

East Midlands Franchise Consultation Document June 2006

Response from TravelWatch East Midlands

AIMS (as presented in EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

TravelWatch is concerned to note that one of the aims for the East Midlands franchise reads:

“To seek to accommodate current and future growth in passenger demand and increasing carrying capacity where it represents value for money and it can be achieved without infrastructure change”

which contrasts with the equivalent aim for both the West Midlands and New Cross Country franchises which reads:

“To achieve sustainable value for money from the new franchise, providing the opportunity to plan a service pattern which drives up patronage and revenue to drive down subsidy, freeing up funds for infrastructure investment.”

This appears to suggest that the East Midlands franchisee will have less room to manoeuvre in maximising passenger benefits within overall financial parameters, and that the East Midlands will be treated less favourably than the West Midlands in this context.

SECTION 3. EAST MIDLANDS BUSINESS REVIEW

Demand, Revenue and Crowding

TravelWatch is disappointed that the demand forecasts are based on internal information and do not take into account forecasts from the Multi-Modal Studies.

Central Trains (East Midlands) Passenger Growth

Available passenger data specifically relating to the East Midlands service groups should be presented, albeit that it is stated to be only available for 2002-03 to 2004-05. Such information is likely to be more helpful than the trend data shown for the Central Trains franchise as a whole.

SECTION 5. PROPOSED BASE CASE SPECIFICATION

Fares

TravelWatch supports the introduction of new technology and new ticket products. However, we wish to see a uniform range of walk-on tickets available for all journeys within the East Midlands region, irrespective of train operator. This would help to strengthen network identity and remove the current anomalies and confusion caused by differing offers between operators and between routes.

Rolling Stock

We wish to see appropriate rolling stock provided for both main line and regional services. The rolling stock used on the Midland Main Line should reflect its importance as an inter-city route. The East Midlands franchise should receive a fair proportion of the present Central Trains fleet.

The franchisee should be required to operate the total fleet in an integrated manner. For example, main line trains which are spare at weekends should be used on suitable regional services to free regional units to strengthen services to Skegness.

The fast service to Sheffield, and key trains to Nottingham, should be provided by trains of HST type without underfloor engines. Adoption of the Standard Hour main line timetable, with portion working on fast trains to Nottingham, should not undermine the case for future provision of new High Speed Trains (HST2) for Midland Main Line services.

East Midlands Parkway

We welcome the provision of this new station. However, the franchisee should be required to seek agreement with Nottingham East Midlands Airport and other partners on the provision and funding of a quality bus link to the Airport, from when the station opens for the duration of the franchise.

Midland Main Line Services

General

We support a higher degree of segmentation of longer distance and commuter passenger flows, especially at peak times. We also support a timetable structure which makes provision for a service to Corby.

However we have serious reservations regarding aspects of the proposed Midland Main Line Standard Hour timetable.

Standard Hour Timetable

Splitting and joining services at Leicester will introduce a source of fragility into what has become a robust, well-performing timetable. It will also, especially in the southbound direction, extend end-to-end journey times and negate possible savings which might be achieved through further exploitation of the performance of the Meridian trains and modest infrastructure improvements.

We suggest that franchise bidders are required to propose, and cost, their arrangements for dealing with instances where the service breaks down, for example when one train portion 'misses' its fellow portion at Leicester. We also believe that DfT should have a costed fall back timetable and franchise change agreement in reserve in case the whole operation proves unreliable and unworkable (as happened with the Cross Country 'Operation Princess' in 2002).

Despite passenger management measures it is inevitable that passengers from Leicester to London will crowd the first portion to arrive, while last-minute passengers at St Pancras will crowd the rear portion of northbound trains.

It is recognised that the proposed service pattern attempts to address the imbalance of loadings between the fast Sheffield and the more lightly loaded fast Nottingham services, by running shorter trains (portions) to Nottingham. However, off-peak and on Saturdays it will create a fresh problem of imbalance of loadings on the semi-fast services. At these times trains starting and terminating at Kettering will inevitably be more lightly loaded than those from and to Nottingham, and the latter are likely to be very crowded at times.

As four car trains are likely to prove inadequate on the semi-fast trains to Nottingham, or the Nottingham portion of the fast trains which split at Leicester, the Meridian train fleet should be reconfigured to provide 5 car trains for these workings.

The semi-fast service from Nottingham should call at Luton Airport Parkway, rather than Luton, and the semi-fast service from Kettering should call at Luton, rather than Luton Airport Parkway. This would provide a direct service to Luton Airport from a larger number of stations.

Sheffield to St Pancras trains should, as often as practicable, run non-stop south of Leicester. Selected trains at peak times should run via the Erewash Valley route, to achieve the fastest possible journey time.

