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10 November 2007

Dear Stuart

Re: Invitation to comment on West Coast Main Line December 2008 Timetable Proposals.

Passenger Focus representatives attended both of your recent events in Birmingham and Manchester aimed at briefing stakeholders about the latest versions of the West Coast Main Line December 2008 Timetables. Thank you for the efforts to publicise the proposals, and for encouraging stakeholders and passenger representatives to send you their comments and practical suggestions.

We have studied the draft timetables you made available at the meetings. We have received copies of Rail User Groups' submissions about the topic (see appendix two). We have discussed the changes with other stakeholders.

The timetables planned offer many important benefits to passengers – faster journeys and more trains on most routes – but also bring major dis-benefits to some sizeable groups of passengers. We are aware of the difficulties the planners have had in creating the best possible timetable, and the constraints within which they have had to plan.

Headline issues:

- consistent service patterns
- reduced connectivity
- selecting the best interchange
- catering for the planned growth of Milton Keynes¹
- reduced frequencies

The reduction in connectivity is the most strongly expressed comment we have received whilst discussing the plans with passengers. Passenger Focus believes that adjustments to the proposed stopping patterns of West Coast services should be made to restore as many through journey opportunities as possible. It was mentioned at the briefings that, in a few more years' time, additional trains could be available to run two trains an hour on the Liverpool route and to Preston. If that is the case, until then West Coast timetables should continue to provide a day-long inter-city service to Nuneaton, and through services between Milton Keynes and Liverpool and the North West. Because of the additional interchange that the

¹ Projected population growth of 23% by 2016 (source Milton Keynes Borough)



proposed timetables will require, it is essential that passengers are provided with detailed and comprehensive advice regarding their interchange options. Interchange stations should be assessed – with due regard to the differing needs of different types of passengers – to create a guide of passengers' options.

We offer the following observations:

1. The 'standard pattern' concept generally creates passenger-friendly timetables, but for maximum benefit should be applied as consistently as possible. The lack of a clock face timetable is confusing for passengers and where possible we would suggest that trains run on a standard pattern. Lack of a 'standard pattern' also creates considerable difficulties in arranging good connections between services (see also three, below), and in providing regular services between stations on the route.

Example² 1.1: The timetable north of Preston.

Example 1.2: No through service from Edinburgh and Oxenholme between the 12.11 and the 16.52 trains. Intermediate services require waits at Carlisle of 44, 64 and 20 minutes.

2. Another tenet of standard pattern timetables is that services should be balanced in all aspects – in both directions is a prime requirement. However, there are many unbalanced flows.

Example 2.1: there are frequent West Coast services from London to Nuneaton in the evening with six trains between 18.00 and 24.00, but none during the daytime.

Example 2.2: Preston's up a.m. peak service (up to 9.00) will be four trains, one less than today, whereas its down p.m. peak service (15.30 – 18.30) will provide seven trains, one more than today.

Example 2.3: Lancaster will have 12 trains to, but 14 from, Birmingham.

Example 2.4: Connections at Crewe between the Birmingham - Scotland service and those serving Milton Keynes will be around 20 minutes northbound, but 57 minutes southbound. Passengers generally expect that if they had good connections on the outward leg of their journey they will experience similarly good connections on the return leg.

3. Connectivity is reduced. Many long-established inter-regional flows will lose their through journey opportunities:

- Watford Junction to Liverpool, Manchester, the North West and Scotland
- Rugby to the North West and Scotland
- Milton Keynes to Liverpool

The proposed replacement services offer some poor connections, with journey times on such services often greatly extended. The reduction in through journey opportunities and consequential increased journey times (often over 30% longer) compare unfavourably with the reduction in journey times of through services (usually 10-14%). Many passengers will be surprised that longer, less convenient journeys are the result of many years' disruption and billions of pounds of expenditure.

Example 3.1: See appendix one.

² Examples are given on a selective, not comprehensive, basis.



Best-possible connections at Oxenholme for the Windermere branch are essential, and it is important to remember that they are needed for passengers to/from both the north and the south. The proposed timetables have many very poor connections, partly as a consequence of the non-standard pattern of the WCML timetable (one, above).

Example 3.2: the 9.16 departure from Oxenholme misses connecting with the 8.00 from Manchester Airport by 12 minutes; the 18.40 from Oxenholme misses connecting with the 16.52 from Edinburgh by one minute; the 13.59 from Windermere misses connecting with the 14.12 from Oxenholme to Manchester airport by six minutes meaning a lengthy wait for passengers.

Example 3.3: nearly an hour's wait for a connection at Crewe when travelling, for example, from Preston to Milton Keynes. (See also appendix one.)

4. Frequencies are reduced at some stations. Our passenger priority research³ shows that, of the 3,965 passengers completing the survey and ranking 30 attributes in order of priority, the 'sufficient train services at times I use the train' was the second highest priority after excellent value for money on the price of a train ticket'.

Example 4.1: Penrith currently has nine trains in each direction. From December 2008 its service will be five up trains and six down trains.

Example 4.2: Lockerbie and Motherwell both lose stops; northbound only three West Coast trains will stop at Lockerbie, and only two will stop at Motherwell.

