

CrossCountry Future Timetable Consultation
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Thursday, 19 January 2017

Dear Sir

Response to Cross Country Trains 2017 Timetables Consultation

Railfuture is the UK's leading independent organisation campaigning for better services for passengers and freight. A voluntary organisation to which many rail user groups are affiliated, the organisation is independent both politically and commercially.

This response is made on behalf of the Passenger Group, part of the Policy Directorate of Railfuture. The comments made are not confidential, and we would be happy for them to appear on your website. You are welcome to use them in discussion with funders and other stakeholders. We would be happy to enlarge on any of the points made above or to work with you to identify the best options for the future.

Yours sincerely



Dr Stephen Wright
Railfuture
Cross Country Trains Liaison Officer

Question 1) Do you agree with the proposal to enhance the number of seats on the Birmingham to Leicester route?

We support most of the changes to rolling stock allocations on these services which should go some way to alleviating over-crowding. However there are number of seat number reductions which we believe will worsen the situation over the present provision; viz:-

- a) 0710 Gloucester to Stansted Airport (from 200 to 120 seats). Whilst removing the Bromsgrove stop will remove much of the pressure on this service, there are a significant number of regular passengers from Cheltenham and Ashchurch to Birmingham University and we are concerned that 120 seats may not be sufficient for a 45 to 55 minute journey.
- b) 1822 Birmingham to Stansted Airport (from 200 to 120 seats). This is still within the peak hours travel for commuters returning home and over-crowding may be created.

We are also concerned that no additional stops are proposed at South Wigston or Water Orton. In the present and proposed timetable there is only one train every two hours, in each direction, at these stations, except during peak travel times. Wigston is a substantial outer suburb of Leicester and Water Orton is close to the major Birmingham suburb Castle Bromwich. Both justify a more frequent service. Therefore we would like to see every stopping Birmingham-Leicester service (and reverse) call at South Wigston and Water Orton. From the present timetable it would appear that this would add only 2 minutes to the overall journey time between Leicester and Birmingham. In the opposite direction, journey times are identical whether a train stops at either station or not.

Question 2) Do you agree with the proposal to extend one service per day in each direction from Leicester to Cambridge?

We support this extension, particularly the evening eastbound service. This will provide a significant improvement for late peak-time travel from Leicester. The provision of 120 seats throughout will alleviate most of the over-crowding on this service out of Birmingham. However the proposed changes do not address either the lack of late evening and Sunday morning services between Cambridge and Peterborough, nor that the earliest arrival into Stansted Airport from north of Cambridge is too late for early morning flights and the last departure too early for many late evening flight arrivals. See Q9 for more details.

Question 3) Do you agree with the proposal to deliver over 3000 additional seats between Bristol and Exeter and other changes to services in the South West for its delivery?

We strongly support the provision of two trains per hour between Bristol and Exeter. However we are concerned that this will mean that all but one train to/from Torbay will be discontinued. An improved GWR local service between Exeter and Paignton will mitigate this loss to an extent but there will be significant inconvenience for passengers to or from destinations north of Bristol, particularly in summer months when there are more through passengers, with a greater volume of luggage, children, etc.

We note that whilst there is a 0702 departure from Paignton (the third morning service from the South West) there is no comparable return service. We request therefore that one of the

late afternoon trains from Manchester should continue through to Paignton to provide a balancing service - possibly the 1805 ex Manchester, which at present goes to Plymouth.

Furthermore the provision of 2 trains per hour between Bristol, Taunton and Exeter has neglected the opportunity to provide a regular fast service to and from Bridgwater, a town of more than 35,000 people, with a catchment area of much of NE and NW Somerset, and the major manufacturing and commercial centre of the county. At present the town is served only by stopping services via Weston-super-Mare and taking about 50 minutes in each direction. It should be possible to serve Bridgwater without additional rolling stock and it would be acceptable for Cross Country trains to vary calling at either Tiverton Parkway or Bridgwater, as the former is served also by GWR trains to Bristol/Cardiff, to London.

Question 4) *Do you agree with the proposal to increase the number of seats per day through Reading on CrossCountry services? Do you agree with the proposal to introduce an earlier first train from Reading to Bournemouth via Southampton?*

The proposed changes are mostly very welcome. However we are concerned about the reduction in seats on the 0604 Birmingham-Bournemouth, between Basingstoke and Southampton. This train fills a gap between successive hourly South West Trains services and arrives in Southampton at a convenient 08:46.

