

Department for Transport (DfT) Response to the Recommendations of Passenger Focus for the New Cross Country Rail Franchise.

Introduction

We welcome your input to the New Cross Country (NCC) consultation process, one of 302 responses received during the period 7th June - August 2006. Your document made clear the evidence underpinning the aspirations of current Cross Country rail users. We have considered your data on customer attitudes and perceptions when formulating the initial franchise proposals, and provide a detailed response to how we have been able to take on board your thoughts on passenger priorities in the new franchise specification.

One of our key considerations in letting a new franchise is the market that the franchise will serve. The NCC market has changed over the last 5 years and our priority must be to respond to that change in delivering what rail passengers want and what TOCs and the wider industry can best deliver. We have looked at the NCC franchise as a component of an overall picture, intimately linked with other routes, e.g. West and West Midlands franchises, as well as the substantial improvements in West Coast and Transpennine Express services and capacity which will be implemented in December 2008.

There were around 20 million journeys on Virgin Cross Country (VXC) during 2005/6. The average journey was 81 miles, with c. 50% of journeys at < 50 miles (c. 9.8 million passengers), c. 20% between 50-100 miles (c. 4.2 million passengers) and 20% of journey between 100-200 miles (c. 4 million passengers). Around 10% of the journeys are over 200 miles. Over the last 5 years, average journey length has decreased by 20 miles, suggesting there are fewer very long distance journeys with more short to medium distance travellers. Using this evidence, the key requirements of the new franchise are capacity enhancement for short to medium length journeys; improved performance and timekeeping to meet the demands of passengers. That does not mean we are forsaking long distance passengers, who are keen to ensure they can get a seat, have good connectivity and fast journey times to their destinations.

We need to be clear that we believe that the new franchise will bring a number of key benefits to **almost all** passengers that use the cross country route:

1. There will be increased capacity on the core of the network between Bristol, York, Reading and Manchester.
2. Services will run to a “Clock face” timetable. This will lead to improved predictability and reliability of interchange, a specific benefit to longer distance passengers.
3. The current frequency of services will be maintained on the core routes and the proposed timetabling improvements will simplify train operations and should lead to improved timekeeping for all NCC services
4. These improvements and the new simpler service pattern will enable the Train Operating Company to add additional capacity more easily than they could have through the existing service pattern.
5. There will be new services: hourly between Manchester and Bristol; Transpennine Express will operate new services between Manchester Airport and Scotland with improved journey times and on the West Coast Mainline services between Scotland and Birmingham will operate at the same frequency as today but with better journey times.

Response to Passenger Focus Recommendations

The Executive Summary of the Passenger Focus response outlines seven key recommendations for the NCC franchise:

(i) Availability of Seats

- We are taking clear measures to procure extra capacity on the NCC network in a way which represents value for money to the tax payer. In order to achieve this, bidders will submit bids with and without a minimum of 30% extra capacity on the busiest routes.
- Following analysis of data provided by the current operator and audits undertaken by DfT, quantities of seats have been set during peak periods on routes around Birmingham, Leeds, Bristol and Manchester. The new operator will be required to adhere to these.

- A further franchise commitment, already in place, is that all rolling stock must be deployed effectively across the entire day. This means that rolling stock which is not focused at the key locations at peak times can be deployed to create increased capacity for off peak leisure travel.
- The Passenger Focus statement that crowding is most evident on Fridays and Sundays is recognised by DfT. The crowding regime will apply on a Sunday, furthermore the NCC operator will be required to provide a weekday level of service on a Sunday afternoon subject to engineering arrangements.

(ii) Loss of Through Services and Impact of Interchanges

- The retention of services to the “Extremities” of the network such as Penzance, Newquay, Paignton, Guildford and Aberdeen has been clearly specified.
- The decision to transfer Birmingham – Scotland services to Virgin West Coast and the introduction of the new Manchester Airport – Scotland services by Transpennine Express offers clear benefits to the majority of people who use these routes:
 - Accelerated Birmingham to Scotland journey times with tilting voyager stock to operate on all services
 - Comparable timings, with possible accelerations, on Manchester to Scotland journey times
 - An increased number of trains and therefore increased capacity on the Manchester to Scotland route across the week. There will be an improved level of Sunday level service in line with Passenger Focus recommendations
 - Regular, clock face, timetables
 - Improved performance and reliability
- Direct services from Glasgow to the South West of England will be retained by extending some Plymouth/Penzance to Edinburgh services. Bidders have been asked to engage with Transport Scotland to establish if the level of services which extend to Glasgow should be increased to capture the Leeds/Sheffield to Glasgow market.
- Peak time calls at key commuter locations such as Congleton and Chester-le-Street are specified.
- DfT are happy to consider any bid which may include the retention of services to Gatwick Airport and Brighton providing that they are complimentary to the core NCC operation in terms of value for money, capacity and reliability.
- Across the core of the day, the number of “Traditional” Cross Country services (Including those transferring to Virgin West Coast) which terminate at Birmingham New Street will not increase
- New routes are being added to the Cross Country Network including Birmingham to Stansted Airport, Birmingham to Nottingham, Cardiff to Nottingham and Birmingham to Leicester

