

CROSS COUNTRY FUTURE TIMETABLE CONSULTATION COMMENTS OF CAMPAIGN FOR RAIL

Introduction

Campaign for Rail is an organisation that advocates railway interests and the best interests of all rail passengers and groups, including (but not limited to) Rail User Groups, Freight Development, and re-opening of lines and services. We also lobby for and promote rail interests with the relevant statutory bodies.

This document forms our response to the “consultation” into the proposed timetable for the Cross Country franchise, to commence from December 2017. This, in our view is not really a consultation. The consultation document published by Cross Country Trains details a series of proposals which to all intents and purposes appear to be a done deal, with questions leading respondees in such a way that anyone questioning the proposals is suggesting they are opposing plans for additional seats and services. No alternative options have been given in the consultation document for respondees’ consideration.

If there are no alterations to the proposed December 2017 timetable as a result of comments from stakeholders and rail users one can only conclude the exercise is a sham. We would therefore expect a full document to be produced during the first few months of 2017 outlining what rail users and stakeholders thought of the proposals and how their comments have been used to influence the planning for the new timetable.

Future Timetable Concept

We challenge objective 1 (3.1 page 5). The Department for Transport and Cross Country Trains (XC) should not be claiming to ‘improve the experience of 250,000 passengers’ by reducing services. They should be actively growing the business and seeking the best ways to cater for all their passengers [and potential passengers] rather than by reducing the extent of the network and burning off some demand.

Objective 3 shows the root of the problem - ‘matching supply and demand, given the resources available’. The Department for Transport should be ashamed of this objective. It reflects lack of XC’s lack of involvement in London and the South East (since the withdrawal of direct services from the North to Brighton in 2007), that decision makers there will not rise to the challenge of providing the additional stock required. IEPs out of Paddington and King’s Cross will soon release HSTs. We must ask how they can be justified to be cascaded to provide Cardiff - Taunton shuttles; whether the best use of them is to provide a second train per hour local service in Cornwall; and if a fleet is to transfer to Scotland for internal services, should that not be on condition that the Class 170s they release there are cascaded to XC for increased frequency and length of XC’s secondary services.

Furthermore, these cascades all involve shortening the HST sets, so a fleet of Mark 3 coaches will probably go into store or for scrapping. As Chiltern, (a franchise owned by Arriva who also manage XC) has demonstrated with the best journey experience for West Midland rail users, there is the opportunity to satisfy rising demand using these coaches. Where is this vision in XC’s planning? Completely lacking!

1. Do you agree with the proposal to enhance the number of seats on the Birmingham to Leicester route?

No!

The enhancement of seats on the Leicester route is very small. It will not meet demand in the medium term. It is certainly not justified by withdrawal of the few Bromsgrove stops, which seems to be the basis for reducing capacity on a couple of trains by one coach.

The company appears to have completely ignored the potential market of passengers from Bromsgrove which has just seen recent investment in a brand new station now suitable for a town which is growing. It is of course true that there will be plenty of extra seats between Bromsgrove and Birmingham in a year and a half's time when Cross City extends to there but XC has failed to realise the untapped market south from Bromsgrove when it is fed three times an hour from the southern side of Birmingham. Some of these are rail passengers who now go north to New Street before doubling back for the South West, but there are many on the M5 who are not attracted by this but would join a XC train at Bromsgrove.

Rather than removing the Bromsgrove stops XC and the Department for Transport should look at increasing services stopping here, by inserting a Bromsgrove stop into the Birmingham - Cardiff. This would improve connectivity particularly for passengers travelling to Bristol and Cheltenham and eliminate the New Street detour.

A better overall solution might be to switch the Cardiff – Nottingham service to run via Leicester, leaving Birmingham - Nottingham as a separate service which could be taken over by the new West Midlands Rail franchise which is due to commence operation in October 2017. Cross Country Trains should note that Leicester is a larger city than Derby and should therefore potentially generate more passenger journeys with significant additional business also likely to be available from Loughborough.

Finally, we note that one long-standing problem on the Birmingham – Leicester route is the long gap between the 20:52 and 22:22 weekday departures from Birmingham. This has not been addressed in the direct award. We would urge that the new timetable includes a service to bridge this gap, and we note that over the last few weeks a “relief” service has been provided during periods of peak demand caused by the Christmas festivities in Birmingham.

2. Do you agree with the proposal to extend one service per day in each direction from Leicester to Cambridge?

We support this proposal.

3. Do you agree with the proposal to deliver over 3000 additional seats between Bristol and Exeter and other changes to services in the South West for its delivery?

No!

The plan is based on the wrong principle - ‘destinations west of Exeter with only one change of trains’ is not what XC should be about. Rail users want through trains. The more interchanges you force a passenger to make on a long-distance rail journey, the less attractive rail becomes compared to a motorway trip or domestic flight. The only through train from Torbay [in either direction] will be before the hotels have even started serving breakfast - a clear case of ‘we’ll run the trains when it suits us, not when the passengers want to travel’ (an old BR attitude from the bad old days of the 1970’s).

