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Dear David,

Track Access Rights on the West Coast Main Line (WCML)

1. The applications

1.1 We note that the following WCML access applications have been made:

- Department for Transport (DfT) application for access rights under section 17;
- Alliance Rail Holdings application for access rights under section 17;
- Grand Central application for access rights under section 17, and
- London Midland applications for access rights under section 22A.

1.2 We are also aware of the work undertaken by the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) with industry stakeholders to inform its decision regarding any access rights, which has resulted in the Prototype Timetable Development Remit – WCML. Phase Two of the remit has resulted in ORR concluding that, for the purpose of this exercise, the scenario of one additional 125mph off-peak train path per hour between London Euston and Preston offers the best whole-industry solution to remaining network availability.

1.3 The application by DfT is based on the current “Very High Frequency” timetable, with additional trains between London and Glasgow, providing improved journey times by reducing the number of calls at Lancaster, Oxenholme and Penrith. A new hourly Lancaster/Blackpool North service, calling at Milton Keynes, is proposed to provide increased capacity and restore some of the connectivity lost in the 2008 timetable. However, the proposal reduces frequency and connectivity for Lancaster, Oxenholme and Penrith. The application provides faster journey times for Preston, Carlisle and Glasgow Central and the opportunity to make full use of the soon to be expanded fleet of Class 390 Pendolinos. The new contract would be in place for 2012.

It must be recognised though that prospective bidders for the Inter City West Coast franchise will have to consider their plans for calling patterns on services to Scotland and north-west England as part of the bidding process.



1.4 The application by Alliance Rail Holdings plans to run services on four routes:

1. Euston to Leeds via Crewe, Guide Bridge and Dewsbury - two-hourly, alternating with
2. Euston to Bradford Interchange via Newton-le-Willows and Rochdale - two hourly;
3. Euston to Blackpool North - "4 or 5" a day, and
4. Euston to Carlisle via Barrow-in Furness and the Cumbrian Coast - "3 or 4" a day. Taken together routes 3 and 4 would provide a two-hourly frequency as far as Preston.

The trains to provide the above services are still being developed but will have dual power capability. Services could start in 2013/14; Alliance are at an early stage in the development of their plans.

1.5 The application by Grand Central proposes to run four return trains each weekday between London Euston and Blackpool. Their services would begin in 2012.

1.6 The applications by London Midland extend their Trent Valley regional service to Liverpool, provide additional services, and re-route to Preston one of their two Birmingham - Liverpool services. The latter change would create additional capacity on the busiest section of the Birmingham to Scotland route and give Stafford and Hartford a regular link with Warrington, Wigan and Preston. Extending the Euston to Crewe services to Liverpool maintains the frequency between Crewe and Liverpool and creates a through service between Stoke and stations to Liverpool.

2. Considerations

2.1 The ORR should ensure that sufficient flexibility is included in the process of assessing the applications not only to allow a co-ordinated review of all the proposals, but also to allow bidders for the West Coast franchise to take a serious look at service patterns as part of the franchising process.

2.2 The services proposed by DfT, Alliance Rail Holdings, Grand Central and London Midland, and proposals contained within the West Coast Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS), overlap in many areas and careful analysis will be needed to ensure the best overall results are achieved for passengers, based upon the accepted scenario of one additional 125mph off-peak train path per hour between London Euston and Preston. However, the recent proposals by Network Rail for remodelling Norton Bridge mention two additional fast line paths an hour between London and the North West¹.

2.3 The release of modelled data and the notional timetables (ORR e-mail 21/12/10) is welcome, providing a better insight of the issues and opportunities, and connectivity. However, until notional timetables are available showing how **all** the proposed services shall link and indeed overlap, it is difficult to assess the proposals in any complete way. The Timetable

¹ For example, page 6 of the Section 42 Consultation Pack, October 2010.



Development Remit work should provide for a complete timetable thus allowing stakeholders to take a more considered view.

3. Passenger Focus input to the process

3.1 Passenger Focus's role is to represent passengers' interests by presenting evidence of their requirements and aspirations.

