

Cross Country rail franchise

There is an online version of this questionnaire that allows you save or print a copy of your response:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/government/consultations/cross-country-rail-franchise>

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to read the consultation document and to respond to the questions. Your views will contribute to the formulation of specification for the next Cross Country rail franchise.

Confidentiality and data protection

We are not asking for any personal data as part of this consultation. If we receive any it will be securely deleted.

Our privacy policy is on GOV.UK.

Responding

1. Are you responding:

on behalf of an organisation? (Go to [yes](#) question 2)

as an individual? (Go to question 3)

Organisation details

2. Name of organisation

[Campaign for Rail - www.campaignforrail.org.uk](http://www.campaignforrail.org.uk)

Your journey

3. Do you mostly travel on the Cross Country network as:

a leisure passenger?

commuting to and from work?

a business passenger?

[Our members include all of these.](#)

[We have experience of the whole Cross Country franchise from Aberdeen to Penzance.](#)

4. What is your most frequent journey (station to station) on the Cross Country network?

Campaign for Rail is West Midlands based. As Birmingham is at the core of the Cross Country network, our members' experiences are of all Cross Country routes.

5. How regularly do you travel by Cross Country?

Every day

4 to 6 times a week

2 to 3 times a week

Once a week

Once a fortnight

Once a month

Less than once a month

Once or twice a year

Never

6. What type of ticket do you usually buy?

Season ticket

Full fare

Advanced ticket

First class ticket

Standard ticket

Other:

7. How do you buy your ticket?

Online (Cross Country website)

Online (alternative operator)

At station

On train

Other:

Awareness

8. How did you hear about this consultation?

- Poster
- Internet
- Station e-board
- On train consultation
- Other: Campaign for Rail has been invited to, and attended the pre Consultation meetings arranged by DfT

Passenger survey

Information on these questions is included in the 'Cross Country passenger rail franchise' consultation document.

9. What are the particular services, routes and times of day where you think crowding on Cross Country services needs to be addressed most urgently?

The evening 'rush hour' sees more crowding than the morning 'rush hour' as evening commuting coincides with leisure travellers. The evening peak trains from Birmingham to both Leicester and Nottingham are desperately in need of more coaches. But we have experienced at other times too, such as severe crowding leaving Bristol Temple Meads to the South West at 11.15 and the 11.17 from Birmingham New Street to Plymouth is often overcrowded. Sunday afternoon and early evening are unacceptably busy in all directions from Birmingham.

10. Rank the following in order of priority for improvement for your future Cross Country services. Rank 1 for most important to 6 for least important.

more additional summer only services	5
later times of last trains	3
more frequent weekend services	2
earlier Sunday morning services	1
earlier times of first trains	4
more frequent weekday services	6

Which routes and stations and why?

On Sundays, the first arrivals into Birmingham New Street are not early enough [e.g. from Nottingham at 11.02, Leicester at 11.15, Cardiff at 12.45 and Stansted Airport at 13.38.] On weekdays, Birmingham to Leicester [20.52 - 22.22] and Bristol to Birmingham [20.30 - 22.00] because they each have a long gap in the evening service.

More frequent services during the day are not needed, just longer trains!

11. What changes would you like to see to the way Cross Country currently sells and provides tickets?

We object to charging for collecting tickets from a Fastticket machine at stations.

We are concerned that break of journey may no longer be allowed with Saver Returns.

12. What changes would you like to see to the Advanced Purchase on the day (APOD) system?

These should be sold without a seat reservation.

13. What additional information would be useful to you when planning your journeys or making connections onto other services?

Cross Country does not integrate with other TOCs. The perception of our members is that there are no connections, just coincidences if another TOC's train appears to be timed to continue one's journey. So for example, the iconic 08.20 from Aberdeen arrives at Par just 6 minutes after the last train of the day to Newquay departs. The Newquay train [GWR] only connects out of the Paddington to Penzance [GWR].