Stops at East Midlands Parkway

The need to minimise the Sheffield to London journey time is understood, but nevertheless we suggest that fast Sheffield trains should call at East Midlands Parkway. Sheffield and Chesterfield are in the catchment area for Nottingham East Midlands Airport, and passengers are more likely to use rail plus bus link for medium distance journeys to the Airport than for local journeys served alternatively by direct buses.

Reduction in the off-peak service at Loughborough from five to four trains per two hours is noted. This is acceptable providing that the two trains per hour run at near-even intervals. However, the feasibility of increasing stops at Loughborough (and East Midlands Parkway) should be reassessed once travel patterns from East Midlands Parkway are known and if growth continues in demand from Loughborough itself.

It is not believed that the opening of East Midlands Parkway will significantly affect travel from Beeston and Long Eaton towards Leicester and London, the main users of these stations living or working in the immediate localities. Passenger transfer is more likely by passengers who at present drive, on congested roads, to Nottingham or Derby stations.

Service at stations south of Leicester

Reduction in the off-peak service at Market Harborough is unacceptable. Although this station has lower passenger numbers than Kettering and Wellingborough it has seen above-average growth in recent years, and is likely to continue to do so given current and prospective housing developments. Off-peak services are used by business travellers who wish, often at short notice, to travel to London in the middle of the day returning late afternoon, and those travelling early morning and returning mid-day once their business is complete.

Provision of extra peak hour calls at Market Harborough by Sheffield trains, with faster journey times to London, is welcomed. However, given the proposed train service pattern there is a likelihood that intervals between peak hour trains will be uneven, and this issue needs to be addressed.

Trains at only hourly intervals between Bedford, Wellingborough, Kettering, Market Harborough and Leicester will compromise passengers wishing to connect at Leicester on to the (half-hourly) Birmingham and (hourly) Peterborough/Stansted Airport routes. At present connections are reasonable, but good connections to and from Peterborough will be harder to achieve with an hourly main line service. If passengers arriving at Leicester miss their onward train the delay at present is less than 30 minutes, but a missed hourly train will lead to up to one hour's delay.

At present, passengers from the same four stations have a direct service to Derby and good connections to Sheffield. The proposed service pattern will require a change at Leicester, where connecting times are likely to be around 45 minutes, or alternatively at Nottingham for Sheffield. Extension of the St Pancras-Nottingham semi-fast train as the new Nottingham-Leeds service would improve journey opportunities to northern destinations.

Loadings on Saturdays between Kettering, Market Harborough and Leicester are high northbound in the mornings and early afternoon, and southbound from mid-afternoon onwards. This applies on most Saturdays of the year in connection with sporting or other events in Leicester and Christmas shopping. The proposed hourly service will be inadequate.

Service to Corby

The option of providing a service to Corby is addressed in Section 7 (Variations) of the consultation document, but given the impact of this service on the Standard Hour timetable we wish to make comments at this point.

We welcome the proposal for an hourly service between St Pancras and Corby. If a second train needs to be provided from Corby in the peak morning hour, the constraints of the single line between Corby and Kettering North Junction mean that the train to form this service would have to arrive at Corby from the north. Conversely, an additional peak evening train would need to be despatched northwards. We accept the possibility that one peak hour main line train in each direction from Nottingham or Derby might run via Corby, providing that a good level of service at Market Harborough and Leicester is maintained. This would avoid the need to work trains empty to and from Corby.

However, we believe that some commuters and business passengers from the potential catchment area for Corby station are likely to continue to make easy road journeys to Kettering and Market Harborough stations to benefit from a faster and more frequent train service.

There is likely to be strong demand for travel from Corby by leisure passengers living in Corby itself and short distance commuters. A Corby-Kettering shuttle train service ran in 1987-90, and a survey (Corby District Council, February 1988) found that the overwhelming majority of passengers started their total journey from within Corby, with few from the surrounding area, and the most popular off-route destination was Leicester, followed by London. It is important that connections for Leicester and beyond are provided at Kettering. This will be harder to achieve with only an hourly service from Kettering to Leicester.

Given the problems outlined above we suggest that the proposed Standard Hour St Pancras-Nottingham/Derby fast train which splits at Leicester should call at Kettering hourly, rather than occasionally, and should call hourly at Market Harborough. This would give all stations a half-hourly service in either direction, but would extend the off-peak journey time to Nottingham by several minutes.

Alternatively, we propose the following timetable structure:

- Retain the present standard pattern from St Pancras to Leicester and beyond of two fast and two semi-fast trains per hour. This is well-liked, well understood and has good operational performance.
- Use shorter train formations than at present on the fast service to Nottingham.
- Operate a service to Corby as a fifth train per hour from St Pancras, using rolling stock which is spare between the peaks and at weekends. This service would accommodate growth in travel to and from Wellingborough and Kettering, and could allow some reduction in stops south of Wellingborough by St Pancras-Derby/Nottingham semi-fast trains.

