



Strategic Transport Forum

24th January 2020

Agenda Item 8: East Midlands Railway Timetable Consultation Response

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Forum agrees, subject to any amendments made by the Forum, the response to the East Midlands Railway Timetable Consultation (Annex 2)

1. Strategic Context

East Midlands Franchise Prospectus 2016

- 1.1. The Forum will recall that in November 2016, the DfT began the process of appointing a new franchisee for the East Midlands rail franchise, previously operated by Stagecoach. Accompanying this announcement was the East Midlands Franchise Prospectus.
- 1.2. This prospectus was heavily shaped by Government's agenda to make the Midlands region an engine for economic growth. There was a need for bidders to demonstrate improved connectivity within and outside the Midlands whilst addressing increased demand into London St Pancras and faster journey times in the east of the franchise.
- 1.3. Improvements in performance, reliability and rolling stock were envisaged to be facilitated by major line upgrades planned in Control Period 5 (2014-2019). This included installation of a second line between Kettering and Corby and a fourth line between Bedford and Kettering. Enhancements were supplemented by an ambition of electrification of the London St Pancras to Sheffield in Control Period 6 (2019-2024).
- 1.4. DfT Franchise ambitions, influenced by East Midlands Councils (EMC) and others, were essentially quicker journey times into London. For example, Nottingham in less than 90 minutes and Leicester in 60 minutes respectively.
- 1.5. In response, the Forum welcomed the addition of an additional sixth train per hour between London and East Midlands cities, but aired caution with the DfT that more frequent services between London St Pancras and Corby must not distract from the need to enhance connectivity between the Heartland, cities across the east midlands and South Yorkshire. This approach recognised the importance of inter-regional services in achieving the Heartland's economic opportunities.
- 1.6. The Forum set out principle support of four trains per hour to Luton Airport, improved evening and weekend services, station improvements and more integrated and smarter ticketing options.

East Midlands Franchise Consultation 2017

- 1.7. In the summer of 2017, the DfT ran a consultation to seek views on its proposals for the future of the East Midlands Franchise.
- 1.8. The Forum responded, demonstrating deep frustration with a proposed reduction in direct services to/from Bedford, Luton and Wellingborough with cities in the East Midlands and their general resistance to recognises the need for through services to adjoin these two regions.

- 1.9. Recognition of Luton Airport Parkway and Bedford as key interchange points was requested as needing explicit reference, with the Forum's minimum requirement that four trains call at Luton Airport Parkway, serving London St Pancras, Luton and key stations in the north, avoiding the proposed change at Kettering.
- 1.10. The Forum again reaffirmed its position that proposed changes to the franchise were inconsistent with Bedford's interchange opportunities arising as part of East West Rail and as a key area in terms of its capacity to deliver exponential planned housing growth.
East Midlands Franchise Invitation to Tender 2018
- 1.11. In June 2018, the DfT published the Invitation to Tender for the East Midlands Franchise. Having received this announcement, the Forum developed a framework for engagement with bidders to ensure this region's strategic priorities were taken into account.
- 1.12. Key principles developed as the basis of ongoing dialogue called for the need for East West Rail to be a key component in franchise plans. This is due to the role Bedford and Luton Airport Parkway will play as a catalyst in enabling both north/south journeys and east /west journeys, as well as providing access to international gateways.
- 1.13. The Forum, building on the need for improved inter-regional connectivity, again emphasised the importance of delivering competitive journey times between key strategic hubs. These principles sought to build on previous correspondence with the Franchising process and remained as the key priorities to pursue with the newly appointed operator.
East Midlands Railways
- 1.14. In April 2019, Government announced that Abellio had been successful in its bid to run the East Midlands franchise. The Franchise will run for 8 years (until 21st August 2027) with an extension of 2 years at the discretion of the Secretary of State.
- 1.15. In September 2019, Forum members received a briefing from the newly appointed operator on the timeline of changes planned for the franchise from December 2020 onwards.
- 1.16. The Forum reaffirmed its continued frustration in reduced levels of service through the Heartland area. Most prominent is the impact of severance of direct connections between Derby/Nottingham and Leicester with key towns Wellingborough, Bedford and Luton, due to new interchange requirements at Kettering.
- 1.17. Following this meeting, and on behalf of the Forum, a meeting was convened to raise these concerns with Midlands Connect (as the Sub national transport body for the Midlands) and a number of east midlands local authorities. It was agreed by a majority of attendees that there should be a minimum level of through service between the two regions, rather than an increased reliance on interchange at Kettering.
- 1.18. Proposed changes from December 2020 are now the subject of a timetable consultation that closes 14th February 2020.

