

Report for Information

Report to Executive
24 March 2010

Report of Head of Transportation and Landscape

Subject Greater Anglia Franchise Consultation and the East Coast
Main Line timetable consultations

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Purpose

This report considers the Greater Anglia Franchise Consultation and the East Coast Main Line timetable consultation

Recommendations

To respond to the Greater Anglia Franchise Consultation and the East Coast Main Line timetable consultation as set out in the report.

Financial Consequences

There are no direct financial consequences arising from this report

Risk Assessment

The new Greater Anglia franchise is key to ensuring the improvement of rail services between Norwich and London, Cambridge and local centres such as Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft and Sheringham. A high quality, fast and reliable rail service is vital to ensuring the sustainable regeneration and growth of Norwich. Similarly for rail journeys to Yorkshire, the North East and Scotland it is essential there are good connections with Inter City East Coast rail services at Peterborough.

Strategic Objective/Service Priorities

The report helps to meet the strategic priorities of a “Strong and prosperous city”, “Safe and healthy neighbourhoods” and “Aiming for excellence”. The report helps deliver the service plan priority to respond to consultation on proposals which have a major economic impact for Norwich.

Executive Member: Councillor Morrey – Sustainable City Development

Ward: All

Contact Officers

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Background Documents

Greater Anglia Franchise Consultation, Department for Transport, 2010
East Coast timetable consultation

Report

Greater Anglia rail franchise

1. The Greater Anglia rail franchise covers rail passenger services between London Liverpool Street and Essex, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk as well as local services within this area. It includes services on the Norwich/London main line as well as services between Norwich and Cambridge, Sheringham, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft.
2. The Department for Transport has launched consultation about the Greater Anglia rail franchise to commence from 1 April 2011.
3. In parallel to the franchise consultation, expressions of interest are being sought from the market to operate the franchise and it is anticipated that the winning bidder will be announced in late 2010.
4. There are a number of planned enhancements to the franchise area, including the lengthening of platforms at certain stations to allow 12 car train operation on key routes following the introduction of additional rolling stock. The new franchise will provide important transport facilities during the period of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, especially at Stratford for access to the Olympic Park. The 2007 Rail White Paper Delivering a Sustainable Railway set out an ambitious programme aimed at improving the quality of service to passengers.
5. The specification for this franchise will ask bidders to consider how additional capacity could be delivered, will set out assumptions on the transfer of services to Crossrail and will consider elements aimed at improving security, ticket retailing, passenger information and the journey to and from the station. It may also ask bidders to consider how the rolling stock fleet should be managed and propose improvements to the environmental impact of the franchise.

Discussion

Norwich/London main line

6. The council's top priority for improvement is the Norwich to London line. The Council has worked with Regional Cities East and Shaping Norfolk's future to develop a vision for the line that would:
 - Deliver faster journey times;
 - Extra carriage capacity;
 - Investment new trains and other infrastructure (to support the above);
 - Improved quality; and
 - Introduction of wi fi.
7. In part these aspirations are recognised in the franchise requirements. For example bidders are expected to put forward proposals to reduce journey times and for minimum standards of catering. In contrast where it comes to rolling stock the consultation merely asks bidders to put forward proposals to replace or refurbish rolling stock to extend its life for at least four years after the end of

the franchise. Equally, there is no mention of wi fi (although there is ongoing work to introduce wi fi on main line trains this summer).

8. Norwich is the largest economy in the eastern region, an engine of growth and with 'growth point' status due to see 35,000 more homes and 30,000 more jobs by 2021. To support the existing economy and its growth and to ensure necessary inward investment and business relocation it is essential that the Norwich/London services are of the highest quality.
9. There is a high level of dissatisfaction with the speed, quality and reliability of rail services among the business community – particularly those between Liverpool Street/Norwich and Norwich's east-west service. Several of Norwich's largest employers have calculated the "cost" to their business operations of this poor service and there is real concern that continued under-performance or failure to adequately address improvements will put further investment and job growth by businesses in their Norwich facilities at risk. There is already anecdotal evidence to suggest that current rail provision has been a strong factor in deterring potential new inward investment in Norwich.
10. The line with connections to Great Yarmouth etc. is also vital to supporting the burgeoning off-shore energy industry. With dualling of the A11 nearly complete, its improvement is necessary to ensure it continues to provide a competitive and sustainable alternative to road routes.
11. It is therefore important that the franchise specification is strengthened with requirements that are more specific. This would help ensure delivery of economic and environmental outcomes. It is suggested that these include:
 - Faster journey times with some trains (e.g. one an hour) travelling between Norwich and London in 1½ hours ('Norwich in Ninety). New more reliable and faster accelerating trains would help achieve this as would fewer intermediate stops (e.g. at Diss, Stowmarket, Chelmsford and Shenfield). Stops at Stratford (not necessarily on all trains) are important for connections to Docklands, Crossrail, the Jubilee underground line , domestic high speed services and direct Eurostar access (from late 2010).
 - Continuation of early morning departures from Norwich and late evening departures from London.
 - New inter-city standard trains (2+2 seating in standard class, adequate first class, table and airline style seating, trolley and buffet catering, sufficient luggage capacity including for cycles, wi fi with more carriages to provide additional seating.
 - Consideration of at seat dining.
 - Operation of a '7 day railway' service with reduced bus substitution during engineering works (typically at weekends); provision of through trains on alternative routes (e.g. Norwich to London via Cambridge if there is engineering work on the Norwich to London via Ipswich route). Poor weekend services do not support the growth of tourism and particularly short city-break visitors which are vital in maintaining the vitality of Norwich

as a year-round destination.

