



## NORTH EAST

### BRIEFING ON DRAFT PASSENGER TIMETABLE EAST COAST MAIN LINE RAIL SERVICES.

#### 1. Introduction

a) This briefing paper is produced by Railfuture North East, a regional branch of Railfuture, Britain's leading independent organisation campaigning for a bigger and better railway for both passengers and freight. Railfuture represents all rail users, with around 20,000 affiliated and individual members. Railfuture is independent because it does not receive funding from government, train companies or unions and is free from influence when developing its policies. The North East branch covers an area from Darlington in the south to Berwick in the north, and from Carlisle in the west to Saltburn in the east. Railfuture is run entirely by volunteers.

b) References in this paper to “trains per hour” refer to trains in each direction per hour and applies predominantly to the Monday to Friday timetable, though with leisure travel recovering post Covid significantly faster than commuter and business travel, and (prior to December 2021) in some cases in excess of 100% of pre-Covid passenger levels, there is no longer any valid reason for the rail industry to offer a reduced weekend timetable.

#### 2. Executive Summary

a) In June 2021, train operators serving the North East of England consulted on a proposed timetable for the East Coast Main Line to take effect in May 2022. The timetable proposed to replace the existing pattern of service south of Newcastle (two LNER trains per hour to London, two CrossCountry trains per hour to Birmingham and the South West, two TransPennine Express services per hour to Leeds and Manchester) with three trains per hour to London and only one TransPennine Express service per hour to cities in the North. In addition to the three LNER services per hour there will be five LUMO open access services per day to London.

b) The proposal was universally condemned by stakeholders in the region. The proposal was withdrawn and the implementation of a new timetable deferred to May 2023. However, Railfuture NE is concerned that the proposed pattern of service will remain. It therefore wants to make the case now for a balanced pattern of service that meets the needs of the region.

c) The fundamental premise of the Northern Powerhouse is that by making transport between its major centres of population easier, agglomeration benefits to the economy of the North of England would accrue. But the proposed timetable halves the number of TransPennine Express trains to cities in the North and will hinder the economic development of the region. Increasing the number of trains to London will suck economic activity from the region to the South East.

d) In the short term, Railfuture NE wants to keep the existing pattern of service. In the longer term, Railfuture NE wants to explore infrastructure interventions that increase capacity south of Newcastle

and within Northumberland, and increase the number of trains that it is possible to run. Railfuture NE would also like to see services adapted to the journeys that people want to make, especially in populous areas that at present are poorly served. The paper discusses the transport needs of different parts of the region and considers how these can be met.

e) Railfuture NE has a vision for connectivity that sees towns that at present have poor links given sustainable options for travel across the North. This briefing paper has therefore been prepared to assist elected representatives, local authorities, business leaders and other stakeholders to continue to press the case for the region's requirements, highlighting what was wrong with the original proposals and how those issues can be addressed.

### **3. Open Access Operators**

The service requirements listed below are **in addition to** the discretionary services provided by open access operators in the region (Grand Central and Lumo). This is because open access services are provided at the operators' commercial discretion, they may be withdrawn or changed at any time with no requirement for public consultation, or in the worst case an operator might fail. There is no requirement on government to step in and take over the services. When operating on the same routes as DfT sponsored (formerly franchised) services, open access services are designed to attract new passengers to rail and give genuine choice in service operator, and not to be the sole provider of services for a particular location.

### **4. Newcastle Needs:**

- 2 trains per hour to London, 2 trains per hour to Birmingham, and 2 trains per hour to Manchester, **and not** 3 trains to London but only 1 to Manchester.
- All local routes to connect through Newcastle, not terminate there.

### **5. Northumberland Needs:**

- Morpeth, Alnmouth & Berwick need 1 train per hour connecting these regional centres to each other, plus northwards to Edinburgh and southward to Newcastle and beyond to York then either Manchester, Birmingham or London.
- Alnmouth and Berwick also need a train to London every other hour and a train to Birmingham every other hour, evenly spaced so that the stations have a train at least approximately every hour.
- Morpeth also needs at least 2 morning peak, 2 evening peak and 2 between peak trains to / from London and Edinburgh, plus 2 trains per hour to / from Newcastle.
- Cramlington needs 2 trains per hour to / from Newcastle.
- All smaller station in Northumberland (Pegswood, Widdrington, Acklington & Chathill) need an hourly local service between Newcastle and Berwick. This service should have capacity to add calls at further stations such as Belford once business cases for such stations are established.

### **6. York – Newcastle Corridor Needs:**

- Durham & Darlington need an hourly service northward to Newcastle and Edinburgh and southwards to York and London, plus a second hourly service northwards at least as far as Newcastle, and southwards either to Birmingham or Manchester.
- Chester-le-Street, Northallerton & Thirsk need an hourly service northward to Newcastle and southward to York, continuing to either London, Birmingham or Manchester

## 7. Durham Coast Needs:

- An hourly local service northwards to Newcastle and beyond and southwards to Middlesbrough and beyond.
- As infrastructure upgrades permit, Sunderland, Hartlepool, Stockton, Eaglescliffe and possibly other stations also need an hourly service to York, continuing on to either London, Birmingham or Manchester.