2. Summary of December 2020 Timetable Consultation

- 2.1. From December 2020 the East Midlands Franchise will be separated into three distinct service groups illustrated in Annex 1. The focus for changes is on achieving 80% increase in capacity into London St Pancras and 40% into Nottingham by 2022.
- 2.2. East Midlands Railways (EMR) Regional services will link communities across the East Midlands and beyond, from Norwich to Liverpool, Crewe to Newark and Leicester to Lincoln.
- 2.3. EMR Intercity Services will serve Kettering and connects London St Pancras directly to towns and cities of Leicester, Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield. These journeys will be up to 30 minutes quicker with earlier morning and later evening services from Sheffield and Nottingham. Fleet renewal in 2020/21 will see EMR Intercity trains replaced and by December 2022 the fleet will be serviced by a brand new bi-mode train service.
- 2.4. Of most relevance to the Forum is the EMR Electrics service that segregates services between London St Pancras and Corby.



- 2.5. Proposals include more frequent services with electric trains serving Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough, Bedford, Luton and Luton Airport Parkway. Trains will run every 30 minutes throughout the day on weekdays from 06:00 – 10:00 with further late night and early morning services.
- 2.6. Capacity will increase by over 4000 seats every weekday morning and will typically be comprised of 12-carriage electric trains in peak hours with over 600 seats per train; 40% more than the existing longest train run on this service.
- 2.7. A new London Luton Airport express service will be introduced, running every 30 minutes and linking the airport with central London in just 23 minutes.
- 2.8. Details of the proposed timetables have not been made available. But a station by station summary is included within the consultation material. Equally, full details of proposed flexible season tickets and station upgrades are not yet known but continue to provide the basis of ongoing engagement with Abellio.

3. Impact of Proposed Timetable Changes on the Heartland

- 3.1. Doubling of frequency and extra capacity on the EMR Electrics service is welcome and in keeping with the need to create more attractive commuter services between London and Corby. This is considered a minimum level of service to connect key strategic settlements sustainably and provide access to future interchange points in Bedford and Luton Parkway, although journey times appear to remain broadly consistent.
- 3.2. The timetable changes will see ThamesLink peak services reverting to their original calling patterns south of Bedford, increasing frequency at Flitwick, Harpenden and Leagrave as stops are reinstated following previous reductions in service.
- 3.3. Bedford will see the reintroduction of EMR peak services, consistently spaced northbound/southbound services every 30 minutes with an average journey time of over 40 minutes. When combined with Thameslink services this will ensure Bedford has over 17,000 seats into London during the morning peak.
- 3.4. Equally, Luton Parkway will see the doubling of frequency to London St Pancras and Corby, with these planned to run every 30 minutes. Luton will - like Bedford - see over 17,000 seats into London during the morning peak.
- 3.5. However, connectivity northbound to Leicester and beyond remains an unresolved issue despite the Forum lobbying for this change. The disproportionate focus of the timetable on journey time improvements between the capital and East Midlands cities continues to ignore the very significant potential of key rail nodes within the Heartland region.
- 3.6. Segregation of EMR Electrics with EMR Intercity will necessitate change at Kettering for journeys north/south between East Midlands cities and the Heartland's key towns. Kettering will see two northbound services per hour to Leicester and Nottingham which is welcome and in excess of the current offer, but does not mitigate the extension in journey times in both directions that will be incurred, even with same side platform crossing (in the northerly direction) and integrated timetabling.
- 3.7. It is therefore recommended that the EEH response needs to continue to make the case for improved connectivity between the Heartland and East Midlands. This must be in the form of through services from key stations, including Luton, Bedford and Wellingborough. Improvements in the level of service are essential if we are to create an attractive public transport offer that supports planned growth in the region. These direct links will maximise the onwards travel opportunities created by East West Rail and potentially HS2 phase B, via a Bedford-Leicester, East Midlands Interchange – Leeds service.
- 3.8. The inconvenience of change at Kettering reduces the attractiveness of rail for longer distance journeys. It does little to rebalance the economy and redistribute wealth and productivity outside of city boundaries.