We have no objections to removing the Guildford service which in any case does not operate at convenient times. However we would like Cross country Trains to keep in mind the possibility of at some future time re-instating direct services between the Midlands and Gatwick Airport.

Question 5) *Do you agree with the proposal to operate through services from the Midlands to Aberdeen in the daytime vice early morning / late evening?*

It would appear that the sole northbound train to Aberdeen from the Midlands (and the South West) will terminate at Edinburgh. We are totally opposed to this change. Firstly, with stops for 5 universities north of Edinburgh (Leuchars (St Andrews), Dundee (Dundee and Abertay) and Aberdeen (Aberdeen and Robert Gordon) there will be significant numbers of long-distance travellers who will be inconvenienced by having to change trains at Edinburgh Waverley, especially at a time when the station is busy. Secondly, off-peak travellers to Cupar will have to wait until 19:00 before they can use their off-peak ticket to travel, arriving nearly an hour later than at present.

We do recognise that the present departure time from Edinburgh is attractive to local commuters, even though there is a ScotRail service to Dundee leaving just 6 minutes before the Cross Country service. We suggest that a better solution would be to restrict boarding the Cross Country Trains at Edinburgh, except for passengers travelling beyond Dundee.

We also suggest that some of the Cross Country trains terminating at Edinburgh should go forward to Haymarket to provide an easier connection into onward trains.

Question 6) Do you agree with the proposal to utilise higher capacity rolling stock in the “core” of the network at peak times?

In principle we support this approach and are impressed with the way Cross Country Trains are proposing to re-roster their limited rolling stock allocation to provide more seats at the busiest times. However there are a number of instances where a reduction of seats provision may create over-crowding where it did not previously exist, or worsen the present situation. This includes:-

- 1) 0604 Birmingham-Bournemouth, between Basingstoke and Southampton – see our response in Q4.
- 2) 0632 Dundee-Plymouth, between Dundee and Edinburgh, serving all major locations en route and arriving in Edinburgh at 08:04.
- 3) 0700 Dunbar-Glasgow. This is well used from Dunbar to Edinburgh and although 200 (instead of 262) seats should be enough at present, demand is predicted to increase over the next few years and the degree of usage will need careful monitoring.
- 4) The 07.21 Stansted (09.48 ex Leicester) - Birmingham will remain a 2-car train. This is usually very full or crowded from Leicester as it is the first train on which Off-Peak Return and Day Return tickets are valid. The preceding 09.18 Leicester-Birmingham is a 3-car train and a ticketing easement to allow Off-Peak tickets on this train would help to spread loadings.
- 5) 1307 Edinburgh-Plymouth, between Birmingham (dep 18:12) and Gloucester. At present this provides 400 seats (8 carriages) and it is proposed to reduce this to 262 (5).
- 6) 1325 Plymouth-Edinburgh, to terminate at Newcastle. This will create a 2 hour gap between successive service between Newcastle and Morpeth - a significant number use the present service to Morpeth (up to 40 observed on several occasions). Whilst we can appreciate that XCT will not wish to convey empty carriages to Edinburgh, an alternative local service is essential to prevent seriously inconveniencing current passengers.
- 7) 1500 Glasgow-Bristol, departing Newcastle at 17:41, tends to well used and reducing to 200 seats is likely to create over-crowding.
- 8) 1610 Nottingham-Cardiff, ex Birmingham at 17:30. Removal of the Bromsgrove stop is likely to create difficulties for commuters returning home as Cross-City trains in the evening peak are already frequently over-crowded. Even with removal of the Bromsgrove stop, reducing from 200 to 120 seats will create, at least, uncomfortable conditions for travellers at this time of day for journeys of 50 minutes or longer.
- 9) 18.22 Birmingham-Stansted is the first train after the evening peak on which Off-Peak Day Return tickets are available for return journeys to Leicester. This train is to be reduced from 3-car to 2-car, exacerbating the problem.
- 10) 1950 Cardiff-Birmingham. Reduction to 120 seats is likely to cause serious over-crowding on days when there is a major, especially sporting, event, in Cardiff.

Question 7) Do you agree with the proposal to enhance the number of seats in the Bristol area?

We support this development but note our comment about Bridgwater in Q3.