- Greatly improved national passenger survey performance (presently performance is below average).
- Greatly improved service reliability (presently performance is below average).

Norwich/Cambridge main line

12. The second priority is services between Norwich and Cambridge, linking the Norwich sub-region with the M11/Cambridge/Peterborough growth corridor (and the Thetford growth point). National Express East Anglian has already agreed with government to lengthen most Norwich to Cambridge services to three cars and the initial service level commitment for refranchising includes this.
13. However, longer trains do not appear guaranteed throughout the franchise period; it suggests that the franchise winner can review this. In contrast, the consultation notes poor east-west connections are an issue and suggests that bidders assess opportunities for improvement. To maximise the potential sustainable transport on this corridor and to assist relocation from the M11 corridor to Norwich (and Thetford), the franchise specification should require an increase in the frequency of services from hourly to a ½ hourly service.

Norwich/Sheringham, Norwich/Great Yarmouth and Norwich/Lowestoft local lines

14. The Norwich to Sheringham and Great Yarmouth / Lowestoft lines both successfully operated as Community Rail Partnerships (CRP). The consultation encourages CRPs and recognises the Norwich to Sheringham CRP as a good example. Beyond this, however, specifications for the rural lines are not covered except in general terms (e.g. in relation to parking, information, etc.). The consultation also asks for views on evening and Sunday services.
15. Improvements that are worth including are a half hourly service between Norwich and North Walsham to improve passenger capacity to assist growth in NE Norwich potentially (Rackheath). It would also be desirable for rolling stock to be improved, for journey times to be reduced. Evening departures from Norwich should allow passengers to enjoy an evening in the City such as visit to the Theatre and Sunday services should run hourly.

Other issues

16. The assumption in the franchise consultation is that the confirmed franchise will be offered to successful commercial bidder in accordance with competitive procurement processes. The record of such providers may sometimes fall short of the expectations from the public and there is therefore a strong case for greater community involvement in the operation of train services.
17. One option to improve matters would be for local councils to take on a role in operating the railway, for example and as a consortium, in giving strategic direction. Such a consortium could also potentially hold the commercial board with direct operational responsibility to account. At very least greater direct

involvement by local authorities seems desirable and appears to have cross party support. It is suggested therefore that ideas to improve governance are brought out in the finalised franchise specification.

18. The franchise specification is relevant to passenger operations on the Great Eastern lines. However, many other factors have an influence on these operations and vice versa. These include the investment plans of Network Rail or the development of freight services. This interdependence is crucial to the operation of successful rail services and it would be valuable if the Government could give comfort that such issues have been properly recognised and addressed.
19. At Norwich station, the passenger environment is generally good. However when catering or shop concessions are closed the only waiting areas are basic with no heating, etc. For those making journeys late evening it would be desirable if these facilities were improved
20. Franchise bidders are expected to consider whether special service provision is required for special events in the region. The list provided is quite limited with only the Norfolk and Norwich Festival listed which is relevant to Norwich. In reality, it is very difficult to be certain about such events during the lifetime of a franchise; for example if Norwich becomes City of Culture, this is likely to have a major effect on the demand for train travel. It therefore seems more sensible if rather than a prescriptive approach, bidders are asked to demonstrate that they could operate sufficiently flexibly to cover such occasions.

Inter City East Coast timetable consultation

21. East Coast, the successor operator to National Express on the East Coast Main Line is consulting on proposed timetable changes from May 2011. Most appear beneficial to travellers and of no particular relevance to Norwich, however one proposal is of deep concern: "Journey time between Norwich and Newcastle or Scotland worsens in both directions (passengers will in future wait 54 minutes at Peterborough if making a Scotland or Newcastle to Norwich journey)".
22. Under such proposals, the attractiveness of longer distance rail travel would be greatly reduced with significant economic disbenefits for Norwich. It would make Norwich a less attractive city to relocate too, for example. It would be likely to encourage more car travel, making use of the A47 and A17 which are both relatively poor quality single carriageway roads.
23. If services between Norwich and Cambridge became half hourly (see paragraph 13) there would be potential for better connections with Cambridge to Birmingham services and hence with services at Peterborough which is one of the stops on this route. This would help mitigate the impact of the proposed timetable changes therefore. However, as a half hourly service may take longer to secure compared to the proposed timetable change and it will be important for the council to lobby strongly East Coast to rethink these ideas. This is likely to have greatest impact if done with other council partners, Regional Cities East and Shaping Norfolk's Future.