When approaching an interchange station, the Train Manager should routinely announce the platform and the departure times for each service likely to be someone's 'connection'. It should have real time validity including platform numbers, and if, during perturbation, a 'connection' is not being held, information about the next train should be given. If bustitution is in operation, the information should be made available as early as possible.

14. How would you like the information (in question above) communicated to you?

The train plan for your journey, including times and platforms, should be provided with fixed times tickets like Advance when purchased and, for all journeys, easily accessible electronically during the journey, updated in real time.

15. How do you believe Cross Country staff could be more effective in providing service and assistance that passengers need on a modern railway network?

Firstly, Cross Country need to inform station staff of which way round each train is before it reaches the platform. Where departure screens already show this, it is OFTEN incorrect. For principal stations, the presence of a member of Cross Country staff on the platform to help passengers stand in the correct area for their reserved seat would be a very worthwhile investment. Voyagers, if they are to continue, need much better labelling of coach numbers and which door for low numbered seats, and which for high numbers, to reduce the scrum as passengers and their luggage try to get past each other inside the coach.

Secondly, there are some Cross Country staff who offer an excellent service and try to help and reassure passengers on an individual basis, but they are the minority. Our experience is often of the invisibility of on board staff.

16. What comment do you have on improving the overall passenger experience before, during and after the journey?

Refreshments should be available on all trains [including some gluten free food]. It is suggested that this could be run as a concession to give it more incentive than it currently receives.

Cross Country should have enough rolling stock to cater for the market, including planning for growth. As many traffic centres as possible should be linked by through services as possible, with the core of the network having frequent regular interval trains [e.g. every 30 minutes]. Beyond the core may be hourly and extremities may be less frequent, from 2 hourly down to just one a day according to demand. For the leisure market, [very significant to Cross Country] there is more customer flexibility, but where few through trains are to be provided, they should be in parts of the day attractive to passengers rather than to suit the TOCs convenience or profits. So, for example, Arriva's recent proposal to run just one train a day from Torbay at the start of the day, before breakfast has even been served in Torbay's hotels, and to run the only through train to Aberdeen at 06.00 from Birmingham would be putting the TOC's convenience before that of the passengers the franchise ought to be serving. Serving and growing, rather than suppressing the market is our Number 1 wish. Much more rolling stock is essential, but not with uncomfortable seats squeezed in to the maximum, but aligned with windows and preferably without underfloor engines. The challenge is to be at least as good as the Mark 3 coach. We hope the ITT will favour enterprising management that seeks to grow the business, including serving more stations. There are great opportunities to do this by joining and splitting sets which would have long trains across the core of the network and half that length at the extremities, matching demand. For example, trains might normally divide at Exeter with the front set for Plymouth and rear set for Paignton.

17. How could the way in which Cross Country deals with your complaints and provides compensation to you be improved?

When a long distance XC train is running late, it is not unusual for that train to be terminated, especially at Birmingham New Street, after another unit has restarted the service there. We appreciate there is a case for this, but usually little help is given to passengers who are expected to find a train for the rest of their journey, some of whom would not have booked the journey if they had known they might have to change trains and would not have a reserved seat for some of it. We have heard of a limited mobility passenger who booked Passenger Assist at each end of her journey who was left to cope when her late running train was cancelled. For all passengers forced to decant, often resulting in reaching their destination at least an hour later than expected, XC seems to make little effort to encourage them to claim the compensation to which they are due. Train managers should give information on how to claim online and carry a good stock of claim forms, giving them out as soon as they know the service is to be curtailed.

18. Rank your priorities for improvement to the carriage layout for long distance inter-city Cross Country trains? Rank 1 for most important to 7 for least important.

More seats	1
More table seats as opposed to 'airline' seats	4
More comfortable room for short distance standing	7
Cycle storage	6
Seats that align with windows	2
Greater leg-room	3
Extra room for luggage	5

Where and when do you think these facilities are most required?

Cross Country's priority should be for longer journeys that are a pleasure. No-one should be expected to stand and seats should be comfortable for a long journey with large windows aligned..

19. Rank your priorities for improvement to the carriage layout for local trains on Cross Country? Rank 1 for most important to 7 for least important.