## 8. Putting It All Together

- Railfuture accepts there is possibly a need for one LNER train per hour to operate between London and Edinburgh in the fastest possible time, and might therefore only call at York and Newcastle en-route, and supports such an initiative as a way of achieving genuine modal shift from air on the London - Edinburgh corridor.
- However the 2<sup>nd</sup> LNER train per hour should therefore follow a logical stopping pattern in the North East serving Darlington, Durham, Newcastle then 2 of Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick with Alnmouth & Berwick having an LNER train alternate hours, and Morpeth having 2 LNER trains in each peak and at least 2 trains between peaks.
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> LNER train should not run north of York on the East Coast Main Line until there is capacity for it to do so **in addition to** the 2 CrossCountry trains (from Birmingham) and 2 TransPennine Express trains (from Manchester) per hour that were running at December 2019. In the meantime, the 3<sup>rd</sup> LNER train from London should either terminate at York or be diverted elsewhere from York.
- Of the 2 TransPennine Express Trains per hour to Newcastle, 1 train (that travels directly on the East Coast Main Line between York and Newcastle) should extend to Edinburgh calling at each of Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick providing connectivity between these stations, and possibly Cramlington, as well as an intermediate station in Scottish Borders.
- There should also be an electric local service per hour between Newcastle and Berwick calling at all stations. This would be in addition to the existing Carlisle – Morpeth service thus improving service frequency at Cramlington station.
- Increased services on the East Coast Main Line do not impact on Northern's ability to connect trains through Newcastle as Northern trains can cross the station without touching the East Coast Main Line by using the High Level Bridge and then the Tyne Valley Line. Local Northern services should therefore operate in approximately the same pattern as they do today, namely hourly services between:
  - Carlisle – Hexham (fast) – Newcastle
  - Carlisle – Hexham (stopping service) – Prudhoe – Newcastle – Morpeth.
  - Hexham – Newcastle (stopping) – Sunderland – Middlesbrough – Nunthorpe or beyond.

## 9. New Service Developments

- During the currency of the May 2023 timetable, the Northumberland Line is expected to open. The new timetable proposals should therefore indicate the paths for the 2 trains per hour on the Northumberland Line which will travel on the East Coast Main Line for the 4 miles between Newcastle and Benton Junction.
- Consideration should be given to further modest service enhancements along existing, fully maintained freight track, as follows:
  - Extend the Carlisle – Morpeth service to Bedlington, to connect to the newly opened Northumberland Line, with a possible intermediate station at Choppington.
  - Extend the Carlisle – Hexham (fast) – Newcastle service to Stockton and Middlesbrough via Durham and the Stillington freight line, to form the Teesside – Tyneside Connect service, with

a possible new intermediate station at Ferryhill.

- There is also a clear need for an hourly long-distance service on the Durham Coast line, serving Eaglescliffe, Stockton, Hartlepool and Sunderland. This service, which must be in addition to the current open access service to London provided by Grand Central, should be introduced as soon as capacity upgrades on the line (which also carries Newcastle – Middlesbrough local services) permit. The final southern destination, whether the trains extend from Sunderland to Newcastle, and whether this should be an entirely new service or a replacement of one of the current services on the East Coast Main Line can be resolved nearer the time taking into account views of local stakeholders.
- Longer term, there should be a clear timetabled plan for the re-opening of the Leamside Line (Ferryhill to Newcastle via Heworth), and the upgrading of the existing Butterwell freight line (Ashington to Butterwell Junction) plus re-modelling of Butterwell Junction to relieve pressure on the East Coast Main line between York to Newcastle and Newcastle to Berwick respectively. These improvements could not be delivered in time to influence the May 2023 timetable, but should be actioned as part of a longer term capacity upgrade plan.

## 10. Questions to Ask:

- Why are the DfT and LNER prioritising connections to London over and above connections between Northern cities and towns?
- Network Rail is saying there is not sufficient capacity to run either the services that the North East had at the pre-COVID December 2019 timetable, or the services that regional and local stakeholders are now demanding. Why are they not saying what infrastructure interventions would be needed to allow such services to run?
- What is preventing Network Rail from implying there isn't capacity when in fact there might be? Are they taking an overly cautious approach? What incentive is for them to find capacity, and how can an independent audit function be introduced that has the confidence of regional and local stakeholders to confirm what capacity is available?
- There have been significant infrastructure interventions to the south of the East Coast Main Line route to permit additional services to run (extra platform at Kings Cross, new running line through and extra platform at Peterborough, and new tunnel to allow fast passenger trains to cross slower freight trains at Werrington). Why has there not been similar infrastructure investment in the North East since it must have been known for some time it would not be possible to provide an enhanced level of LNER services on existing infrastructure without cutting back on other services between northern cities and towns?

## 11. Conclusion & Contact Point

- Railfuture North East believes the rail network as it stands today can meet the reasonable aspirations of faster London – Edinburgh trains without sacrificing existing services, by following the recommendations set out above.
- However Railfuture North East also believes an immediate programme of infrastructure upgrades should be initiated, to match those already completed in the south, to relieve northern pinch-points and bottlenecks, create more resilience and provide capacity for further services, particularly regional and local, to be added.
- Railfuture North East is willing to provide further information and briefing where requested. Contact point in the first instance is Keith Simpson, Chair, Railfuture North East Branch, tel 01642 477141 email [keith.simpson@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:keith.simpson@railfuture.org.uk).