hull, Portsmouth.

Liverpool is the one major city that used to be served regularly by Cross Country and is no longer. This might be achieved by routing one of the two trains per hour between Birmingham and Manchester via Crewe and there detaching/ attaching a portion for Liverpool.

Two or three trains to/from Manchester per day should be extended to Preston, the Lake District, Carlisle and possibly on to Glasgow to provide connectivity from/to the South West, Thames Valley and South Coast.

Swansea could be served by extension of three or four of the Cardiff/Birmingham trains per day.

Middlesbrough, Sunderland and Hull could be served by the Cardiff/Birmingham/Leeds service proposed to replace Cardiff/Nottingham. (detailed in Q49)

Brighton via Guildford and Gatwick Airport would provide direct connectivity to the Midlands and beyond.

Portsmouth - Harbour station is the most convenient route for the Isle of Wight and passengers from the Midlands and North of England are inconvenienced by one or two changes of train before they even reach Portsmouth.

## Page 15: To improve and simplify fares and ticketing

Q37. What changes would you like to see to the current Cross Country current fares structure?

Revise overall ticket pricing policy. It is usually cheaper for the longer south to north journeys to travel via London and accept the inconvenience of changing termini. Better pricing for longer journeys would also reduce the current incidence of split ticketing.

Day returns should be available for all journeys of up to two hours duration in each direction. This would encourage more use of their trains for leisure trips.

The price differential between off-peak singles and off-peak returns should be much greater than at present where the single is only a few pence less than the return. The single should be no more than 60% of the return.

Advance fares for short journeys (say, less than 50 miles) should not be offered.

## Page 16: To improve access, information and making connections

Q38. What more could be done to improve access and provide facilities for those with disabilities or additional needs?

Greater prominence should be given to the availability of passenger assistance.

There should be priority seats with extra legroom and near toilets in each coach (not necessarily DDA compliant in all cases) with passengers needing such a seat to have priority reservation.

On stations, information should be provided as to where on the platform the coach(es) with DDA compliant seats/wheelchair space(s) will be located.

## Page 17: To improve the on-board experience

Q39. Which initiatives would you suggest to try to reduce the disturbance caused by the 'churn' of passengers alighting and boarding at frequent station calls?

Longer trains would lessen the effect of 'churn' by providing more entrances/exits.

A small lengthening of the dwell time at each such station would allow the 'churn' to be less disruptive.

On-board announcements encouraging passengers leaving the train to do so by the leading door and platform announcements encouraging passengers joining the train to use the trailing door (or vice versa).

## Page 18: Engagement improvement

Q40. Are there any improvements to the level stakeholder engagement by Cross Country that you would like to see and how could stakeholder engagement be improved?

The present Cross Country franchise has been inconsistent in its dealings with stakeholders. We recognise that the geographical spread of Cross Country makes it more difficult than for most other TOCs to have meaningful involvement with all the communities they serve. The incoming Operator should hold Stakeholder meetings at main locations, with a view to explaining its difficulties and encouraging ideas from participants.

A dedicated stakeholder manager and team might be the most appropriate means to provide effective and responsive TOC-wide engagement.

Q41. Does Cross Country provide a sufficient level of support to relevant Community Rail partnerships in your experience?

No

## Page 19: Community Rail partnerships engagement

Q42. Has their support improved in the last year to 18 months?

Yes

Q43. Provide ideas on what more you feel the franchise could do to help the relevant Community Rail partnerships?

Support the primary franchises beyond the Cross Country core

Some CRPs find difficulty in providing "back office" facilities for their paid staff – e.g. payroll facilities. As part of their provision to CRPs they could provide these on a sub-contract basis for free or for a nominal payment.

As Cross Country is not responsible for any stations, in many areas they have limited involvement in Community Rail. More support is desirable but we recognise that, given the extensive network of Cross Country, this is very difficult to provide and manage.

## Page 20: Final comments



## Q44. Any other comments?

The present Cardiff to Nottingham service provides only a semi-fast service to/from Birmingham. Furthermore Nottingham is not a usual destination from or to South Wales. We therefore recommend that this be converted into a full hourly inter-city service and re-routed to Leeds (which would also provide the additional train from/to Birmingham) and York, calling only at Newport, Gloucester, Cheltenham and University south of Birmingham.

