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Dear Sirs,

RAILFUTURE RESPONSE TO THE DfT AND RAIL NORTH CONSULTATION ON THE TRANSPENNINE EXPRESS AND NORTHERN RAIL FRANCHISES

Introduction

Railfuture is a national voluntary organisation structured in England as twelve regional branches, and two national branches in Wales and Scotland. We are completely independent of all political parties, trades unions and commercial interests, funded almost entirely from our membership. We campaign for improved rail services for passengers and freight. Whilst very much pro-rail, we are certainly not anti-car or aviation.

We are delighted to be able to respond to this consultation. This consolidated response is the result of feedback from our branches within the NTPE area plus input from the Passenger Group (including our TOC Liaisons Chris Hyomes (for Northern) and David Harby (for TPE)), and the Infrastructure and Networks Group.

As a national organisation, we are concerned with the geographical scope of the Northern and TransPennine Express franchises in their entirety. Railfuture is aware that many local user and campaign groups, some but not all affiliated to us, will be submitting their own responses to this consultation, concentrating on local issues.

Railfuture's comments and suggestions are designed to help grow the railway over the two franchise periods. Our premise is that we need a step change in the scope and quality of the railway in the north of England and our proposals are ambitious, but we believe that is what current and future passengers expect.

Chapter 3 – Infrastructure investment: new franchise opportunities and trade-offs

Trade-offs

TO1: What are your views on increasing below-average fares over time to levels typical on the rest of the network in order to improve the frequency, capacity and quality of local services? Do you have any evidence to support your views?

There is always a difficult and delicate balance to be struck, especially in areas of below-average incomes, between increasing below-average fares to generate an improved revenue-stream to underpin business cases for investment in improvements (such as better-quality rolling stock), and maintaining rail services which remain attractive to existing and potential users at least in part because they are perceived as affordable.

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The current poor level of smart ticketing disadvantages the increasing number of part-time commuters in terms of reducing their daily commuting costs with a season ticket. We wish to see a ticket type suitable for these travellers introduced early in the new franchises.

TO2: What are your views on giving priority to improving the quality of the Northern rolling stock at the expense of some reduction in lightly used services (e.g. fewer calls at low-use stations)? Do you have any evidence to support your views?

In the report to be published this December [ref. Introduction to this consultation, para.7] it will be helpful if it lists in an Appendix the 67 and 53 most lightly-used stations mentioned in Chapter 2 para. 2.9, together with their most recent usage estimates, to better inform future discussion about potential reductions to their levels of service.

The Northern franchise urgently needs more, as well as better, rolling stock. We cannot support 'robbing Peter to pay Paul' as a general principle; rather we wish to see a case-by-case examination of the scope for increasing the patronage of low-use stations and services. Improving the quality of the rolling stock, to improve the overall journey experience, may well prove to be one such contributor. Many services are lightly used because they are poorly timed, infrequent, have the wrong stopping pattern, or are too slow.

Over the period of the franchise, electric units will displace a significant amount of diesel rolling stock. We are concerned that those units to be cascaded from elsewhere on the national network receive a deep overhaul and comfort upgrade before (re-) entering Northern service. Older diesel units that are fit for cascading following refurbishment need to both replace Pacers and increase the number of carriages available to end crowding and to increase the number of services and routes that are offered. We consider that longer distance routes in the Northern franchise should receive higher-quality rolling stock. Whilst these services remain diesel-powered, we wish to see such services (e.g., Leeds/Manchester-Settle-Carlisle; Blackpool-Leeds-York/Scarborough/Hull; Leeds-Nottingham; Manchester-Barrow; Newcastle-Carlisle), receive cascaded quality units. We are aware for example that 32 Southern Turbostar carriages could be released early in the new Northern franchise following an early commitment to electrify Southern's Uckfield branch, rather than send 14 sorely-needed compatible carriages south from other franchises (as with the recent transfer to Chiltern from First TransPennine Express) to increase that line's capacity. That potential cascade to the north would then be followed by the remaining 12 such carriages following the planned electrification of MarshLink early in CP6, in the middle of the new Northern franchise. Such improvements will not only provide a better service for existing customers, but are likely to attract new customers by making the rail offer more attractive.

