

Strategic Transport Forum 15th September 2017

Agenda Item 5: Rail – East Midlands Rail Franchise Consultation

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Forum agree (subject to any amendments agreed by this meeting) the response to the East Midlands Rail Franchise consultation (Appendix 1).

1. Purpose

- 1.1. To consider and agree the Forum's response to the Department for Transport's consultation on the East Midlands Rail Franchise.

2. Context

- 2.1. Government is currently consulting on the East Midlands Rail Franchise for the period from August 2019 to *at least* 2026. The consultation was due to take place earlier in the summer, however was delayed due to the General Election.

3. Consultation

- 3.1. Consultation for the East Midlands Rail Franchise will run until 11:45pm on Wednesday 11th October. The consultation includes proposals that have an impact on services supporting England's Economic Heartland.
- 3.2. The Department for Transport is holding a number of consultation events across the franchise area. The closest events to the Heartland area are as follows:
 - Kettering
Kettering Conference Centre, NN15 6PB – 13th September - 2:00-4:00pm
 - London
St Pancras Community Association, NW1 0LB – 19th September - 12:00-2:00pm
- 3.3. Further details on the consultation (including the proposals and key questions) can be viewed online: see [link](#).

4. Consultation Response

- 4.1. The response has been drafted based on initial discussions with Local Authorities affected and the wider Transport Officer Support Group. See Appendix 1 attached.
- 4.2. The Forum is invited to consider the response and agree it, subject to any amendments agreed by the meeting.

Martin Tugwell
Programme Director

September 2017

**East Midlands Rail Franchise Consultation
Draft Response****Summary of Key Points**

- Improved connectivity between major urban hubs across the Heartland area is a strategic priority, as is improved connectivity into adjoining regions, both London and Midlands Connect.
- England's Economic Heartland is deeply concerned at the proposed reduced level of service to/from Bedford, Luton and Wellingborough put forward as part of the consultation, which is inconsistent with the area's potential to be a focus for planned growth. The current level of service should be viewed as the minimum required of the next franchise.
- England's Economic Heartland is seeking a minimum of 4 trains per hour calling at Luton Airport Parkway providing services to both London, as well as Bedford and key stations to the north.
- The proposal as set out will significantly impact on journeys from towns within the Heartland to destinations north of Wellingborough by introducing a requirement for interchange at Kettering. If this is to be the case, the importance of good, timely and reliable onward connections at Kettering is critical to retaining rail market share for these journeys and limiting transfer to the highway network. Prospective franchisees should be required to actively seek opportunities to improve the level of service provided at Kettering, both in terms of connectivity southbound and northbound.
- In preparing the franchise specification for the next East Midlands franchise the Department should consider how the delivery of East West Rail and in particular opportunities identified for the 'Eastern Section' might be incorporated.
- The proposal to transfer the Birmingham-Leicester-Standed services to the East Midlands franchise is supported in principle.
- If the proposal to transfer the western section of the Liverpool to Norwich service to the Trans-Pennine franchise is pursued there should be a requirement placed on the operators of the East Midlands and Trans-Pennine franchises to maintain an attractive interchange between services, with that being provided at either Nottingham and/or Sheffield.
- Luton Airport Parkway and Bedford are key interchange points on the wider transport system, a function that should be explicitly identified in the East Midlands franchise.
- There should be a requirement on the new franchisee to work pro-actively with the relevant Local Transport Authorities and local bus operators to deliver the seamless journey experience for public transport users, taking advantage of the provisions within the Bus Services Act 2017 where it helps to achieve this strategic outcome.

- The decision to drop the electrification of the Midland Main Line north of Kettering is extremely disappointing.
- There should be a requirement on the new franchisee to be work pro-actively with the Department for Transport and the emerging Sub-national Transport Body to identify opportunities for new or amended services during the lifetime of the next franchise and to identify changes in the specification that might be required for future franchises.

England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance

1. England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance established the Strategic Transport Forum in February 2016. Membership of the Strategic Alliance covers the area from Oxfordshire, through Milton Keynes and across to Cambridgeshire, and from Northamptonshire across to Luton.
2. The Strategic Transport Forum is the focus for a single conversation on strategic transport issues across the Heartland and maintains the overview of strategic investment priorities. The Forum is the emerging Sub-national Transport Body (STB) for the Heartland area, and works closely with the Department for Transport and Network Rail, both of whom are members of the Forum.
3. The Department for Transport's recently published Transport Investment Strategy emphasises the importance of STBs in providing local partners with the opportunity to shape future strategic investment priorities. In parallel to developing an STB proposal, a Transport Strategy is being prepared that will outline the strategic infrastructure requirements necessary to enable economic growth.

Strategic Context

4. The National Infrastructure Commission's (NIC) Interim Report of November 2016 identified the economic potential of the Heartland area as being of national significance to the long term future of the UK economy. The Interim Report identified the value of the Heartland economy (currently £92.5bn per annum) increasing by between £85bn and £163bn over the next 30 years.
5. The Commission in their Interim Report identified improved connectivity as being one of two critical issues that needed to be addressed in order to realise that opportunity.
6. The Government endorsed the Commission's view in the 2016 Autumn Statement, in which it identified additional funding specifically targeted at enabling work on two critical infrastructure investments – East West Rail and the 'expressway' – to be taken forward to the next stage. Delivery of these schemes is seen by Government and the Strategic Alliance as a 'once-in-a-generation' opportunity to create a multi-modal spine across the Heartland.
7. Economic opportunity on this scale is truly transformational in nature. Delivery of the multi-modal spine across the Heartland area will have wider implications for both housing and economic geographies that will need to be reflected in future passenger rail franchising requirements, including the East Midlands franchise.
8. The Strategic Transport Forum is concerned that the current framework for the new East Midlands franchise fails to adequately recognise the scale of economic opportunity

across the Heartland area and fails to reflect the need for the next franchise to support its delivery.

