



ASLEF's Response to the East Anglia Rail Franchise Consultation

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 just under 850 members working for the Greater Anglia franchise.
2. ASLEF is glad to have the opportunity to respond to this consultation and raise some of the issues the union feels need addressing on this busy and important network. As key stakeholders, trade unions should be part of the formal list of interested parties.
3. The overarching issue that creates many of the problems on this franchise is the short termism and frequent remapping of the region's railways. This has led to a disparate and fragmented workforce where even within the driving grade, we have three sets of terms and conditions.
4. From a staffing perspective, it is bad for moral and industrial relations for this situation to continue for much longer. Since 2004 there has been no progress on harmonisation and therefore ASLEF calls upon the franchise agreement to require the new holder to support and where necessary, fund harmonisation to improve staff morale.
5. One of the key passenger priorities highlighted by Passenger Focus is the availability of train and station staff. For this reason ASLEF believes that there must be staffing at stations from the first service in the morning until the last service at night. Potential cuts to station staff could be

counterproductive with many of the more vulnerable people in our society deciding not to use free capacity late at night due to a lack of staffing and concerns for their safety in empty stations. This could lead to a reduction in revenue and thus offset the savings accrued from getting rid of the staff in the first place.

6. Our members also have problems with parking. Train drivers often have to get to work at times when train services and other public transport options are not yet running or have stopped running. Despite this, parking facilities have been eroded to minimal or non-existent levels at some locations in favour of paying customers through NPC. This presents our members with real problems.
7. Additionally ASLEF would categorically reject any attempt to impose DOO on any more services than those that currently utilise it. The union feels passengers expect a visible member of staff on trains. Taking staff away from services will have safety implications and could well put passengers, especially those who are more vulnerable, off of using services.
8. ASLEF welcomes the fact the DfT has acknowledged that the franchise is covered by the public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010. This is something that ASLEF have called upon for many years. Winning a franchise is winning a public sector contract. Therefore the relevant duties must apply. 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 address this issue. ASLEF will seek to work closely on this with any franchise holder and it is a core part of our work. We must look to increase the amount of people from underrepresented groups in our industry and in the driving grade itself.
9. In regard to service provision, there are huge challenges for the Eastern Region. Many of the proposals in the document seek to simply shift

capacity around the franchise. Not enough is being done to look at how we can make the necessary infrastructure enhancement that will allow an increase in capacity. There is a real sense that the eastern region is the “poor relation” within the greater south east region and London’s commuter belt. This is especially the case when considering the growth in recent years of Norwich in both population and industry. Even within the franchise itself, much of the investment has been in the west of the franchise, for example around Cambridge. The east of the franchise desperately needs much capacity upgrades.

10. An example of this required investment is the swing bridge in Norwich. Trains leave Norwich station and are able to be reported as leaving on time for statistical purposes, yet sit just outside before the bridge for a significant period of time, leading to service being late. This is simply due to the lack of capacity. Depots in the area were not designed for the amount of traffic required.
11. Additionally, ASLEF believes that electrification of the line Breckland Line beyond Ely to Norwich would create a real opportunity for alternative routes and a “get out of jail free card” when things go wrong.
12. ASLEF also feels that dualling the line from Felixstowe to Ipswich is something that would create many benefits to the area in terms of both freight and passenger rail. Short of this a loop would also assist traffic in the area.
13. One obvious way to improve capacity is longer trains. We have many stations within this franchise with platforms long enough to accommodate more carriages. However over the years, sections of these platforms have been closed. Therefore only a limited amount of construction would be required to enable greater capacity in many cases.

14. The experience of our members is that the current franchise fails to have any strong contingency plans when things go wrong or a properly thought out connections policy for onwards journeys. Often after services have been cancelled, Greater Anglia fail to put on additional stops. Part of the new franchise agreement must therefore be a properly considered contingency plan detailing how the new franchise owner will deal with disruption. They must also ensure that they will consider peoples connecting journeys throughout the network.

15. Some of the headline demands suggested in the document look impressive, but ASLEF is concerned that in chasing milestone figures, other services will be sacrificed or negatively impacted. For example, having a London to Norwich 90 minute service is clearly something that all stakeholders would support. It should of course be considered a relatively easy target considering the distance is a little over 100 miles, but the infrastructure works against services running at the necessary speed. It is therefore difficult to see how this can happen without cutting other services and station stops.

16. ASLEF believes that Stansted services could be improved by extending journeys further north in the region to Norwich, Kings Lynn and up to the East Coast Mainline. It seems that many of these services have taken a backward step. When the Stansted Express service began, morning peak services took 37 minutes from London. They now take up to 57 minutes.

17. ASLEF fails to see any benefit to the proposed changes proposed around connections to the north of England. The current East Midlands service between Liverpool Lime Street and Norwich should remain as it is. There appears to be no advantages in terminating the current Ipswich to Peterborough service at Ely. The only consequence of this is further upheaval for staff alongside the additional complications of TUPE and

reduced staff morale. In exchange there is no apparent benefit in connections from the eastern region to the north.

18. ASLEF has long had concerns over alliancing. Freight plays an important role in the East of England. Felixstowe is the busiest container port in Britain and the 28th busiest port in the world. It employs over 2,000 staff and over 40% of the UK's import and export trade passes through the Port. It is therefore essential that freight paths are kept open. The risk of alliancing is that joint incentives for the Train Operator and Network rail may lead to passenger transport being prioritised over freight transport. The additional track maintenance needed for paths used heavily by freight means Network Rail also have an incentive to run more passenger services at the expense of freight. ASLEF therefore believes that any alliance should also formally involve Freight Operating Companies that use the regions infrastructure.

19. ASLEF are concerned by the approach the DfT has regarding service specification. "The intention is to specify a minimum level of passenger services to be operated in response to stakeholder, passenger and market needs. In developing this specification we wish to provide flexibility for the operator to respond to the growing demographics of the region, market changes, and future commercial opportunities." Often necessary and vital services for local communities and economies are not commercially profitable services. It must be the big picture that is worked towards. Not the profit of the franchise winner. Rail should always be seen as an important public service, not simply a commercial interest. This is especially the case when one considers that the running of the franchise required government funding of £97 million last year. Taxpayers and passengers therefore have a right to demand levels of service provision without the market have a louder voice on the matter.

20. ASLEF is aware that many of the issues raised within this response will not be covered by the new franchise agreement because they involve larger infrastructure improvements. However, many of the proposals within this document are simply shifting the limited capacity around the franchise. For too long, there has not been enough real investment in the railway in the east of England. We need more ambition, and less minor adjustments that only really tinker around the edge of the problem. Often these minor adjustments achieve very little benefit for passengers but have major implications for staff. The region needs to build on its capacity, improve infrastructure and to have joined up thinking with all stakeholders involved. Without this we will not be able to achieve the improvements the region greatly needs.

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