In certain areas the future franchise should take account of the need to integrate Cross Country trains with those of other operators to provide a satisfactory point-to-point service but without XC becoming "all-stations". A good example is the route between Newcastle and Edinburgh as described in Q28.

To enhance connectivity, train times from the SW-NE and SE-NW should be arranged to provide good connections, with cross-platform interchange, at Birmingham New Street. Similarly for SW-NW and SE-NE trains.

The Cross Country operator should liaise actively with other operators to provide robust connections into last trains of the day to stations XC does not itself serve. A good present example is the 13.00 Glasgow-Plymouth, due into Bristol Temple Meads at 20.42, connecting into the 20.48 Bristol- Weymouth.

Supplementary comments on specific questions:-

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Q18 - Considering each option for reducing over-crowding:-

- a) Removing stops close to major conurbations at peak times may be appropriate in a few limited cases – for instance:- Wakefield - for trains starting/finishing at Leeds, Dunbar for trains starting/finishing at Edinburgh, Stockport for trains starting/finishing at Manchester. However generally this would remove connectivity. Removing calls would only be acceptable if there was a suitable alternative service.
- b) The same opportunities and issues arise for picking up/setting down only at these stations, with the added complication of policing such a policy.
- c) Reducing validity of local travel cards should not be pursued. It would generate considerable adverse publicity and probably on-train conflict between passengers and staff.

Q25 & Q26 - A service west of Plymouth should be retained. However the present timings are not especially useful for the leisure traveller in particular. Railfuture would favour a better spread of departure and arrival times (currently XC trains leave Penzance at 0628, 0828 and 0935 only. They arrive there at 2054, 2143 and 2241). One approach would be a morning, a mid-day and a late afternoon departure from Penzance and a mid-day, late afternoon and evening arrival.

A service to/from Torquay and Paignton also should be retained. However, in the Winter timetable, possibly two trains per day at suitable times (say, departures in mid morning and early afternoon) should suffice. These should also serve significant stations to Exeter to provide a degree of direct connectivity to the Midlands and beyond. However in the Summer months, especially at weekends significantly more direct services are required throughout the day.

A service north of Edinburgh to/from Aberdeen should also be retained to maintain connectivity. The timings of the present sole direct train appears appropriate for the journey length involved. However the train from Dundee to the south seems geared more to the commuter market north of Edinburgh. Railfuture would prefer a second service from Aberdeen later in the day, possibly only going as far as Bristol or even Birmingham and a comparable service northbound.

The present hourly service beyond Southampton to/from Bournemouth should be retained in principle, although there may be a case for some of the very lightly loaded present services terminating at Southampton or being reversed there to reach Portsmouth instead.

The present service to/from Guildford is an anomaly, especially the northbound 0602 departure. These should either be discontinued or retimed to provide a more useful morning departure from and evening arrival into Brighton. Further the present trains run to Edinburgh/from Aberdeen. This direct route is unlikely to be of interest for passengers south of London and if this service is retained it should be re-directed to the North West – Manchester or Liverpool.

Bath need not be served by Cross Country on the present basis, provided another operator can provide a suitable alternative. However extension of one or two trains beyond Bristol to Bath, Yeovil and Weymouth would provide improved direct connectivity, particularly in the Summer months.

The present Cardiff to Bristol service (1 train per day each way) operates as a local stations service and is used primarily for sustaining route knowledge in case of diversion between Cheltenham and Bristol Temple Meads. These services should be discontinued and the train concerned would more usefully start/finish at Weston-super-Mare.

**Q44. Any other comments?**

Q29 - Railfuture agrees with this as a principle with using Birmingham as the focus for XC services, as it could enable more direct services between stations north and south of Birmingham.  
To enable this to function effectively without losing existing regular connectivity, trains between, say, Plymouth and Leeds and Bournemouth and Manchester should be timed to be at New Street Station at about the same time and on adjacent platforms to allow cross-platform connections.