More seats	1
More table seats as opposed to 'airline' seats	3
More comfortable room for short distance standing	7
Cycle storage	6
Seats that align with windows	2
Greater leg-room	5
Extra room for luggage	4

20. What other comments or suggestions do you have about the on-board experience?

Cross Country should not be running 'local' trains. Birmingham to Nottingham/Leicester should be remapped to the West Midlands franchise.

21. Do you have any other views on how the future Cross Country franchise could be improved that have not been captured in the questions above?

Rubbish should be collected at frequent intervals during long journeys and as much as possible should be recycled.

Qualifying question

22. The rest of this survey is mainly designed to be completed by rail industry stakeholder representatives, however you can complete this if you wish.

Crowding issues and ideas to respond to

Use the consultation annex to help inform your response.

23. Which of the following potential measures do you think could overcome crowding caused by short distance commuters using long distance Cross Country trains, assuming that suitable alternative services are available?

No

Removing calls from towns closest the conurbation centre either completely or just at peak times.

Yes or No?

No

Retaining calls at such stations but restricting them to pickup/set down only?

Yes or No?

No

Removing the validity of multi-modal tickets on long distance trains?

Yes or No?

Other:

Provide specific instances where these may be applicable.

Pick up or set down only in conurbations such as the West Midlands could not be operated to exclude local journeys into Birmingham as it would also deprive Coventry of through trains to Manchester and Newcastle, Wolverhampton or through trains to Bristol and Bournemouth.

24. If it were possible would you agree with transferring these local routes to the West Midlands franchise:

	Yes	No
Birmingham to Nottingham	Yes	
Birmingham to Leicester	Yes	

Why?

These local services will never be a high priority to any TOC management focussed on long distance Inter City services. It would enable links to be made across the West Midlands with services from Hereford and Shrewsbury, benefiting connectivity.

To improve the service pattern and network to offer journeys that better meet your needs

Use the consultation annex to help inform your response.

25. Would you like to see any other routes or stations transferred to or from the Cross Country franchise?

Yes

Yes. Economic benefits accrue to well connected places and there are several large cities that should join the XC network.

No

Routes to transfer

26. Which routes and stations and why?

Bradford, Hull, Middlesbrough or Sunderland to the north. Swansea and Portsmouth to the south. Cross Country does not currently serve and East coast ports south of Newcastle.

It is not only about adding new destinations. The Cross Country map at present suggests through trains, although in reality, a change of trains (often an unpleasant experience at Birmingham New Street) is required. There are important places on the current Cross Country network that are not connected by through trains. Even if only a few a day, there should be trains from Cardiff to the North East and Scotland, Nottingham and Leicester to the South West, Bournemouth to the North East.

Changes

The East Coast service north of York aspirations are listed in the consultation document.

27. If the network was unable to cope with all the service enhancement aspirations north of Northallerton on the East Coast mainline, would a:

	Yes	No
curtailment of one of the existing Cross Country services be acceptable (with the resources redeployed to enhance other existing or new routes)?	Yes	
diversion of one of the existing Cross Country services be acceptable (with the resources redeployed to enhance other existing or new routes)?	Yes	

Why / why not?

We would like to see one long distance XC service per hour, formed of two coupled sets, split at Sheffield with one set providing a through train to Hull, the other to Bradford via Leeds [also possibly via Barnsley]. These may be two hourly, with the split being at York in the other hour with one set to Teesside or Wearside, the other to Scarborough or Harrogate in at least some hours.

28. Do you think the department's minimum specification should preserve exactly the existing pattern of services and station calls rather than offer an opportunity to change?

	Yes
No.	No

Comments:

This is a great opportunity to refocus this unique franchise from maximising revenue [profit] from the network core to serving people and places across Britain. Tapping suppressed demand may even make a more comprehensive network profitable. Of course the operator should be allowed some flexibility to encourage enterprise, but the specification must ensure the service meets passengers' needs so more early and late trains at Stansted Airport to match flights should be included rather than letting the operator decide on their profitability or how convenient this is for crewing and stock maintenance.