It is envisaged that fewer people will have to change trains at Birmingham New Street station as a consequence of the restructured timetable:

- Currently over 45% of journeys on VXC involve a change of train (approximately 9 million).
- The overwhelming majority of these have changed to or from another operator onto VXC.
- We estimate that approximately 220 000 passengers currently change between VXC services at Birmingham New Street.
- We estimate that, in future, approximately 400 000 could change trains at Birmingham between NXC services – but crucially, not all of these will *have* to change at Birmingham New Street.
- We estimate that no more than 100 000 journeys (travelling North-South and vice versa) will have to change trains at Birmingham New Street. The rest can change trains at quieter stations.
- Bidders have been asked to develop plans that promote passenger-friendly interchange (e.g. same platform) outside Birmingham such as Cheltenham Spa, Wolverhampton, Banbury and Derby.

(iii) Fares and Value for Money

- Regulated fares will remain in line with standard fares policy (Currently RPI + 1%) for the duration of the franchise
- Extra capacity within the franchise will offer incentives to bidders to offer “Value” fares in order to grow the market
- Precedents already exist within the industry for multi operator “Value” tickets

(IV) Service Patterns

The NCC timetable when compared with today's operation, offers significant benefits:

- The timetable aligns capacity and direct, regular, reliable services with popular passenger flows and projected future growth
- It follows a "Clockface" pattern, with 2 trains per hour on the Network core flows into Birmingham New Street for most of the day and new, regular hourly services on popular cross-Birmingham flows.
- The standalone status of Birmingham and Manchester to Scotland services via the West Coast Mainline will lead to reduced journey times between Scotland, Cumbria and Birmingham/Manchester
- It is an operationally resilient timetable which prevents the need to make operationally conflicting movements at Birmingham New Street. This will lead to improved performance, not only on the NCC network but also the other networks which interface with NCC. There will be accelerated direct journey times on Birmingham to Manchester and Scotland to Birmingham services via the West Coast have been identified in Network Rail's timetabling work.
- Network Rail have indicated that there is potential for accelerated timings between Manchester and Scotland and Birmingham and Sheffield in the finalised timetable
- Bidders for the franchise are encouraged to exploit the 125mph line speeds which are achievable between Birmingham and Derby; York and Edinburgh and Wolverhampton and Stafford
- New, regular, direct services between Bristol and Manchester will offer accelerated journey times between these locations replacing the current circa 35 minute wait at Birmingham which occurs across much of the day.

In line with Passenger Focus recommendations, bidders for the NCC franchise are required to engage with stakeholders to finalise the detail of their timetable submissions. In the NCC franchise the timetable is organised into simply defined routes:

Route 1: Plymouth to Edinburgh (With Extensions to Penzance, Aberdeen, Dundee and Glasgow)

On this route, across the most part of each day, services will call at hourly intervals as follows:

Plymouth, Totnes, Newton Abbot, Exeter St David's, Tiverton Parkway, Taunton, Bristol Temple Meads, Bristol Parkway, Cheltenham Spa, Birmingham New Street, Tamworth#, Burton on Trent#, Derby, Chesterfield, Sheffield, Wakefield Westgate, Leeds, York, Darlington, Durham, Newcastle, Morpeth*, Alnmouth*, Berwick upon Tweed*, Dunbar* and Edinburgh Waverly

*These stations may not be served in every hour and the call may be rotated to serve these locations without detriment to the provision of a competitive Anglo – Scottish journey time.

#Burton and Trent and Tamworth will be served on a regular basis during the morning peak and then with occasional services across the off peak.

