

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

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Report Originator	Head of Development Services	Fwd Plan Ref No: -	
Wards Affected	All	4 October 2017	
Title	EAST MIDLANDS RAIL FRANCHISE PUBLIC CONSULTATION		

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform Members of the contents of the East Midlands Rail Franchise Public Consultation; and to agree the response of Kettering Borough Council for submission to the Department for Transport.

2. INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Department for Transport is holding a consultation on the East Midlands Rail Franchise, which sets out proposals for the future delivery of train services on the East Midlands rail network. A link to the consultation document is provided at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-east-midlands-rail-franchise> The consultation closes on 11th October 2017, the remaining timetable proposing to issue an Invitation to Tender in April 2018, the Contract Award in Spring 2019, and the Franchise to start in August 2019. This is a tight timetable made tougher by the general election earlier this year.
- 2.2 The consultation is seeking views on a range of issues including journey times; frequency/stopping patterns; overcrowding; on-board facilities; airport connectivity; plus other service improvements. The document notes that the franchise covers a broad area of the country, serving Liverpool, Leeds, Lincoln, Norwich and London, as well as the towns and cities on Kettering's branch of the line, between Sheffield and London St. Pancras International.
- 2.3 The franchise is made up of four distinct passenger markets, these being intercity; London commuter; inter-urban; and local and regional. The consultation document proposes to restructure the current service as Kettering knows it in favour of two distinct services. The **London commuter** market, described as "commuters into London St. Pancras on the Midland Main Line, provided by trains stopping at Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough, Bedford, Luton and Luton Airport Parkway." The other service passing through Kettering is proposed as the **Intercity** service, described as "Long distance travel along the Midland Main Line between Sheffield, Derby, Nottingham, Leicester and London St. Pancras."
- 2.4 The document highlights a number of challenges facing the train service. These include issues around **infrastructure** (shared parts of the network with other operators; congested infrastructure; access windows for maintenance); **crowded trains** (some passengers have to stand for all or part of their journeys; some regional services are overcrowded); **long journey times** (many peak time

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service journey times are up to 30 minutes longer than off-peak services due to intercity services from Nottingham, Sheffield and Derby calling at a number stations to pick up commuters into London; intercity trains make commuter stops when these trains are not designed for short distance commuter journeys and to allow for passengers alighting quickly); **limited connectivity** (there's a poor configuration of connecting trains, particularly with the East Coast Main Line; journey times can be improved where a wait for a connection is required eg. there are services from Corby which currently miss a connection north by 2 minutes, leaving passengers with a delay of nearly an hour for the next train); **poor customer satisfaction** (punctuality and general satisfaction is good, however passenger satisfaction compared to other long distance operators is below average; facilities and services at stations need to reflect growth in travel and expectations, including access to information, safety and security, onward journey options and connection to WiFi; the current diesel trains are older than average and don't fit with modern expectation and comfort).

- 2.5 It should be noted that this consultation emerged shortly after the cancellation of electrification to the line north of Kettering, and in seeking to cut out intercity stops south of Leicester, may reflect the continuing pressure from midlands and northern cities for reduced journey times from their stations onto London.

Planned Improvements Affecting Kettering Borough

- 2.6 Significant upgrades to Midland Main Line are planned to be delivered within the next three years. The new franchisee will be able to take full advantage of the upgrades, to deliver a modern service to a growing customer base. The document proposes that a brand new fleet of bi-mode trains will deliver benefits to customers in terms of speed, efficiency and comfort. Cooperation between Network Rail and the next operator is recognised as being of importance to ensure customers are properly supported and informed whilst work is on-going on the continued upgrade work and electrification.
- 2.7 The consultation document sets out passengers' top ten priorities for improvement for the East Midlands franchise:
- Price and value for money
 - Passengers always able to get a seat
 - Trains sufficiently frequent
 - Free WiFi
 - Train company keeps passengers informed about delays
 - More trains arrive on time than now
 - Less frequent disruptions
 - Accurate and timely information at stations
 - Well maintained and clean toilets
 - Trains maintained and cleaned to a high standard
- 2.8 As indicated earlier in this report, the franchise document proposes a solution that involves dividing the service for Midland Main Line into two distinct markets,

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those being an intercity service and a commuter service. It indicates the intercity service will not stop as often at stations served by the commuter service, fewer peak time services will stop at Kettering and none at Wellingborough or stations further south. In terms of the commuter service, it describes “dedicated high quality” commuter trains operating on the Corby to London route. The consequence of this being that intercity journeys between destinations north and south of Kettering would no longer have direct through-trains, passengers would instead potentially change at Kettering.

- 2.9 Alongside these changes to the franchise, the consultation document also sets out that whilst electrification to Corby will be complete in 2019, plans to undertake electrification of the line beyond Kettering to Leicester, Derby, Nottingham and Sheffield have been cancelled. Instead, the Government wants to explore the potential of bi-mode rolling stock and ‘alternative technologies’ to achieve benefits similar to high speed electric trains. Bi-mode train technology offers seamless transfer from diesel power to electric that is undetectable to passengers.
- 2.10 Discussions have been taking place over a number of years between the Council and Northamptonshire County Council, Philip Hollobone and various Ministers, the Department for Transport, Network Rail, SEMLEP, East Midlands Councils, East Midlands Trains, and the Kettering Rail Users to ensure all parties are familiar with the merits of an enhanced service for Kettering in both the short and long-term.

