



East Midlands Rail Franchise Public Consultation

September 2017

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train driver's union representing approximately 20,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems. The union has over 500 members working for the East Midlands Trains franchise.
2. ASLEF appreciates the opportunity to respond to this consultation about the next contract for the right to run the East Midlands services and highlight some of the issues we feel are important. The union is glad to be able to have input where views are sought on operational issues and other such issues.
3. As the Transport Secretary mentions in the foreword to this consultation, the Midlands is a dynamic region, responsible for over a fifth of the UK's total manufacturing capability and accounting for over four million jobs in the service sector. As the local economy grows, passenger numbers on this strategically vital network are growing too. Much of the railway is operating on the edge of what it can cope with because of capacity constraints, and yet the long term economic prosperity of the region relies on improvements being made to both long distance rail lines and local services. Passengers want more frequent services, better punctuality and reliability, more space, more seats, more comfort, more affordable fares, and better customer service, and the end of the current East Midlands franchise gives the government the opportunity to set the conditions for major changes, from April 2019 onwards.
4. The East Midlands Trains franchise has rolling stock with an average age of 25 years and many of the trains are uncomfortable and overcrowded at peak times (even though first class carriages are comparatively empty). Passengers will welcome the planned introduction of a new, modern fleet of trains on the intercity line and the introduction of higher capacity trains, with an increase in length of up to 12 on dedicated commuter services – so long as the extended platforms and the new fleet of trains are ready to be used when changes under the new franchise are introduced (it is not clear when the new fleet of trains is expected to be introduced). In our opinion, however, the decision to replace existing diesel-powered trains

with a fleet of bi-mode intercity trains, able to run on both electrified and non-electrified lines is not the best choice because bi-mode trains are more expensive, less reliable and slower to accelerate than electric trains. Had plans to electrify lines all the way up to Sheffield not been scrapped, bi-mode trains would not be necessary.

5. As regards this decision, we were disappointed in July when the government announced that it was halting plans to fully electrify the Midland Main Line. We are not convinced by the reason that was given for cancelling these plans, which was to spare passengers the disruption from putting up wires and masts along the route, and we believe it is a very short-sighted decision to have made. Parts of the infrastructure are currently being upgraded but major work still needs to be undertaken to improve the infrastructure on the railways and investment in electrification would improve services for passengers by making trains faster, cleaner and more reliable, as well as reducing CO2 emissions and creating long term savings on maintenance. The construction process would cause challenges and unpopular disruptions, but in the long-term the benefits would make these worthwhile.

6. ASLEF considers that many of the proposals within this document are simply shifting limited capacity around the franchise rather than fully addressing challenges and we reject some of the choices offered in the consultation. For example, one of the options under consideration is to improve long-distance intercity journey times on the East Midlands Mainline by not stopping as often at stations used by commuters. The consultation states that passengers at these stations would instead be served by dedicated commuter trains but 'some stations would have fewer services at peak times compared to today'. It is clear that commuters who currently use the intercity service would be faced with a longer journey as a result of the changes. We don't believe that we should have to reduce services to certain stations in order to reduce journey times. These sticking plaster solutions are short sighted and benefit some passengers at the expense of others and simply confirm that the government's rail policy is no more than make do and mend. Separating the intercity and commuter markets may reduce the long-distance journey times and longer trains may partially relieve over-crowding on commuter lines, but this is not sufficient enough to provide the infrastructure enhancements needed to increase capacity. Where lines are overly congested, only by investing in building new lines will we be able to relieve the problem and continue to grow the railway. The consultation document does state that 'we are investing in building new track in order to increase the number of services on this route and enable a better service for passengers' but the small amount of new track and upgrading currently underway are insufficient to make a real difference.

7. Another consequence of this proposal to split long distance and commuter services would be that journeys between destinations north and south of Kettering (e.g. Luton Airport to Nottingham or Leicester to Wellingborough) would no longer have direct through-trains. This would be regrettable, given the intention, declared elsewhere in the document to prioritise improving connections across the East Midlands network. Currently millions of pounds are

being invested in the construction of a transit service between Luton Airport Station and the airport terminal. By 2020, according to local MP Gavin Shuker, Luton Airport's national economic contribution will total £2.3 billion and will support 37,000 jobs in the region, but better connectivity to the North is crucial for Luton Airport to achieve its potential. Unfortunately, if fewer services stop at that station and passengers travelling North have to change at Kettering, this could severely affect passenger numbers.

8. Aside of the effects on the airport, businesses and residents in towns along the line would also be negatively impacted. Deputy Mayor of Bedford Charles Royden has reported that an increase in the journey time between London and Bedford from 35 minutes to 50 minutes would adversely affect Bedford in comparison with neighbouring Milton Keynes and Stevenage where no increase in journey time is planned. The proposed changes could take £3.5m a year out of the town and deter people from going to live there.
9. The consultation document recognises the importance of improving rail services for people who want to travel on routes with services either too slow or too few, so it is disappointing that the suggestions for improving services to some stations should be accompanied by a trade-off withdrawal of services, increased journey times elsewhere and / or a negative impact on freight services. It is paradoxical that bidders for the franchise are encouraged to think of ways to improve connections on the East Midlands network and with other train operator services, but at the same time unpopular changes would be made which would break up services and increase journey times. We believe that more ambitious work must be undertaken to generate capacity for more frequent services, instead of minor adjustments that only really skirt around the edges of the problem and offer short-term relief.
10. We would like to draw attention to the fact that even minor adjustments can have major implications for staff on the railways. The consultation asks for views on route changes and the possible transfer of responsibility for running several parts of routes from other operators to the East Midlands franchise and vice versa. While we would be in favour of new routes and connections that improve services - changing the destination of services and transferring services between operators, as suggested on lines between Liverpool – Norwich; Barton-on-Humber – Cleethorpes; and Birmingham – Nottingham, would be both costly and disruptive for the CrossCountry, Northern and TransPennine Express franchises, and their employees. While these transfers may offer some benefits, remapping the region's railways and transferring routes between franchises presents an upheaval for staff alongside the complications of TUPE and leads to a disparate and fragmented workforce with different sets of terms and conditions within the driving grade. Fragmentation is one of the biggest reasons for the inefficiency and high costs in running the rail network in Britain. This was something highlighted in the McNulty Report in 2011 and is why ASLEF campaigns for a national, integrated and publically owned network to replace the current system.