3.2 Passenger Focus believes that competition can bring benefits to passengers. By definition passengers will have a choice and some may also have improved access to services that they did not have before. However, we also recognise that 'network benefits' are important and so accept that competition must at times be delivered within a framework of co-ordination. That framework should ensure the overall service on the route meets passengers' needs to the greatest possible extent. There must be no significant disbenefit to any existing group of passengers and the granting of new track access rights should not significantly frustrate the industry's subsequent ability to develop a timetable that maximises capacity and utility to passengers. Similarly, we would expect that any new proposals should not take precedence over the resolution of existing gaps in user needs, particularly where the wider passenger benefits may exist.

3.3 It is important that the key criteria for the determination of priorities for improved service provision should be influenced by passenger demand (perhaps the ultimate test of passengers' requirements). On the WCML this would indicate that Blackpool North and Shrewsbury/Wellington Salop in particular should be prioritised as beneficiaries of any new direct services.

		Annual Journeys	Line of Route Pairs	
Euston	Blackpool			
Euston	Shrewsbury		Shrewsbury & Wellington	
Euston	Five Ways-Longbridge		Aberystwyth & Machynlleth	
Euston	Wellington Salop			
Euston	Bolton		Bolton & Blackburn	
Euston	Wrexham General			

3.4 The London Marylebone flows to Shrewsbury, Wellington Salop and Wrexham General, though direct are comparatively weak, (xxx annual journeys, whereas the same three flows from London Euston appear to generate xxx annual journeys i.e. some six times greater) despite the need to change trains at Wolverhampton/Birmingham New Street, the significantly faster journey times and frequency of service is a driver of passenger demand.

3.5 In respect of intermediate calling patterns, we are concerned that few of the proposals (with the exception of the proposal to extend the London Midland Trent Valley services from Crewe to



Liverpool) appear to deal effectively with any of the gaps between existing passenger flows and the provision of direct services between station pairs. In particular, and using journey flow data, we have identified and ranked the top four significant gaps in service specification, where no material provision currently exists :-

- Watford Jn. to Manchester (average xxx journeys/day)
- Watford Jn. to Liverpool (average xxx journeys/day)
- Watford Jn./Northampton/Milton Keynes/Coventry/Birmingham International to Longbridge (combined average xxx journeys/day)
- Stoke on Trent to Liverpool (average over xxx journeys/day) – this would be resolved by the proposed extension of the London Midland Trent Valley service from Crewe to Liverpool.

Against this background, we would expect the parties to develop revised proposals for more Manchester (and to a lesser extent Liverpool) high speed services to be timetabled to call at Watford Jn., particularly in the morning (northbound) and afternoon/evening (southbound). The issue of improving direct accessibility between WCML stations and the Birmingham-Longbridge route will be raised separately under the West Midlands & Chilterns RUS.

3.6 Using passenger flow and direct service frequency data, a separate review of locations *already* provided with direct services suggests that, given the volumes of passengers travelling between London and Liverpool, the current frequency (slightly greater than one train/hour) is the worst provided for in comparison with other locations on the WCML. This route should therefore be prioritised for an improved frequency. Consideration should also be given to extending some further Euston-Chester services onwards to Wrexham given the level of demand for travel to and from Euston via the WCML.

Table 2 Existing through service - average demand per train					
London Euston to/from	SX freq/hr direct	Average journey/train	London Euston to/from	SX freq/hr direct	Average journey/train
Liverpool BR	1.125		Holyhead		45.08
Bletchley	3		Coventry		41.47
Wrexham Gen	0.0625		Northampton		41.04
Manchester BR	3		Preston Lancs		33.69
Milton Keynes Cen	4		Oxenholme		29.8
Birmingham BR	3		Llandudno Junc		29.07
Watford Junc	5		Chester		27.81
Glasgow BR	0.75				

3.7 Blackpool North. Table 1 shows that Blackpool to London is the largest flow on the WCML that is not provided with through trains. All three of the section 17 bidders include Blackpool North in their applications, at these frequencies and journey times, and start dates:



Applicant	Journeys	Journey Time	Timescale
DfT	5	2 hours 52 minutes ²	On electrification of Preston-Blackpool?
Alliance	4 or 5	Not Given	2013/14?
Grand Central	4	3 hours 17 minutes	2012

3.8 In respect of 1.6, and the aspirations of the London Midland Franchise, we note that within the geography of the Trent Valley regional services, Barlaston in particular remains effectively closed to train services, Of all the stations affected by the high frequency timetable and currently served by an infrequent replacement bus service, Barlaston is a centrally located station serving a sizeable and growing population (approx 3,000) in very close proximity to the station.. We believe therefore that the reinstatement of regular station stops at this location in the London Midland service should be reconsidered for the benefits of passengers wishing to use rail services from and to Barlaston.