Proposed Kettering Borough Council Response

- 2.11 **Intercity first stop out of and last stop into London** - The provision of a strong rail service for Kettering is critical for the Borough’s continued housing and business growth. The town is well placed on the line to serve as the first stop out of London for the intercity service, it being the most northerly town on the main branch of newly electrified Midland Main Line before the proposed commuter service diverts to Corby. Kettering Borough is one of the fastest growing areas in England. Kettering should be the first stop out of London, and the last stop into London for southbound intercity services.
- 2.12 North Northamptonshire will see a population rise from approximately 320,000 to 394,000 by 2031. To put that in context, North Northamptonshire is currently around the size of Coventry or Leicester, with growth the area will be around the size of Bristol. Kettering is central within North Northamptonshire, and easily commutable. Kettering Borough continues to take the lead across North Northamptonshire in delivering the Government’s growth agenda, and continues to be identified as one of the fastest growing towns nationally in terms of population and business base. Hanwood Park, a major mixed-use sustainable urban extension to the east of Kettering containing 5,500 dwellings commenced last year. With delivery set to continue throughout the period of the new franchise and beyond, other major housing and employment schemes under-

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construction, and access to the A14 very nearby the station, the catchment for growth in passengers is significant.

- 2.13 **Connectivity north** - Kettering suffered a major reduction in its service north in November 2007, with the loss of its two stops an hour between Kettering and Leicester. The loss in frequency of the service reduces convenience, and as a result passenger numbers. As reported in the Network Rail study of October 2013 entitled 'Regional Urban Market Study', there is a strong market for travel from Kettering into Leicester, this for business, education and leisure. Restoration of this service through the introduction of at least two intercity trains an hour north will improve patronage previously lost, and with passengers connecting at Kettering from Corby and stations south of Kettering, will attract a significant customer base which might otherwise use the road network for convenience if the service is not seen to be sufficiently frequent.
- 2.14 **Frequency and choice** – The new timetable should provide frequency and choice at peak times, providing resilience and protecting against overcrowding of services should trains be cancelled or delayed. Commuter growth will increase much quicker with the provision of a shadow service which would provide flexibility for both the operator and passenger through cancellations and missed trains.
- 2.15 **Intercity quality service and rolling stock** – It is noted that the franchise refers to the provision of a brand new fleet of bi-mode intercity trains with the capability of delivering speed, efficiency and comfort. The Council support the Department for Transport's stance that the stock should be new and capable of delivering speed, efficiency and comfort, but investment in high standards of stock should not be for intercity alone, the commuter service should equally be provided with investment in its stock too. However, it would question whether the bi-mode trains as proposed are sufficiently capable or reliable enough to provide the service, as opposed to the current Meridian 222's. To provide the journey times the service requires may need solutions, including the potential for a higher proportion of powered cars than the norm.
- 2.16 There is a lack of clarity in the consultation document about what a "quality commuter service" looks like, the only commitment given is for longer trains. It is highly likely that any such service will have a longer journey time into and out of London than currently enjoyed. The comfort and facilities on these trains may partly compensate for longer journey times, so it is critical that these aspects are properly specified in the franchise and not left to operators to find the cheapest solution. It is also important for a free WiFi service to be available on the trains, allowing the ability for customers to carry out business and communicate whilst travelling on the service. The WiFi service must be of sufficient speed and capacity to be effective for the level of customer usage undoubtedly attracted to using any facility.
- 2.17 **Opportunities for Growth in Business** – Network Rail and Kettering Borough Council are both a major landowner in the vicinity of the Railway Station. The

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Council has an agreed set of planning policies, approved through the adopted Kettering Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP) to guide development in the area. The AAP identifies the area around the station as the Station Quarter, the vision being to deliver a high quality sub-regional destination offering a sustainable mix of employment, transport infrastructure and open space. It is recognised that Network Rail now intends to use a part of its land for the creation of a new rail stabling facility. However, there remain significant parcels of land to both the east and west of the station, with potential to come forward and strengthen the station's customer base.

2.18 The prospective uses contributing to added vitality around the station are projected to include offices; residential units; car parking; and improvements to other transport provision, creating a strong rail and bus transport hub. The opportunity to provide car parking on the western side of the line, along with employment opportunities, allows the potential for a beneficial reconfiguration of uses which enhances the entrance to the station, and adds to the traveller base in the nearby vicinity. Progress is also being made in advancing plans to dramatically increase the stock of residential properties elsewhere within the town centre by around 700 dwellings, this will potentially add significantly to commuter numbers. Continued housing delivery at Hanwood Park, a scheme of 5,500 dwellings, and accessibility to the A14 route provides significant growth potential.

2.19 Kettering Borough's housing market is buoyant, completion rates increasing year on year and hitting 706 dwelling completions in the last monitoring year 2016/17. This high level of housing delivery is expected to be maintained in years to come. Growth in employment opportunities remains strong, with progress being made with a wave of strategic business parks coming forward around Kettering.

3 CONSULTATION AND CUSTOMER IMPACT

3.1 The Department for Transport East Midlands Rail Franchise Public Consultation was published on 20th July 2017, the consultation closes on 11th October 2017. The views of passengers; communities and businesses are being sought, assisted by a series of 11 events spread across the franchise area. In the case of Kettering, an event was held at the Kettering Conference Centre on 13th September 2017 between 2 – 4pm.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The successful Rail Franchise company will provide an agreed standard of service commencing August 2019 to at least 2026. The quality of the railway and service provided will have some influence on prosperity, housing delivery rates, potential development schemes in the vicinity of the railway station, and the direction of future policy proposals.

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5. USE OF RESOURCES

- 5.1 The resources used in preparing this report have been met by the existing Development Services Planning Policy budget.

6. RECOMMENDATION

That Members note the contents of this report and agree the comments made at paragraphs 2.11 to 2.19 for submission to the Department for Transport.

Contact Officer: Simon Richardson – Development Manager

Previous Reports/ Minutes:

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