11. We note with concern the Transport Secretary's reference to encouraging additional private sector investment in infrastructure development with new models of private funding, and new commercial, community and residential developments at stations. We are also alarmed by the assertion that 'the government is committed to seeking private sector funding to design, build and operate routes that have traditionally been the responsibility of Network Rail'. ASLEF opposes any further privatisation of the railways. Privatisation has created a fragmented and dysfunctional system where fares are among the highest in Europe, services are overcrowded and much of the rolling stock is obsolete. Every year we see private companies move hundreds of millions of pounds offshore in dividends rather than using the money to hold down fares and help investment in Britain's railway network. A more integrated system would be far more efficient and would spare us wasting resources on complex interfaces, transaction costs, debt servicing and dividend payments to private investors. We would also have serious health and safety concerns about privately-run rail companies taking over responsibilities from Network Rail, since the devastating fatal rail accidents at Potters Bar and Labroke Grove. Network Rail isn't perfect and needs reform but profit-driven, cost cutting and sub-contracting private companies simply can't be trusted with safety and safety critical work such as maintenance, track renewal and signalling.

12. ASLEF objects to any proposals which would put rail freight at a disadvantage or undermine access to the network in favour of passenger traffic. The consultation document suggests that certain routes covered by the East Midlands franchise could see the introduction of passenger services over freight-only routes which would damage the predicted growth in rail freight: Network Rail's Freight Market Study projected an annual growth in total rail freight volumes of about 3% per annum to 2043. Intermodal volumes were forecast to increase by over 5% per annum and construction volumes were forecast to grow by 1% per annum. In this context, closing lines to freight to give priority to passenger services would be extremely short sighted and would lead to freight being pushed onto the roads. Rail freight produces 76% less CO2 emissions than the equivalent HGV journey so pushing freight off the railways would also be detrimental to the UK meeting legally binding climate change targets that it has signed up to. Rather than allowing freight routes to be marginalised for the benefit for passenger trains, we would like the franchise specification to include incentives for protecting routes for the movement of freight on rail.

13. The railway performs an important social function, connecting people and businesses. Cutting less busy services and reducing services can have significant negative effects on passengers and on whole communities. Clearly, resources are always finite, and priorities have to be made, but rail should always be seen as an important public service, not simply a commercial interest. Many vital services for local communities are not commercially profitable, so we applaud the DfT for its concern that the franchise holder consult with local authorities, heritage rail, community partnerships, passenger groups and other stakeholders about their needs before taking decisions about services and investment. While ASLEF believes that the British railway

should always be considered as a national entity, we fully support the idea of local authorities and local groups having more of a say over how their transport system functions and operates. These stakeholders are often best placed to define and negotiate the needs of passengers within their catchment area and they can offer valuable insights to national decision makers about how best to improve timetabling and ensure that connections with other modes of transport are fully integrated. Rail operators can benefit in many ways from working closely with Network Rail and other stakeholders involved in delivering rail services – particularly during maintenance and upgrade work – and as key stakeholders, we would also stress the importance of trade unions being part of the formal list of interested parties.

14. As a union we welcome the inclusion of the reference to provision of information, training and tools for staff, to equip them to respond to the needs of passengers and to create an environment they are enthusiastic to work in. We are also pleased that the new operator is expected to introduce apprenticeships or similar schemes to get more young people interested in a career on the railway. ASLEF welcomes the fact the DfT has acknowledged that the franchise must meet its equality obligations. We believe this is an important objective. Winning a franchise is winning a public sector contract so operators have a duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010. It is a core belief of ASLEF that the staff in our industry should reflect the communities they serve. The new franchise agreement must set out how the holder plans to increase the amount of people from underrepresented groups in our industry and in the driving grade itself.
15. We strongly support the DfT's requirement that bidders increase the availability and visibility of staff on the network. Cutting the number of staff, either at stations or on the train, is not what passengers want: The Transport Focus' report "*Passenger attitudes towards rail staff*" notes that when asked what could allay concerns about security on rail journeys, passengers consistently identified staff presence as key. Their research has shown that passengers like staff to be readily available to help vulnerable or disabled passengers, provide information and act as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour. We have seen elsewhere that cuts to railway staff are often counterproductive and deter people from using transport at night due to lack of assistance and concerns for their safety in empty stations. This is why ASLEF believes that there must be visible staffing at stations and on trains from the first service in the morning until the last service at night.
16. We would welcome the introduction of new technology which improves services for passengers and signalling systems. Obviously the union would expect to be consulted before decisions are taken about the implementation of any such technology.

17. Demand for rail services continues to increase, yet capacity remains limited. Managing infrastructure enhancements will be a major challenge for the new franchise holder. ASLEF believes that these hurdles will only be overcome by working in co-operation with all stakeholders, including the unions who represent the workers who deliver these essential services. We look forward to working closely with the DfT, the rail operator and other partners, to ensure that the railway in the Midlands provides a quality service where people are put before profit.

Mick Whelan
General Secretary
77 St John Street
London
EC1M 4NN