The proposal will do nothing to assist leisure travel or in meeting a key requirement for the XC franchise, the maximisation of revenue in order to reduce the demand for subsidy. The plan is also a kick in the face for the tourism industry in the South West who've suffered in recent years following the Dawlish sea wall collapse.

We need to see the proposed increase in XC capacity in the context of GWR's increase in capacity with the new HST service from Cardiff to Taunton and Paddington to West of England services via the Berks and Hants line. This may well be the wrong route to provide so much extra capacity.

4. Do you agree with the proposal to increase the number of seats per day through Reading on CrossCountry services? Do you agree with the proposal to introduce an earlier first train from Reading to Bournemouth via Southampton?

The first three XC services of the day from Bournemouth currently require 80 minutes empty running from Eastleigh to Bournemouth. To utilise one of these ECS runs to provide an earlier morning service from Reading to Southampton and Bournemouth is supported. With regard to the Guildford service, the early start and late return of the token service are to suit the convenience of the operator. This minimal service was a political expedient rather than to tap a passenger demand.

5. Do you agree with the proposal to operate through services from the Midlands to Aberdeen in the daytime vice early morning / late evening?

No!

This is not 'a more attractive service for through journeys from the Midlands' to Aberdeen, leaving Birmingham New Street at 06.00, rather than at 13.03. It is just not possible to reach New Street so early in the morning from most places in the Midlands by rail. It may be a good time from 'Yorkshire and the North' but those stations will continue to have Aberdeen services provided by Virgin Trains East Coast. Similarly our only through service from Aberdeen, to be at 15.20, will arrive in Birmingham New Street at 23.25, much too late to get home by public transport. All this is well hidden in Appendix C. In effect, we would be losing our Aberdeen service. This is unacceptable.

6. Do you agree with the proposal to utilise higher capacity rolling stock in the "core" of the network at peak times?

In principle yes, *but not at the expense of services beyond the core*. Extra capacity in the core should be provided by extra stock.

7. Do you agree with the proposal to enhance the number of seats in the Bristol area?

It is strange that CrossCountry's timetables are not annotated to show the 06:00 Leeds - Plymouth and 12:25 Plymouth - Edinburgh (Glasgow) trains as worked by an HST set on weekdays. These 30 year old trains are still popular with passengers; some actually deliberately choose to use the HST operated services rather than those run by the newer Voyager trains which have been criticised for passenger comfort.

We note that it is proposed to up the number of HST's in service on weekdays from 4, rather than the current 2/3. However, all this means is that usage of the HST's will be at the level promised when Arriva won the XC franchise back in 2007, however the pledge then was for 8 car HST's to be in service on Mondays – Fridays.

8. Do you agree with the proposal to increase the peak time service frequency between Leeds and Sheffield, by providing 1,000 extra seats per day?

We would agree that it is desirable to increase the capacity on between Leeds and Sheffield. However, should this be provided by XC? These Yorkshire services are using paths allocated to Northern, which XC expects to vacate. Why take them up now? Northern should provide these additional services, and additional stock should be provided to Northern for this to happen.

9. Please provide any further observations you would like to include in your response to this consultation.

One service which has not been mentioned in this consultation is the daily return service from Manchester to Cardiff. Consideration should be given to operating this as a separate service so that appropriate rolling stock can be provided regardless of which unit is used between Manchester and Bristol.

We note that it is proposed for the 1225 Plymouth – Glasgow Central to be cut back to terminate at Edinburgh, while the 1325 Plymouth – Edinburgh will be cut back to Newcastle. This is to the detriment of cross border passengers and seems solely to enable the HST's to be stabled overnight at Heaton rather than Edinburgh Craigentenny. If one HST set was to be stabled at Craigentenny overnight, as it is now, the 0606 ex Edinburgh Waverley and 1325 ex Plymouth could operate as they do at present, rather than being truncated to start/terminate at Newcastle.

The plan promises improved journey times, though detail is scarce. Norton Bridge enables shorter times for Manchester trains, but where sectional times have been reduced in the past, this has generally been used to increase dwell time at major stations, such as Birmingham New Street. There is nothing here to suggest that will not continue to happen rather than the major timetable recast that would benefit long distance rail users. Longer than needed dwell times should not be used as a perturbation safety net to protect the PPM.

Services from Birmingham to Nottingham and Leicester are painfully slow - and actually slower than they were a few years ago. Nottingham averages just 47 mph. This must be improved and Midlands Connect is rightly looking for improvements to help economic development. Part of the problem is XC's requirement to give a service to local stations like Water Orton and Wilnecote. Local services to Derby and Nuneaton/Leicester should be handed over to West Midlands Rail so that XC can be speeded up.

What we should be seeing is the identification of where long distance through services would be justified, though perhaps only once a day, to better serve the nation and improve our quality of life. There is no mention of Liverpool, or Hull, or Blackpool, or Swansea.

Finally, there is also no mention of XC's important role on Summer Saturdays, such as to Newquay, other than to say that weekend services will mirror the midweek pattern. That is concerning.