TO3: What are your views on allowing some reduction in the hours ticket offices are open and staffed if this is accompanied by the ability for passengers to have widespread access to ticket buying opportunities (e.g. through new and improved approaches such as smart ticketing, increased advance purchase ticketing or via mobile phones), adequate measures to ensure vulnerable passengers are not disadvantaged and more effective customer service by both station and on-train staff? Do you have any evidence to support your views?

Passenger surveys continually show that passengers prefer to see an open ticket office. We accept however that as the franchises will run until the mid-2020s, changes in ticketing practice during the intervening period may necessitate an adjustment in the role of station staff, but their presence and expertise will always be required. A smart card system will be welcomed, but there will continue to be demand for conventional ticketing. We accept that there may be a good case for redeploying staff from lightly used ticket offices to be more available and visible to passengers, but the case for this must be made on a station-by-station basis and not as blanket closure of all 'lightly-used' station ticket offices.

Some very lightly used stations are likely to remain unstaffed, and most staffed stations are not staffed throughout the operating day. We therefore consider it essential that, at all stations, passengers are aware when the next scheduled train is due and whether it is running to time or cancelled, in which latter case information on alternative arrangements e.g. replacement buses needs to be readily available. The default position should be all stations equipped with a minimum of a combined passenger service information/help point.

Community rail and other partnerships

COM1: How can local communities, local businesses and other organisations be further stimulated to play an active part in the running of Northern and TPE rail services, including at stations?

Northern Rail has shown how to be successful in increasing the involvement of communities through Friends and station adoption groups, and we wish this to continue and expand. On stations currently without a ticket office, or with a lightly-used one, or with other vacant buildings, the new franchisee may need to take the initiative with Network Rail in investigating whether a multi-purpose facility e.g., combining ticket office with a retail facility and/or a Tourist Information office.

Regular Passenger/Stakeholder Group and other such fora have also been found mutually beneficial especially in those franchises that have developed models of good practice in this field. This has very recently been re-emphasised by Passenger Focus in research that highlights the need for franchisees to put effort into building long-term relationships with their passengers, to improve trust.

COM2: What opportunities are there for Community Rail Partnerships to expand their role and range of activities?

Community Rail Partnerships are a success story but for them to expand their role and range of activities, and hopefully their number, direct funding support and a dedicated staff member from the franchisee will be required, together with increasingly close liaison with the Network Rail Route(s) since the recent disbanding of their central staff team and continuing downward pressures on local authority budgets.

Third party funded changes

TPF1: Are you aware of any proposals for third-party funded changes not already indicated? Please provide details.

We are aware of Hull Trains most welcome interest in supporting the funding of Selby to Hull electrification.

We understand that BNFL may be prepared to fund an improved service on the Cumbria Coast Line, at least at those times when its workforce is commuting. We welcome this, but consider that the services must be available to anyone, and all recognised public rail tickets accepted.

We recommend that the franchise specifications be flexible so that improvements required and funded by stakeholders (DfT, ITAs, County Councils, LEPs etc.) may be added to the contract specification during its term.

Future impacts on demand

FID1: What factors may impact on demand for travel on the new Northern and TPE franchises? Please provide evidence.

At the local level we suggest that the best intelligence on factors that may impact on demand for travel will come from bodies such as local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

Door-to-door journeys

DTD1: What are your proposals for providing passengers better and safer access to different modes of transport at stations (including bus, tram, cycling and walking?)

The following will help:

- Car parking availability
- Car parking charges (for security, but may have negative impact)
- Information about local bus services
- Connectivity with local bus services
- Information about local taxi/mini-cab services
- Connectivity with other train services
- Connectivity with tram/light rail services

- Availability of multi-modal ticketing
- Safe/secure cycle parking
- Safe cycle routes to/from stations
- Pleasant walking routes between stations and town centres/visitor attractions/ residential areas.

As a general rule, visual screens displaying bus services with real time information should be located at railway stations that have actual or nearby bus connections.