- Continue to time semi-fast trains between St Pancras and Derby/Nottingham to cross half-hourly at Kettering, in order to provide good connections between Corby and Leicester.
- Operate peak services with a variant of the proposed Standard Hour timetable, which provides a service pattern more suitable for peak hours than for the off-peak or Saturdays. This could include additional dedicated services to Kettering (or Corby), and splitting of fast services at Leicester to increase load factors and service frequencies to individual destinations while making the best use of each train path from St Pancras.

Weekend services

As discussed above, a Saturday service based on the off-peak standard hour is likely to prove inadequate.

We are surprised to note that the structure of the Sunday service will remain unchanged. We understand that Midland Mainline has a review of Sunday services in hand, with changes to be implemented in December 2006.

Leeds-Nottingham direct service

We strongly support the introduction of this new service, with as fast a journey time as possible and appropriate rolling stock to cater for inter-city journeys. If routeing has to be via Barnsley then stops north of Sheffield should be confined to Wakefield Kirkgate, Barnsley and Meadowhall. South of Sheffield, there should be stops in the Erewash Valley, at Alfreton (and at Ilkeston if this new station is opened). Hourly stops at Dronfield and Langley Mill should be provided, or alternatively distributed between this service and the Liverpool-Norwich service.

We wish to see good connections to and from Leicester provided at Sheffield. The existing semi-fast fast train from Leeds via Barnsley gives a 14 minute connection at Sheffield into the St Pancras train; going north, there is only 4 minutes between arrivals from St Pancras and departures to Leeds which, strictly, is not a connection.

Liverpool-Norwich

We welcome the retention of this through service, and support the suggestion that trains should run alternately to Norwich and Cambridge.

The specification should require the franchisee to put in place measures to counter crowding between Manchester and Nottingham; this occurs at weekday peak times, on Saturdays and on Sunday evenings. Measures might include strengthening of selected trains between Liverpool and Nottingham, as happens currently to a limited extent.

Crowding between Sheffield and Nottingham will be alleviated by provision of the new Leeds-Nottingham service. Provision of a service between Manchester and Leicester (see comments under Section 7 Variations) would alleviate crowding between Manchester and Sheffield,

The franchisee should be required to make proper arrangements for overnight stabling and maintenance of the trains used on this route, to avoid the need to run units empty for long distances at night, for example between Nottingham and Liverpool

Skegness-Nottingham

We welcome the proposed increase in the number of trains serving Grantham, providing these make good connections at Grantham with services on the East Coast Main Line. We suggest that at least two direct trains in each direction, avoiding Grantham, should operate on weekdays, timed to suit the day trip market from Nottingham to Skegness. One direct train should run through from and to Derby. On summer Saturdays until mid afternoon alternate trains in each direction should operate direct. In order to minimise the overall journey time, direct trains should run non-stop between Sleaford and Nottingham.

First and last trains in each direction on weekdays should run no later or earlier, respectively, than at present. The first departure from Skegness on Sundays in the winter timetable should be earlier.

We are disappointed that the specification makes no mention of the strong seasonal traffic on this route. The franchisee should be required to make provision for peak loadings. These occur on summer Saturdays; on Fridays and Sundays - increasingly throughout the year driven by the short break market and events in Skegness; during school holidays; and at Bank Holiday periods, including those which fall outside the summer timetable. A summer train service capacity should be provided for the late May Bank Holiday period (as occurs on routes to Devon and Cornwall) now that the national summer timetable is not introduced until June.

The franchisee should continue to provide services suitable for carrying school children to and from Skegness.

Nottingham-Derby

We support the restoration of a third train per hour, preferably from Crewe. In addition, there should be through trains between Matlock and Nottingham at peak commuting times.

Ivanhoe and Robin Hood lines

We welcome DfT taking responsibility for all funding of these services, provided that this does not result in a reduction in the service provided. However, we wish local stakeholders to continue to be involved in the future development of these routes. Within the funding available, the franchisee should seek to optimise the timetable to maximise passenger benefits. We also suggest that the franchisee should discuss with local stakeholders the provision and funding of a Sunday service on the Robin Hood line.

We support the development of the Third Party Scheme to extend Robin Hood line services to Bingham / Saxondale Park & Ride.

All other regional and local services

We are disappointed that all other services are dismissed in three lines in the draft specification.

We welcome retention of current numbers of trains but wish to see the specification of first and last trains and minimum service intervals. We believe that regional and local train services, especially those running east of Nottingham, should be made as effective as possible in meeting public needs. The franchisee should be required, in consultation with local authorities and other stakeholders, to reassess the travel market and stopping patterns. Stations where housing development has occurred or is in prospect may justify more stops, others may support only limited stops but these should be at times which meet the needs of most passengers.