International Gateway Connectivity – Midland Main Line

9. Luton Airport is an integral component of the wider London airport system. It's ability to accommodate new short/medium haul routes has led to significant growth in passenger numbers. In addition, it is one of the top three hubs in Europe for business aviation services. Immediately adjacent to the airport is the Luton Airport Enterprise Zone. Construction of the Direct Air to Rail Transit will provide a step change in connectivity between the Airport (including the Enterprise Zone) and Luton Airport Parkway.
10. Passenger data demonstrates the importance of rail access for people accessing the Airport. It also highlights the extent to which travellers use rail to access stations to the north, as well as the traditional London market.
11. In terms of the East Midlands franchise the Strategic Transport Forum is therefore seeking a minimum of 4 trains per hour calling at Luton Airport Parkway providing services to both London, as well as Bedford and key stations to the north.
12. Improved connectivity between major urban hubs across the Heartland area is a strategic priority, as is improved connectivity into adjoining regions, both London and Midlands Connect.
13. The reduced level of service to/from Luton, Bedford and Wellingborough proposed as part of the consultation is therefore deeply concerning and inconsistent with the potential for the focus for planned growth. The proposed service patterns indicate that these stations will become perceived solely as a commuter station rather than as an 'intercity' destination.
14. It is entirely unclear from the consultation document what the proposed approach that is referred to actually is, and what journey times from respective stations in the Heartland area to London would be. If there is no through service, passengers from Luton, Bedford or Wellingborough to destinations north of Kettering (e.g. Leicester or Nottingham) will have to change at Kettering.
15. This is also inconsistent with the role of Bedford as a hub station for interchange both with Thameslink services and in future, services on East-West Rail. Passengers from either service intending to travel northwards on the Midland Main Line would be required to change twice – at Bedford and Kettering – in quick succession.
16. Introducing a requirement for interchange at Kettering has the potential to discourage people's propensity to travel by rail to destinations north of the Heartland and is likely to contribute to higher travel by private car. Moreover, it will impact on the Heartland's ability to attract labour and thus will impact on economic growth. The current level of service provided by East Midlands Trains should be viewed as the minimum required of the next franchise.

17. However, if the through services are to be removed, the importance of good, timely and reliable onward connections at Kettering becomes critical to retaining rail market share for these journeys and limiting transfer of trips to the highway network. In that instance, we would expect good connections with longer distance services to be made at Kettering by all St Pancras – Corby services.

Inter-Urban Connectivity

18. The National Infrastructure Commission's Interim Report emphasised the importance of improved connectivity, particularly east-west. Delivery of the East West Rail improvement – a priority for the Department for Transport – will provide a step-change in connectivity between Oxford and Cambridge.
19. Work undertaken by the East West Rail Consortium in partnership with the Department for Transport has identified the added value that the East West Rail infrastructure potentially provides for a wider range of inter-urban/cross-country services. This work has resulted in a Conditional Output Statement being submitted to the Department for Transport who are now considering the opportunities to realise some of the added value at the earliest opportunity.
20. In preparing the franchise specification for the next East Midlands franchise the Department should give consideration to how the work undertaken by the East West Rail Consortium might be incorporated.
21. The proposal to transfer the Birmingham-Leicester-Standed services to the East Midlands franchise is supported in principle. The proposal to transfer the western section of the Liverpool to Norwich service to the Trans-Pennine franchise would represent a reduction in service quality for longer-distance passengers. If pursued through the franchise specification there should be a requirement placed on the operators of the East Midlands and Trans-Pennine franchises to maintain an attractive interchange between their services, with that being provided at either Nottingham and/or Sheffield.

Passenger Interchange

22. It is likely that a key objective of the emerging Transport Strategy for the Heartland will be the delivery of improvements that enable passengers to make a seamless journey.
23. Luton Airport Parkway and Bedford are key interchange points on the wider transport system, a function that should be explicitly identified in the East Midlands franchise.
24. As part of the franchise specification there should be a requirement on the new franchisee to work pro-actively with the relevant Local Transport Authority and local bus operators in order to deliver the seamless journey experience for public transport users, taking advantage of the provisions within the Bus Services Act 2017 where it helps to achieve this strategic outcome.
25. In order to improve the passenger experience it should be a requirement of the new franchise that free access to Wi-Fi is provided by the franchisee, both at stations and on-board services.

Other Strategic Issues

26. The decision to drop the electrification of the Midland Main Line north of Kettering is extremely disappointing. The continued reliance on diesel power for services north of Kettering represents a missed opportunity in terms of reducing the environmental impact of rail services. In addition the use of bi-modes, with their higher weight, is likely to result in increased maintenance and renewal costs in the medium/long term. Experience suggests that in the UK the stop-start nature of electrification programmes means that each new project has to go through a similar learning curve, meaning that opportunities to embed experience learnt with one project are much reduced.
27. The delivery of East West Rail infrastructure will have a transformational impact on existing travel patterns, as well as stimulating new travel patterns. There should be a requirement on the new franchisee to be work pro-actively with the Department for Transport and the emerging Sub-national Transport Body to identify opportunities for new or amended services during the lifetime of the next franchise and to identify changes in the specification that might be required for future franchises.
28. The proposal for a commitment to explore improvements across the area that will improve connections with other rail operators is welcomed. The East Coast Main Line is named as a specific route that will be considered; however it is essential that interaction with Thameslink is included as a priority for this work.

On-going Engagement

29. The Strategic Transport Forum, as the emerging Sub-national Transport Body, would welcome the opportunity to work closely with the Department for Transport in the development of the franchise specification, alongside other sub-national bodies.

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