5. Crowding is likely to be an issue on certain routes as a result of five-car Voyagers (250 seats⁴) being used in place of nine-car Pendolinos (447 seats). The fourth-highest ranking priority in our recent passenger priority research⁵ is that 'passengers are always able to get a seat on the train'. Sufficient room⁶ scored 72% "satisfied or good" for West Coast, and 65% for CrossCountry.

Example 5.1: Capacity between Crewe and the North West/Scotland will be greatly reduced – from, typically, one Voyager and one Pendolino each hour, to only one Voyager. Given the probability that the Birmingham-Scotland trains will be carrying passengers displaced from services previously covered by through trains – to/from Rugby is one of many such – their capacity could regularly be insufficient.

Example 5.2: The 14:30 Euston to Lancaster will be a five-car Voyager. Its current equivalent is the last train on which Savers can be used before the evening peak, and is therefore likely to be very crowded. First class will offer only 26 seats, compared to the current 147.

(See also example 2.2.)

6. We would like reassurance that train turnaround times will not be so rapid that service reliability and train preparation is compromised. Adequate cleaning, provisioning, fault rectification and seat labelling, must not be sacrificed. They are all important aspects of the passengers' journey

³ *Passengers' priorities for improvements in rail services* MVA Consultancy for Passenger Focus, 2007.

⁴ "Platform 5" figures.

⁵ *Passengers' priorities for improvements in rail services* MVA Consultancy for Passenger Focus, 2007.

⁶ Passenger Focus: National Passenger Survey, Spring 2007.

experience. "Value for money" depends to a large part on how well these aspects of journeys are managed. Value for money scored⁷ 53% "satisfied or good" for Virgin West Coast.



7. Looking further into the future we would also query whether platforms at all stations where VWC services stop are long enough to accommodate eleven-car Pendolinos.

Example 7.1: At Wilmslow.

We hope that the Department for Transport working together with Train Operating Companies and Network Rail can address the points raised. We look forward to reviewing with you the comments you have received from stakeholders during this consultation period, and discussing the detail of any changes or adaptations to the proposed December 2008 WCML timetables which result from the practical suggestions you receive.

If you have any queries about the content of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Julie Warburton, Passenger Link Manager.

⁷ *ibid.*



Appendix one.

WCML example “intermediate” up journeys M – F

1. Preston Watford Junc.

typical peak journey

current

dep. 7.18 arr. 9.27 (through train)

Dec. 2008

dep. 7.17 arr. 10.16 (change Wolverhampton 8.31/8.45) **39% longer journey**

typical off-peak journey

current

dep. 10.49 arr. 13.02 (through train)

Dec. 2008

dep. 10.17 arr. 13.16 (change Wolverhampton 11.31/11.45) **38% longer journey**

2. Preston Milton Keynes

typical peak journey

current

dep. 7.43 arr. 9.45 (through train)

Dec. 2008

dep. 7.17 arr. 10.01 (change Crewe 7.59/8.56) **34% longer journey**

typical off-peak journey

current

dep. 9.49 arr. 11.45 (through train)

Dec. 2008

dep. 9.17 arr. 12.01 (change Crewe 9.59/10.56) **41% longer journey**

WCML example “intermediate” down journeys M – F

3. Watford Junc. Preston

typical peak journey

current

dep. 16.32 arr. 19.15 (change Crewe 18.07/18.32)

Dec. 2008

dep. 16.38 arr. 19.51 (change Wolverhampton 18.10/18.37) **18% longer journey**

typical off-peak journey

current

dep. 11.01 arr. 13.15 (through train)

Dec. 2008

dep. 10.38 arr. 13.51 (change Wolverhampton 12.10/11.37) **44% longer journey**



Appendix two.

Correspondence re the 2008 WCML Timetables received by Passenger Focus from:

Cannock Chase Rail Promotion Group
Lakes Line Rail User Group
Lichfield Rail Promotion Group
Milton Keynes & Bletchley Rail Users Group
Wolverton Rail Users Group
Rugby Rail Users Group
Northampton Rail Users group

Stakeholders with whom we have been in contact regarding the WCML 2008 TT:

Blackpool and Fylde Rail Users' Association (BAFRUA) &
Railfuture NW
Chester & North Wales Rail Users' Association (CNWRUA)
Cymdeithas Defnyddwyr Rheilffordd Caer A Gogledd Cymru
Chester Area Rail Travellers' Federation (CARTF)
Clydesdale Rail Action Group

Crewe and Shrewsbury Passengers' Association (CASPA)
East Cheshire Line Rail Users' Group (ECLRUG)
Leighton-Linslade Public Transport Users Group
North Staffs Rail Promotion Group (NSRPG)

Railfuture (London and South East branch)
Railfuture (North Wales branch)
Railfuture (Scotland)

Shrewsbury-Wolverhampton Rail Users' Association
(SWRUA)
Tyne Valley Rail Users' Group
Watford Rail Users' Group (WRUG)

Wolverton Rail Users' Group (WOLRUG)
Support the East Lancashire Line Association (STELLA)
TravelWatch Midlands West
Travel Watch North West
Ormskirk - Preston & Southport Travellers Association
(OPSTA)

Lancaster and Skipton RUG
Lakes Line Rail User Group
Furness Line Action Group (FLAG)
Ribble Valley Rail
Copeland Rail Users Group (CRUG)
Rail Future North West