4. Conclusion

- 4.1. The Midland Mainline is a key rail corridor for the Heartland. The southern part of this franchise has already experiencing unacceptable reductions in service levels and this should not be compounded by the need to change at Kettering.
- 4.2. The December 2020 timetable goes some way in delivering high frequency rail connectivity within the Heartland. But the enhancements should not come at the expense of realising economic opportunities associated with inter-regional connectivity.
- 4.3. Investment in the region's rail system must serve as the backbone of a pan-regional public transport network that encourages people to make trips by non-motorised transport whilst facilitating economic growth. Frictionless interchange is key to this ambition. As such EEH – as the STB – needs to continue to make the case at every possible opportunity to support the Forum's longstanding position on direct connectivity between this region and the East Midlands.

5. December 2020 Timetable Process

- 5.1. Responses to the consultation will be considered to help shape East Midland Railway's final timetable submission to Network Rail and the Office of Road and Rail in March 2020.
- 5.2. Between March 2020 and September 2020, timetable proposals will proceed through standard industry processes before being agreed by the industry and published 12 weeks before they are introduced.
- 5.3. It is envisaged that these timetable changes are a step towards more substantial changes to the EMR Regional services in December 2021. A further consultation for these changes will take place towards the end of 2020.

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January 2020



Annex 2: East Midlands Railway December 2020 Timetable Response

DRAFT RESPONSE

EAST MIDLANDS RAILWAY DECEMBER 2020 TIMETABLE CONSULTATION

England's Economic Heartland's (EEH) Strategic Transport Forum is the Sub-national Transport Body for the Heartland region. Membership of the Forum covers the area from Swindon, through Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes and across to Cambridgeshire, and from Northamptonshire across to Luton and Hertfordshire.

As the Sub-national Transport Body, EEH is responsible for setting the strategic vision for the transport system, supported by a long term strategy for realising that vision. The Heartland includes the Oxford to Cambridge Arc – a region identified by the Government as being an economic priority for the UK.

In March 2019 the UK Government set out its strategic ambition for the region - to realise its economic potential whilst achieving net environmental gain. EEH provides leadership on connectivity issues for the Oxford – Cambridge Arc and works closely with the other work streams: productivity, place-making and the environment to ensure that matters relating to transport infrastructure are considered in the wider policy context.

The region's connectivity ambitions and challenges are reflected in the EEH Outline Transport Strategy published in July 2019. The Outline Transport Strategy and its subsequent engagement sets out the key role that rail must play in delivering the region's economic potential whilst delivering net environmental gain.

The Heartland's need for inter-regional and high frequency intra-regional connectivity continues to outstrip supply. It is essential that this region levels up its current connectivity and capacity offer in order to ensure the strategic ambition for region can be realised.

The Forum was extremely disappointed when in 2018, the Department for Transport's specification for the Train Service Requirements and objectives for the East Midlands Rail Franchise led to an unacceptable reduction in connectivity into adjoining regions, specifically direct travel to the East Midlands.

The Forum provided a comprehensive response to the Department's East Midlands Franchise consultation and has since made subsequent representation to newly appointed train operator Abellio. This follows the awarding of franchise in August 2019 that runs through to August 2027, with an extension of two years at the discretion of the Secretary of State.

The approach to the East Midlands franchise fails to recognise the economic potential of key Heartland towns, particularly Bedford, Luton and Wellingborough. This is inconsistent with the Government's ambition for the region and our concern is compounded by the specification's failure to require the franchisee to actively work with EEH to ensure the opportunities to improve connectivity arising from delivery of East West Rail are realised.

Key Issues

The East Midlands Franchise is a key franchise for the Heartland region: a region identified by the National Infrastructure Commission in its report to the Treasury as requiring investment in infrastructure and services.



The Midland Mainline is a strategically important rail corridor both in terms of passenger and freight. It connects the region to the East Midlands and London, tying together strategically important growth areas and providing access to the international gateway that is Luton Airport.

The primary concern for the region is the removal of existing inter-regional through services between London St Pancras and East Midlands cities that will no longer call at Luton/Luton Airport Parkway, Bedford and Wellingborough.

The removal of interchange stations from Bedford/Wellingborough will mean passengers travelling north of Wellingborough will need to change at Kettering, notably having to cross platforms when doing so. Further onward journeys to Derby or Sheffield will require change at Leicester.

This change, even with integrated timetabling and two additional intercity services per hour at Kettering, will sever the Heartland with the East Midlands. It will extend inter-regional journey times in both directions, thereby significantly reducing the attractiveness of rail services. The result will therefore result in an increase in road traffic, with a resultant adverse impact on air quality and increased carbon emissions.

The removal of this service disregards the agglomeration benefits realised by connecting economic opportunities within two high-performing regions.