Route 2: Reading to Newcastle

On this route, across the most part of each day, services will call at hourly intervals as follows:

Reading, Oxford, Banbury, Leamington Spa, Birmingham New Street, Derby, Sheffield, Doncaster, York, Darlington, Durham, Chester-le-Street* and Newcastle

*Limited calls at Chester-le-Street

Route 3: Bristol Temple Meads to Manchester (With Extensions to Cardiff and Taunton)

On this route, across the most part of each day, will call at hourly intervals as follows:

Bristol Temple Meads, Bristol Parkway, Cheltenham Spa, Birmingham New Street, Wolverhampton, Stoke on Trent, Manchester Piccadilly

A small number of trains in this service group will serve Crewe and Wilmslow as an alternative to Stoke on Trent. Peak time calls will be made at Macclesfield

Route 4: Bournemouth to Manchester

On this route, across the most part of each day, will call at hourly intervals as follows

Bournemouth, Brockenhurst, Southampton, Southampton Airport Parkway, , Winchester, Basingstoke, Reading, Oxford, Banbury, Leamington Spa, Coventry, Birmingham International, Birmingham New Street, Wolverhampton, Stafford, Stoke on Trent, Congleton*, Macclesfield, Stockport, Manchester Piccadilly

* Congleton to be served at peak times

Route Transferred to Virgin West Coast: Birmingham New Street – Scotland via the West Coast mainline

On this route, across the most part of each day, will call at hourly intervals as follows:

Birmingham New Street, Wolverhampton, Stafford*, Crewe, Warrington Bank Quay, Wigan North Western, Preston, Lancaster, Oxenholme, Penrith North Lakes, Carlisle, Lockerbie*, Haymarket# & Edinburgh#/Motherwell# & Glasgow Central#

#Scottish terminus will alternate between Glasgow Central calling at Motherwell and Edinburgh calling at Haymarket in each hour.

*Denotes limited calls

The Cardiff to Nottingham, Birmingham to Stansted Airport and Birmingham to Leicester services will continue to operate in a similar fashion as today.

In addition to the basic route structure of the timetable bidders must also include the following:

- There must be at least one train per day to and from Guildford
- There must be three trains per day to and from Paignton
- There must be at least two trains per day in route 1 which extend to and from Glasgow. Bidders will engage with

Transport Scotland to establish if the number of these services should increase

(V) Stations

Bidders are required to formulate an interchange and stations strategy for NCC which will make changing trains as simple as possible for all rail users:

- The “Clockface” nature of the new timetable removes the need for Birmingham New Street to be the central interchange point for the Network. Bidders have to develop an interchange strategy for the franchise around the key locations of Derby, Wolverhampton, Banbury and Cheltenham Spa. These are locations at which a change of platform is unlikely.
- Bidders are required to develop the current “Journey Care” service at all interchange locations to ensure that a high standard of service is available to passengers who may need assistance when changing trains
- Further steps will be taken by bidders to ensure that interchange is simple for all rail users. Bidders are encouraged to make the most of new technologies to offer a high standard of connectional information
- Bidders will be required to demonstrate how they intend to develop their station strategy to ensure that NCC customers receive a high standard of customer service as locations where NCC staff are not present

(VI) Trains

DfT welcome the information provided by Passenger Focus outlining passenger's preferences regarding rolling stock. In most cases it is not the policy of DfT to specify rolling stock outright or the aesthetic qualities, other than where appropriate DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) compliance; however there is a need to prescribe certain technical characteristics relevant to speed and acceleration.

- Bidders must deploy rolling stock capable of achieving the Network Rail specified point to point timings; in many cases this means 125mph rolling stock with a voyager standard of acceleration
- Birmingham to Scotland services via the West Coast Mainline must be formed of tilting 125mph rolling stock
- Additional trains will be leased by TransPennine Express to augment capacity on their routes.
- Far from speculation that services are being withdrawn, , tilting 125 mile/h Voyagers under Virgin West Coast will run an hourly Birmingham to Glasgow/Edinburgh service taking advantage of the considerable accelerations achievable with tilt on the West Coast route

TransPennine Express will provide a regular link between Manchester Airport, Manchester, Cumbria and Scotland, using its new fleet of high performance diesel trains. These trains will use the existing fast 'slots' between Preston and Manchester Airport, provide some new through links and use trains with excellent acceleration and short station dwell times. There are only limited sections of West Coast route north of Preston where the current non-tilt Voyagers usually deployed between Manchester and Scotland can run at 110 mile/h instead of the 100 mile/h of the Trans Pennine new trains. Train pathing is also improved and the 13 trains linking Manchester and either Glasgow and Edinburgh each day will have an average time of under 3hr 20 min, better than your correspondent's aspiration of 3hr 30 min and better than today's 13 through links at an average time of average time of 3hr 35min – a clear improvement.