Extremities of the network changes

The extremities of the network information is listed in the consultation document.

29. Should bidders be given flexibility to make limited changes to the extremities to the network so that benefits such as reduced crowding in the centre of the network can be provided?

	Yes
Yes	Yes, but only if alternative services are provided by other operators
	No

Comments:

Where current services to extremities are purely tokenism, such as only at the very start or finish of a diagram [e.g. Guildford, Bath], these should become more frequent through the day or abandoned. The daily XC Cardiff long distance train is another example, and the choice of Manchester as its destination is a missed opportunity as Cardiff already has hourly direct trains there all day. If the ITT requires long distance trains from South Wales [at least some from Swansea], they should be to the North East or Scotland.

30. Do you agree that the current level of Cross Country services to the following routes are the minimum that must be specified for:

	Yes	No
West of Plymouth to Penzance?		No
Exeter to Paignton?		No
Newton Abbot to Paignton?		No
North of Edinburgh to Aberdeen?	Yes	
Southampton to Bournemouth?	Yes	
Guildford?		No
Bath?		No
Cardiff to Bristol Temple Meads?	Yes	

31. Do you agree that the changes to the following routes would be acceptable if a similar or improved service was provided by another operator:

	Yes	No
West of Plymouth to Penzance?		No
Exeter to Paignton?		No
Newton Abbot to Paignton?		No
North of Edinburgh to Aberdeen?		No
Southampton to Bournemouth?		No
Guildford?	Yes	
Bath?	Yes	
Cardiff to Bristol Temple Meads?	Yes	

Bidder station stop flexibility

32. Should bidders have some flexibility to make fewer calls at some stations, for example if that enabled them to accelerate services?

Yes	Yes
	No

33. On what routes could this be introduced?

There may be a case for Chesterfield and Totnes not to be served by every train. The stopping of long distance XC services in alternate hours at Tamworth and Burton is a bit of a luxury. Bromsgrove, however, should have a morning call by a train to Bristol [and beyond] and a corresponding evening call as we know of suppressed demand by M5 commuters. This is long distance commuting and the 06.42 from Birmingham, for example, passes through each morning very lightly loaded.

Minimum specification

34. Should the minimum specification have the number of trains from each station to Birmingham but give bidders the flexibility to decide where the trains go after Birmingham?

Yes

Yes

No

35. Are there stations within the geography of the Cross Country network that should receive calls that they currently do not receive (include examples and supporting evidence)?

Yes. The Birmingham to Bristol axis is poorly served - and only served by XC. Long distance trains run non stop from Birmingham to Cheltenham, the longest such run on the entire network. There is tremendous suppressed demand here. Even when Worcestershire Parkway opens and the Nottingham - Cardiff trains call there, there will still be absolutely no service from Bromsgrove south to Cheltenham and Bristol, even though Bromsgrove has now become the southern terminus of Cross City and should be the interchange for South Birmingham and North Worcestershire onto XC for the south west, there is to be a gap in service that must be addressed [no train service at all between Bromsgrove and Worcestershire Parkway]. XC has only focussed on the flow between Bromsgrove and Birmingham, seeing this as a nuisance causing overcrowding. Now that Cross City electrification has allowed four trains per hour north from Bromsgrove, the XC service pattern should examine to potential of interchange at Bromsgrove, with pick up/set down safeguards. Cross City South runs through a population of 424,000 who presently have to double back via Birmingham New Street at extra cost and time [or in many cases, use the M5]. As well as gaining a Worcestershire Parkway call, the Cardiff trains should call at Bromsgrove. The small time penalty would be easily offset by losing the local stations call north of Birmingham when the West Midlands franchise takes them over and by timing them to avoid the need for pathing time between Bromsgrove and Birmingham.

36. Are there stations beyond the geography of the Cross Country network that should receive calls that they currently do not receive (include examples and supporting evidence)?