DTD2: How do you suggest your proposals to improve the door-to-door journey experience might be funded?

One example is the continuation and expansion of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund.

TransPennine Express train service specification

TPE1: What are your views on the degree of flexibility proposed for the train service specification for the new TPE franchise? Do you have any evidence to support your views?

We are broadly content with the degree of flexibility proposed, with one vital qualification. On weekdays in particular the number of calls at each station per hour/per day should instead be expressed as per period of the day e.g., per a.m. peak/daytime off-peak/p.m. peak/evening off-peak. This is to avoid any risk of a skewed, 'Parliamentary-style', service pattern of little practical use to the travelling public. A similar period-based approach should also be adopted for Saturdays and Sundays.

The next franchise must have the flexibility to introduce new or improved services when the franchisee considers that there is a market for them. One example would be some Boxing Day services around major urban centres and events.

TPE2: Where, if anywhere, would you like to see any changes to first and last trains on the TPE network and why? Do you have any evidence to support this?

Timing of first and last trains should recognise that changes in society, especially in the catchments of major urban centres, are spreading the pattern of demand across a longer day. This requires the service day to be long enough to enable people to get to work early, or enough to have a full day in their destination, and to return late enough for the same reasons. In the case of services for Manchester Airport, we consider it highly desirable that the service is a near all-night one to reflect the reality of late-evening flight arrivals (with slow baggage and customs services), and that early-morning services reflect the check-in time required to board early flights.

TPE3: Where, if anywhere, would you like to see any changes to weekend trains on the TPE network and why? Do you have any evidence to support this?

As we live in an increasingly seven-day society an increasing number of people work on Saturdays and/or Sundays. They are also important days for sporting and other significant events, as well as general leisure activities, and the services offered need to reflect this. Road congestion to Scarborough is one example of why train services need to be good enough in terms of both capacity and timetabling to offer the more attractive alternative.

Chapter 4 – North TransPennine train service options

North TransPennine route options

NTP1: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of the North TransPennine route options, in particular in the balance of crowding, frequency, journey time and connectivity benefits? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?

An enhanced level of service between some of the country's major provincial cities should command widespread support, especially if extended beyond York to Newcastle for better links with Teesside as well as Tyneside. That option would offer the maximum connectivity benefits, as well as reducing crowding and creating a more attractive 'turn-up-and-go' core frequency. We therefore offer conditional support to a sixth TPE service between Manchester and Leeds via Huddersfield only, provided that route capacity is there and that it is not achieved at the expense of a reduced service to some intermediate stations.

NTP2: Are there other options for any additional North TransPennine services that you would put forward for consideration? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?

We consider that Scarborough should have a half-hourly service, at least in weekday peak periods, and that one of these should be routed via the Calder Valley line to enhance service frequency and connectivity, including with other principal centres such as Bradford and Halifax.

Connectivity to Manchester Airport and Liverpool

NTP3: Do you consider that the ITT should specify which services should terminate at Liverpool or Manchester Airport on the North TransPennine route, or should the choice of destination be left to bidders' commercial decisions, and what are your reasons? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?

We are content that provided each destination continues to be served by two TPE services per hour; the cross-Pennine linkages can be left to the bidders' commercial decision.

Impact of electrification on North TransPennine service pattern

NTP4: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of the options for Hull, Middlesbrough and Scarborough services? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?

Through services to principal destinations, serving the greater number of passengers, are likely to prove the most attractive, as the need to change trains is one of the most un-liked features of rail travel for existing users and one of the greater deterrents for potential users. They best support the concept and experience of an attractive, inter-connected network. For those reasons we particularly support the suggested Hull-Chester and Scarborough-Blackpool North services, subject to reconciliation with our NTP2 and NTP3 observations.

NTP5: Are there other options for Hull, Middlesbrough or Scarborough services that you would put forward for consideration? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?

No.

North TransPennine calling patterns

NTP6: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of whether or not to reduce calls at Stalybridge and Garforth? What evidence do you have in relation to this?

