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Dear Julie,

WEAT COAST TIMETABLES: DECEMBER 2008

Thank you for your letter of 10 November concerning the proposed changes to train services along the West Coast Main Line.

I appreciate the considerable interest taken in these changes and I have shared the contents of your letter with colleagues dealing with the implementation of the alterations and importantly with the train operators. The timetables are the culmination of the work arising from completion of the West Coast Route Modernisation Project in late 2008. This work is based on the need to get the best possible pattern of train services overall, match resources with demand and ensure a return on the substantial public investment made in the entire project.

In this connection, the rolling stock resources, especially the Pendolino fleet, are being worked to the maximum possible extent, commensurate with ensuring reliability and sound performance is achieved, including turn round times. There is considerable concentration on the provision of high frequency, inter urban services where there are significant passenger flows and where rail can play a major role in the nation's transport system. Such trains serve key intermediate stations. Other points are generally served by feeder services linking up with the longer distance trains.

I agree that it is most important passengers are provided with information over the best route and timings to follow, where a change might be involved. I have asked train operators to give detailed consideration, possibly on a joint basis, to this matter. It is as you say, important to offer the most direct journey and the most appropriate point of interchange. Given the variety of journeys made on the West Coast, this will be quite a challenge, but your support on the matter, with the train operators, will be appreciated.

The direct services are designed deal with key passenger flows and give a regular and consistent seven day a week timetable with the service pattern remaining the same throughout much of the day, peak hours included. This is, as you know, one of the most

successful ways of "selling" a public transport network and persuading people to use this form of travel. I am aware of the population growth areas especially that around Milton Keynes, hence enlargement of the station. This will act both as the station for the expanding "new town", as well as an interchange point for passengers to and from, for example Watford Junction. It is just not feasible for more trains to call at this station, given the growth in the number operated. With up to eleven trains an hour on the fast line, it is only practical for two of these to call each hour. Any more then it would not be possible for eleven to operate. However, connectivity with Milton Keynes should improve with the extension of the Southern service from Watford. Again good publicity and passenger handling skills are essential to reassure people, especially the occasional traveller, but I am confident that London Midland are fully "on the case".

Milton Keynes (and Nuneaton) to Liverpool is quite possible via Birmingham which I know is not always a popular interchange point but quite practical for very many people.

You are right that some passenger flows are affected by the changes. The Rugby calls are not included in the core Anglo Scottish services to help accelerate the London-Lancashire link, achieving that headline "two hour" journey time and contributing towards the economic growth of the region. Scotland is seeking faster links with London which is also an output of these timetables.

In the case of Nuneaton, the proposals provide, as you know, for a new hourly Desiro service to and from London, serving Rugby, Northampton and Milton Keynes. This service will also link Nuneaton with Crewe calling at Atherstone, Tamworth, Lichfield and Rugeley. It will offer links to a number of new destinations, along with connections at key points with more distant parts of the West Coast route. I hope this is marketing opportunity for the town, to be exploited by the local authority.

Virgin Trains will continue to serve Nuneaton at peak times, providing fast links to and London. The Department, along with the train operators, has looked at the relatively low levels of business generated at Nuneaton for destinations such as London. It has been concluded that the Virgin operated services should concentrate on longer distance traffic and at stations where business is likely to be more substantial.

Passengers wishing to travel to and from London outside the peak hours will, of course, still be able to do so, by the Desiro operated service. These trains are 100mile/hr air conditioned units, well capable of offering comfortable, long distance travel. I accept that the journey time will be longer, but from my own experience of extensive public transport travel, I see no reason why such a service should deter people from rail travel.

Quite simply, to include calls in the off peaks by Virgin Trains would destroy the ability to provide the intensity of service being offered. It is also interesting to note that Liverpool is certainly opposed to intermediate calls.

Your letter contains a number of comments about the service frequencies in Lancashire and Cumbria. Although there are changes to the total numbers of trains calling at a

number of stations, I am not sure this distracts from the value and usefulness of the services. Preston has two early morning business trains for London (0534 -arrive 0757) and 0656(arrive 0908) compared with a 0551 (not Mondays -arrives 0840) and a 0648 departure (arrives 0914). Preston then gets an hourly all day service with a journey time of 2hrs 12mins. Given your comments about the evening return service, I assume there is not a real problem here.

I have promised to meet with the Cumbria local authorities to deal with the various issues that have been raised by stakeholders. A date has yet to be fixed - response from the County Council is awaited.

The detailed points in your letter are being shared with TPE and Virgin and will be discussed at our all industry timetable working group.

You mention potential limitations on Voyager capacity and this is a matter for monitoring. However, given the increase overall in passenger carrying capacity and the redistribution of traffic around a completely new pattern of service, there is confidence that services will cater for business over the medium term. The 1430 from London to Lancaster does of course operate generally at a more "quieter" time of day but your views about capacity will be taken up with Virgin.

There was a meeting in Lockerbie recently which I was not able to attend. I await a report on any issues of note that should be pursued.

When we meet in January, I hope I can give you a full progress report.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Francis