Question 8) Do you agree with the proposal to increase the peak time service frequency between Leeds and Sheffield, so providing 1,000 extra seats per day?

We support this development, although we think “1000 extra seats per day” is over-stating the situation somewhat, as many of these seats will be outside peak travel times and there are not 1,000 in both directions. (From your data we estimate that there will be 452 extra seats in peak hours from Leeds to Sheffield and 395 from Sheffield to Leeds.)

Question 9) Please provide any further observations you would like to include in your response to this consultation

Rolling Stock Allocation

We were very disappointed that so little additional rolling stock was forthcoming in the recent Direct Award agreement and we are not persuaded that no further rolling stock could be obtained or hired in. For instance, a number of private companies offer locomotive-hauled carriage sets, capable of up to 100 mph, which could be used to release one or more sets of class 170 DMUs which could, in turn, be used to strengthen services rostered with only 2-car sets.

Whilst we acknowledge that there are not at present any 125 mph multiple units available to strengthen services on the SW/South Coast to NE/Manchester axes, greater priority must be given to expanding the Cross Country train fleet either by stock cascades or new build.

Bromsgrove

It is not now expected that the extension of the Birmingham Cross-City service to Bromsgrove will be implemented in full until May 2018. Therefore removal of the few Bromsgrove stops in the present timetable can only be undertaken if there are to be replacement services at comparable times. It is already noted under Q6 that Cross-City trains leaving Birmingham in the evening peak are frequently over-crowded. It should also be noted that the Birmingham-Hereford services are already seriously over-crowded at peak times and will not therefore offer alternatives to the present Cross Country services. Removing calls by Cross Country trains at Bromsgrove at this time will merely transfer the problem to London Midland Trains.

We believe that the continuing growth of Bromsgrove and its surrounding areas, including Redditch, will justify some of the “core” services calling at the new Bromsgrove station (now capable of handling 6-car trains), to provide in particular direct links to Bristol and the South West, but also to Wolverhampton, Manchester and the North East.

Worcestershire Parkway

There is no mention of this new station to be built at the crossing on the Birmingham-Bristol and Oxford-Worcester lines. It is anticipated that this station will come into use in 2018 and would therefore need to be served by Cross Country Trains. It will require regular (say, hourly) services towards both Birmingham (and beyond) and Bristol.

Gloucester

There is a continuing need for more long distance trains to call at Gloucester throughout the day and to reinstate the ability to travel direct from there towards Manchester, Leeds/Newcastle/Edinburgh, and fast to Bristol and beyond. We accept that this may only be possible when improvements in the Bristol area are complete so enabling inter-city trains to be less delayed by local stopping services. We also think that routing more Cross Country trains via the Camp Hill line on the southern approach to Birmingham would reduce the impact of delays from the Cross-City line, even if this requires more reversals in New Street station.

Birmingham - Stansted Airport Services

The proposed changes do not address the lack of late evening and Sunday morning services between Cambridge and Peterborough, an important local service for Cambridgeshire.

The final train from Cambridge on a Monday to Friday evening is currently 21:01 to March, Peterborough (and on to Leicester and Birmingham), and 20:01 on Saturdays. This compares very badly with last services to Ipswich (22:44), Norwich (22:55) or Kings Lynn (00:10). Similarly on Sunday mornings, the first northbound Cross Country service does not depart until 11:00, compared to 08:52 to Norwich, 09:06 to Kings Lynn and 09:12 to Ipswich.

Moreover we are concerned that the earliest arrival into Stansted Airport from north of Cambridge is too late for early morning flights – on a typical weekday 30 flights depart before the first train arrives (08:39), 47 allowing for a 1 hour check-in time. At the other end of the day, between 13 and 20 flights arrive after the last train departs for Birmingham (20:21).

There are earlier train arrivals from and later departures to Cambridge and we would like to see:-

- a) one or more of the late departures from Stansted to Cambridge extended to Peterborough and returning to Cambridge for stabling. This would also allow later connections at Peterborough into East Anglia.
- b) one of the late departures and one of the early arrivals extended to Birmingham.

Cambridge North

We also note there is no mention of the new Cambridge North station due to open in May 2017. This will be a major destination for passengers in Cambridgeshire so, at least, some of the Cross Country services which link Peterborough to Cambridge should stop at this new station.

None of the improvements detailed above should require any additional rolling stock on the Birmingham/Leicester/Stansted service.