This an example of a trade-off identified in TO2 above. An assessment of each station is required to explore the potential to increase off-peak usage. We note the potential benefits accruing to through passengers, and that each station would retain a half-hourly off-peak level of service.

Chapter 5 – South TransPennine and North West TransPennine train service options

South TransPennine frequency

STP1: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of the option to specify one additional train per hour on the South TransPennine route, in particular in the balance of crowding, frequency, journey time and connectivity benefits? Please provide any evidence you may have.

As with NTP1, enhanced levels of service between some of the country's major provincial cities should command widespread support. However we suggest that this objective would be better served with the additional limited-stop train per hour being deployed to improve connectivity between the East Midlands and the North West, Leicester and Derby being major centres with no through trains to/from the Manchester conurbation and suffering from extended journey times which are not competitive with the road alternative. This we feel would better align with the strategic goals and particularly the connectivity-based conditional outputs in Network Rail's Long-Distance Passenger Market Study.

We, therefore, do not support an additional TPE service if solely between Manchester and Sheffield. Whilst our preference is for an additional trans-Pennine service to run direct between Leicester-Loughborough-Derby-Stockport-Manchester and to be operated by East Midlands Trains, we could accept it as the additional TPE service if that were the only means to secure its earlier delivery.

Remapping and South Humberside connectivity

STP2: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of the remapping and South Humberside connectivity options? Please provide any evidence you may have.

As noted in NTP4 above, through services between principal destinations prove to be the most attractive to passengers, as the need to change trains is one of the most un-liked features of rail travel for existing users and one of the greater deterrents for potential users. They best support the concept and experience of an attractive, inter-connected network. For those reasons we cannot support the proposed re-mapping and South Humberside connectivity options. Should they nevertheless go ahead, an imperative must be to improve the quality of rolling stock deployed and its quantity to provide sufficient capacity to eliminate crowding.

STP3: In particular, what factors do you think should be taken into account in considering the case for replacing TPE services between Doncaster and Cleethorpes with a service operated by Northern? Please provide any evidence you may have.

As explained in our response to STP2 above, we here re-assert the primacy of through services as the means to secure maximum connectivity and journey-time benefits for passengers. FTPE's own figures show 65% of passengers to/from stations east of Doncaster staying on trains across Doncaster. We therefore do not support the specific re-mapping of Doncaster-Cleethorpes from TPE to Northern.

STP4: Are there other options that you would put forward for consideration? Please provide any evidence you may have.

No.

South TransPennine connectivity to Manchester Airport and Liverpool

STP5: If the ITT were to specify a third South TransPennine service via Stockport, or remapping of the EMT service to TPE, do you consider that it should specify which of these services should terminate at Manchester Airport or Liverpool or should this be left to bidders' commercial decisions, and what are your reasons? Please provide any evidence you may have.

An additional option could be for the ITT to specify alternating two-hourly services to each destination. However we reiterate our response in STP2 above, and oppose the specific re-mapping of the Liverpool-Nottingham service from EMT to TPE.

North West remapping and connectivity

NW1: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of the North West remapping options for Blackpool North, Windermere and Barrow-in-Furness services? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?

Passengers are concerned less with who operates their services than the quality of those services. In that context the quality of rolling stock offered again emerges as a key consideration for the outcome of any re-mapping. That said, we agree with the principle that passengers' journey experience is likely to be enhanced if a single operator is managing a series of related changes. Note the NTP4 possibility of a Scarborough-Blackpool North TPE service.

NW2: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of the Barrow and Windermere connectivity options? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?

Passenger flows appear to suggest through Barrow-Manchester services should be retained to support a strong market. For Windermere its role as a major leisure destination, with many passengers encumbered by luggage, pushchairs, restricted mobility etc., suggests that the balance of shuttle/through services needs shifting strongly in favour of the latter, with Preston the preferred minimum destination southwards for maximum connectivity benefits.

Anglo-Scottish services

NW3: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of the options for Anglo-Scottish services? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?

There appears to be logic in equalising the levels of service to each of Scotland's two primary centres.