Yes. Bradford, Hull, Middlesbrough or Sunderland to the north. Swansea and Portsmouth to the south. Cross Country does not currently serve and East coast ports south of Newcastle. These are places with large populations and significant hinterlands where some long distance journeys and economic development are currently suppressed by not having any through trains into the XC core.

To improve and simplify fares and ticketing

The current Cross Country fare structure is mentioned on page 26 and 27 of the consultation document.

37. What changes would you like to see to the current Cross Country current fares structure?

All fares should be at most the sum of the parts by split ticketing. Advance tickets are currently few in number for many trains and at very little discount on tickets without their restrictions, reflecting the seat shortage on trains with too few coaches.

Single fares should be no more than 60% of the return fare

Peak time charging should only apply for the part of the journey where there is high demand and the afternoon peak restrictions seem to be understood by neither passengers nor staff!

To improve access, information and making connections

38. What more could be done to improve access and provide facilities for those with disabilities or additional needs?

Experience of this is generally good, as it relies on the staff of other TOCs which run the stations. Our only negative experience has been at Leeds, where 'Cross Country don't tell us anything'. There should be an XC presence at the main interchange stations.

To improve the on-board experience

39. Which initiatives would you suggest to try to reduce the disturbance caused by the 'churn' of passengers alighting and boarding at frequent station calls?

It would seem like less of a 'churn' if trains were not so crowded - more coaches!

The middle coaches of Voyagers seem to be the most crowded and we believe this is because Coach A, at one end is first class. Because regular travellers know not to trust any information about which way round the unit is, they tend to stand around the middle of the platform, leading to the middle coaches experiencing more 'churn'.

Engagement improvement

Stakeholders are explained on page 30 of the consultation document.

40. Are there any improvements to the level stakeholder engagement by Cross Country that you would like to see and how could stakeholder engagement be improved?

Apart from DfT's invitations to meetings about the next Cross Country franchise, the present franchisee has not made an effort to engage with us or other stakeholders we know. XC should hold regular meetings with Rail User Groups and other stakeholders in the regions which they serve. Such meetings were organised by the Regional RPC network during the origin Virgin XC franchised were very successful in providing an opportunity for informed passengers to discuss issues with the operator and suggest improvements to the service.

41. Does Cross Country provide a sufficient level of support to relevant Community Rail partnerships in your experience?

	Yes
No	No

Community Rail partnerships engagement

42. Has their support improved in the last year to 18 months?

Yes	Yes
	No

43. Provide ideas on what more you feel the franchise could do to help the relevant Community Rail partnerships?

The initial experience since the direct award has been positive. XC should provide at least two regionally based dedicated Stakeholder Managers to liaise with CRPs and User Groups.

Final comments

44. Any other comments?

The underfloor engines of Voyagers are noisy and vibrate badly. We hope Voyagers will be replaced with bimodes early in the new franchise. We would like to see these being easily coupled and detached so that trains across the core of the network would normally be double sets, splitting to serve two destinations beyond the core. Voyagers are not suitable for use within Birmingham New Street station on health grounds. Class 170s are suitable trains on the routes that use them, being comfortable and sufficiently powerful. They should be reformed into longer trains, rather than coupling sets together with no way passengers and staff moving between sets, for catering and revenue protection.

There does not appear to be anywhere else in this survey to comment on catering. At present this is erratic. In principle, there is Arriva's policy of no catering provision after 20.00 and no catering at any time beyond Plymouth or Edinburgh. This should not continue into the new franchise. In reality, the busier the service at the moment, the less likelihood of refreshments being available. A trolley which cannot get through a crowded train is useless. Evaluation of franchise bids should include proposals for providing catering - when, where and how, possibly involving a concession to give the provider more incentive.

First class pricing includes catering, but the service is inconsistent. Trains deemed 'quieter' have had their First Class Host withdrawn and catering, if provided at all is from the trolley, but only after Standard class passengers [who of course pay for goods] have been served. We have been told by staff that this is a management policy. Franchise bids should be evaluated for what they promise for catering in First Class too.

Return your completed questionnaire

Save this file and email it to crosscountry@dft.gov.uk

Or post it to:

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