Both regions benefit from complementary business sectors. Both are leaders in professional services, science and technology based industries. A high level of connectivity is therefore a priority in realising added value. Realising these opportunities is the subject of ongoing rail planning between England's Economic Heartland, Midlands Connect and Network Rail System Operator.

The proposed segregation of long distance (EMR Intercity) services with commuter services (EMR Electrics) will see services double between Corby and London St Pancras. These will call every 30 minutes between 06:00 and 22:00, including the reintroduction of some peak services. The Forum recognises that earlier and later arrivals reflect the changes in working patterns society is experiencing.

As part of the EMR Electrics services, EEH is pleased to see the improved connectivity proposed in respect of London Luton Airport Parkway, with an express service operating on a half-hourly frequency. EEH would expect East Midlands Railway to work with London Luton Airport Limited and Luton Borough Council to develop a frictionless interchange experience and integration with Direct Air to Rail Transit service opening in 2021.

The proposed enhancements to capacity and frequency are welcome due to the way it enables existing Thames Link services to reinstate peak frequency services to certain stations. This removes the need for rail replacement coach services.

The proposed timetable does little to rebalance economies or create genuine travel choice. It is disproportionately focused on faster journey times to London. By doing so, it bypasses key strategic hubs that require high levels of connectivity.

Reference is made to the EMR Electric services (those stopping between London St Pancras and Corby) benefiting from fleet refurbishment, which includes new seating and power sockets. This investment is welcome if the sector is to make use of this region's propensity to use public transport when it is presented as a viable alternative.

It is subsequently disappointing that the fleet will not be fully refurbished before the services are introduced, given the opportunity that the timetable change presents to present a step change in the travel offer.



The consultation material cites a major refurbishment planned for 2020/2021 for EMR Regional services. Whilst these services sit outside the Heartland geography, we would request further engagement with the EEH Business Unit on proposed plans for all new rolling stock: for e.g EMR's plan to replace intercity services that call in the north of the Heartland with new bi-modes.

It is reassuring to see that the Midland Mainline Upgrade programme remains on track to deliver electrification of the line between Bedford, Kettering and Corby. We believe that extension of the electrification network further north should remain an ambition, one that would benefit from building on the experience gained to date. Delivering of this ambition at the earliest opportunity would deliver improved line speeds, capacity and environmental benefits, all of which would improve the attractiveness of rail.

In addition, EEH welcomes planned infrastructure projects that increase resilience and capacity along the route. This includes the quad-tracking of the railway between Bedford and Kettering, the installation of a second line between Kettering and Corby and platform extensions at Bedford, Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby.

Delivering franchise objectives

The Strategic Transport Forum remains frustrated that the proposals have not used the flexibility available to the operator so as to ensure direct services are maintained between key centres of activity in the Heartland and the East Midlands. The Train Service Requirements are a minimum specification, giving East Midlands Railway discretion to propose additional services where there is a case for them.

A key franchise objective is to improve public perception of the railway. The Forum is concerned that the failure to improve journey times to/from London St Pancras from those stations on the EMR Electric Service is inconsistent with this objective. When viewed at in the context of the inability to access key East Midlands cities without changing and the delay in refurbished rolling stock, this reinforces that concern.

A second key franchise objective is for the franchise to address growth in demand. The Forum is concerned that the timetable does not adequately recognise the scale of planned growth in Bedfordshire, whose growth sites all fall within the catchment of the franchise. The scale of Luton Airport growth and its expansion plans to double capacity whilst achieving a mode shift target of 45% of passengers arriving at the airport by public transport is also overlooked.

The timetable, in its current form, disregard's Bedford's place as a key hub on the East West Rail corridor, irrespective of Central Section corridor selection. Delivery of East West Rail will be transformative in terms of travel patterns, creating a step-change in opportunity to develop rail services across the region. The EEH Business Unit expects the franchisee to work with it to ensure those opportunities are realised.

In light of the above, England's Economic Heartland urges East Midlands Railway to maintain direct connections to key stations to the north when submitting a formal timetable offer to Network Rail and the Office of Rail and Road in the coming months.

The Forum understands that other regional organisations in the East Midlands are also echoing similar concerns; specifically requesting the provision of peak northbound calls at Bedford (to East Midlands) where the timetable allows.

The EEH Strategic Transport Forum invites East Midlands Railway to discuss this response and wider issues outside of this timetable consultation. These include station experience, first/last mile interchange and improved ticketing, building on the discussion during our last Strategic Transport Forum.