We suggest that there should be a requirement on the franchisee to develop a timetable for regional services which maximises connectional opportunities for the most important traffic flows. For example, good connections should be provided at Nottingham from Lincoln towards Birmingham, in the absence of through trains. These connections have been broken in recent timetable changes.

We are disappointed that there is no specific requirement on the franchisee to provide regular, robust connections from Lincoln to London at Newark. Such connections would be facilitated by adoption of a standard pattern timetable on the East Coast Main Line, which hopefully will be facilitated by the forthcoming ECML Route Utilisation Study. Trains should be held for, say, up to 15 minutes at Newark to maintain connections without penalty under the performance regime. In addition, consideration should be given to running trains from Lincoln to St Pancras – see comments under Section 7 (Variations).

As mentioned above, we wish to see the restoration of a through service between Crewe and Nottingham.

On train catering

We wish to see retention of inter-city style catering, including provision of a breakfast service, on principal weekday Midland Main Line trains. The franchisee should be required to continue to provide catering on the Liverpool-Norwich route.

Engineering Access

The franchisee should undertake to operate replacement bus services only over sections of route directly affected by engineering work, rather than lengthy bus substitutions for operational convenience. This is a particular concern with the Liverpool-Norwich route. Passengers should not be conveyed by bus when diversionary routes or alternative rail services, by another route or operator, are available.

Stations

We are disappointed that franchise bidders are not required to make suggestions for station improvements funded directly by the franchisee, in addition to seeking funding from third parties. Many stations in the East Midlands (including several on the Midland

Main Line) need improved access, particularly for passengers with special needs, while some require platform extensions and others real-time information systems. Only two, Loughborough and Sleaford, are set to receive funding for step-free access from the 'Access for All' strategy.

Other comments

Network identity

The franchisee should be required to promote East Midlands rail services as a single network, including routes on which the service is provided by other operators. Timetables and notices of engineering work should cover all trains on a route.

Cooperation with other operators

The two principal inter-regional routes from the East Midlands: Nottingham-Birmingham and Leicester-Birmingham will be in the hands of other operators. The franchisee should be required to cooperate with these operators (and vice versa) in the interests of securing an integrated rail service for passengers.

Integration of rail and bus services

The franchisee should be required to work with bus operators and local authorities to improve the integration of rail and bus services. This will require increased publicity and information and better signing, but relatively modest changes in the bus services themselves.

Provision for passengers with special needs

The franchisee should undertake to make reasonable provision on trains for passengers using wheelchairs, with a clear consistent policy on their carriage, including any advance notice of journeys which is required. Adequate capacity should be provided for pushchairs and heavy luggage.

Provision for cyclists

The franchisee should undertake to improve facilities for cyclists, including storage for cycles at stations. There should be reasonable provision for the carriage of cycles on trains, together with a clear and consistent policy on the numbers which can be accommodated, peak hour restrictions, and charges.

Staffing on Sundays and Bank Holidays

The franchisee should be required to ensure adequate staff cover, especially train crews, to deliver consistently reliable services on Sundays and Bank Holidays, and avoid dependence on voluntary working.

SECTION 7. VARIATIONS TO THE BASE CASE SPECIFICATION

Corby

TravelWatch supports the requirement for bidders to price an option of serving a station at Corby. Comments on provision of a service to Corby are included in our response (above) to Section 5 of the draft specification.

Other aspirations

Leicester-Derby-Manchester

The Midland Main Line / East Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy, published by the SRA in 2004, discussed (at Section 9.6.3) provision of a Leicester-Derby-Manchester through service. It concluded that “a two-hourly service using marginal resources is possible” and indicated that “the matter will be kept under review at the time of decisions on the successor franchise to Midland Mainline”.

We are disappointed, therefore, that there is no requirement for bidders to price an option for a Leicester-Derby-Manchester service.

Lincoln-Nottingham-St Pancras

With capacity constraints on the East Coast Main Line, the franchisee should be required to price an option for running trains through from Lincoln to London St Pancras via Nottingham.

As a minimum, one or two fast trains between Nottingham and St Pancras should start back from Lincoln in the morning and run through to Lincoln in the evening, both in marginal time, with a mid-day working resourced by using rolling stock which is spare between morning and evening peaks. These trains should call only at Newark Castle between Lincoln and Nottingham and could replace some existing Lincoln-Nottingham trains.

The journey time from Lincoln to St Pancras of around 2h 25min would be competitive with the current best times of 2h via connection at Newark or 2h 30min via connection at Peterborough.

Stephen Abbott
Honorary Secretary
TracelWatch East Midlands
2 August 2006