Chapter 6 – the Northern train service specification

Northern TSR

NTSR1: Please indicate, with evidence where available, where passengers would be better served, and revenue increased, by:

- **Reducing the number of calls at low-use stations?**

An example of a route that would benefit from some services calling at fewer stations is the Hull to York service, which currently takes up to 75 minutes.

- **Increasing frequencies on busier sections of routes or at busier times?**

A line urgently needing a more intensive (quarter-hourly) service is the Leeds-Harrogate-York line.

- **Speeding-up the service for longer-distance passengers?**

Speeding-up services for longer-distance passengers would generally be welcome, especially between major urban centres. Newer, faster and better-accelerating trains are another important factor.

- **Improving connections with other services where there is evident demand?**

An example is for commuters between the Calder Valley in West Yorkshire (Todmorden, Hebden Bridge, Mytholmroyd, Sowerby Bridge), and Huddersfield; because of the lack of a direct service and poor connectivity in the return direction, most commuters drive despite the heavy congestion on the route. Connections with long distance services, and especially those to and from London, are another critical area. Poor connectivity includes that with Open Access Operator services. Examples include the last Hull-Beverley service leaving Hull at 23.00, six minutes before the last Hull Trains service from London arrives at Hull. Another example is at Halifax, where the last Grand Central service from London arrives at 22.22, forty-eight minutes before the hourly westbound Calder Valley line service.

- **Adjusting train services to meet seasonal changes in demand?**

We agree that it makes sense to adjust services when seasonal demand requires it. Examples are additional services to the coast (e.g., to Bridlington from West Yorkshire and York), and along coastal routes (e.g., the Cumbria Coast lines, Bridlington-Scarborough) in the summer; enhanced services to major shopping destinations in the pre-Christmas period.

- **Adjusting the time of the first/last train?**

There is a growing need on many routes for later services to run from the major cities - such as Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield, Newcastle, and York - to cater for people such as theatre and concert goers; those socialising with friends and colleagues; and evening workers.

NTSR2: Please set out, with evidence where available, any other approaches that might improve route utilisation and make better use of existing resources on the Northern franchise.

None to add.

NTSR3: Please indicate, with evidence where available, where services should be improved on weekends, resources permitting.

Sunday is an increasingly busy day, yet Northern train services either do not run at all (e.g. Leeds-Brighouse-Manchester; Barrow-Whitehaven; Morpeth-Metro Centre), start late and finish early (most or all Sunday services), and/or have a much reduced daytime timetable.

NTSR4: Please indicate, with evidence where available, where weekend services provide poor value for the subsidy required to operate them.

The only examples we are aware of are on those lines with already skeletal services.

Franchise transfer**NTSR5: What are your views on retaining the route from Cleethorpes and Grimsby to Barton-on-Humber within the Northern franchise? What evidence do you have to support your views?**

This is probably best run by whoever runs Doncaster to Cleethorpes. If TPE continue to run to Cleethorpes, then it is probably best transferred to EMT. If Northern take over the Doncaster-Cleethorpes semi-fasts, then Northern should run this service.

Chapter 7 – Other franchise issues**OTH1: Do you have any other views on the future of the Northern and TPE franchises that you would like to set out?**

We wish to see the next franchisees investigate and experiment running dedicated bus/coach services, as an integral part of the journey with through ticketing, from selected stations to major destinations in rural areas not currently rail-served. Those we have identified are Keswick (to/from Penrith), Pickering (to/from Malton) and Ripon (to/from Thirsk), and also Whitby whose rail connectivity from the south is very poor (Whitby and Pickering would be served by the same service from Malton). These bus services would be timed to connect with specific services, and held for late running train arrivals as appropriate.

The Penrith-Keswick service would also serve passengers arriving on Virgin Trains, and might be a joint venture between the two franchisees. We offer this being mindful of examples elsewhere such as the Saffron Walden-Audley End service recently arranged by Abellio Greater Anglia, and the longer-established links into First Capital Connect services.

Yours faithfully,



Chris Fribbins
Railfuture
Head of Passenger Group
for Director of Policy