3.9 In considering the various applications ORR should take into account the passenger research undertaken by Passenger Focus (October 2009) where we surveyed 4,106 passengers travelling on the WCML to inform the RUS process.

3.10 Passenger Focus's WCML RUS survey – Headline results. We spoke to 4,106 passengers across 6 routes:

- **Route 1 – 1,062 Virgin/TPE passengers travelling between Lancaster/Carlisle and Edinburgh/Glasgow on all days of the week/all times of day;**
- Route 2 – 745 Virgin passengers travelling between London Euston and Liverpool/Manchester on all days of the week/all times of day;
- Route 3 – 560 ATW/Virgin passengers travelling between Llandudno /Bangor and Chester on all days of the week/all times of day;
- Route 4 – 477 Northern Rail passengers travelling between Crewe and Wilmslow on weekdays at peak times;
- **Route 5 – 432 London Midland/Virgin passengers travelling to/from stations between Tamworth and Northampton on all days of the week/all times of day;**
- Route 6 – 830 London Midland/Virgin passengers travelling between London Euston and Milton Keynes Central on weekdays at peak times.

3.11 The results from routes 1 and 5 are particularly relevant to ORR's deliberations.

Key findings relating to service provision	route 1	route 5
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² Based on current timings



1	reason for travel		
	leisure	50%	39%
	business	26%	20%
	commuting	18%	38%
2	use nearest station "most" journeys	67%	71%
3	of those not using their nearest station, why?		
	for better frequency	40%	39%
	through train	45%	49%
4	frequency – satisfied	67%	61% (54% require half-hourly trains in the off-peak)
5	not very/not at all likely to travel if had to change	37%	46%
6	require regular timetable	54%	73%
7	always able to get a seat	67%	70%

On route 1 70% of passengers preferred faster journey times between cities, at the risk of having to change trains to reach smaller stations; 25% stated that longer journey times were not acceptable. Those questions were not asked on route 5.

3.10 Passenger Focus commissioned research into passenger priorities for improvement. Around 4,000 passengers were asked to rank 30 different aspects of rail travel³. The work was repeated in 2009⁴.

3.11 The table below shows the top ten priorities in 2009 compared to 2007. It also shows the relative importance of each attribute ranking relative to punctuality – the higher the score, the greater priority passengers assign to that service aspect.

Table 5 Service Improvement Preference	2007	2009	2009 'Score'
Price of train tickets offer excellent value for money	1	1	1.08
At least 19 out of 20 trains arrive on time	3	2	1
Sufficient train services at times I use the train	2	3	0.98
Passengers are always able to get a seat on the train	4	4	0.86
Company keeps passengers informed if train delays	5	5	0.79
Information on train times/platforms accurate and available	7	6	0.75
Maximum queue time no more than 2 mins	6	7	0.69
Trains consistently well maintained/excellent condition	8	8	0.69
Seating area on the train is very comfortable	9	9	0.67
Station staff are available whenever required	17	10	0.67

3.12 In the 2009 research there were three clear priorities for improvement: value for money, punctuality and service frequency. These, coupled with seats/capacity in fourth place, emphasise the importance passengers place on the 'core product' and should be a consideration when considering track access applications and the impact on existing services.

³ Passengers' priorities for improvements in rail services (July 2007)

⁴ Passengers' priorities for improvements in rail services (March 2010)



4. Conclusion

On the basis of passenger preferences expressed through existing demand levels, we support the establishment of the direct services between Blackpool and London and the extension of the Euston to Crewe Trent Valley service (London Midland) to Liverpool. We also believe that wider network benefits of enabling additional calls in London-Manchester (and Liverpool) services at Watford Junction would be facilitated by the provision of additional services over the route as a whole.

However, it is very difficult to compare the benefits of the various applications, because the content of the WCML RUS will not be finalised until later this year, and the invitation to tender for the West Coast franchise will not take place until later this year too. Without those documents a complete review of the WCML timetable cannot be completed. Passengers' needs and aspirations must play a major role in the considerations which will decide which track access rights should be granted.

Yours sincerely

Robert Samson

Robert Samson
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