

Strategic Transport Forum

20th January 2017

Agenda Item 8: Procurement of East Midlands rail franchise

Recommendation: It is recommended that the meeting:

- i) Note the timescales for procurement of the East Midlands rail franchise
- ii) Agree the proposed response as set out in Section 3 of the report
- iii) Seek assurances from the Department for Transport that England's Economic Heartland will be engaged as part of the process for procuring a new franchisee.

1. Context

- 1.1. In early 2016, the existing East Midlands rail franchise operated by Stagecoach was extended by a further two years.
- 1.2. In November 2016 the Department for Transport commenced the process of procuring a new franchisee by issuing a Prospectus and holding a stakeholder event for potential bidders.
- 1.3. The DfT were due to release their Franchise Expression of Interest (EOI) pack and start public consultation on their proposals the following month, but (at the time of writing) that has not yet commenced. However consultation will need to commence soon in order to meet the remainder of their timetable, which is set out below:

Deadline for receipt of completed EOI Packs	January 2017
Identification of short-listed bidders	March 2017
Issue ITT to bidders	May 2017
Receipt of ITT submissions	August 2017
Contract award	March 2018
Anticipated franchise start date	22 July 2018

- 1.4. A key element of the new franchise is the proposal for a six train per hour timetable between London and key towns/cities in the East Midlands and South Yorkshire by 2019, ensuring faster journey times and more capacity across the Midland Main Line. This will be facilitated by recent line upgrades and infrastructure works planned for the remainder of the current Control Period, in particular those in Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire. These would then be supplemented by works to electrify the whole line in the next Control Period (2019-24).
- 1.5. Recent and planned improvements to the Thameslink services will also provide more services and better connectivity both to the north and south of London.

2. Customer and Stakeholder Priorities

2.1. Recent research undertaken by Transport Focus has indicated that the current top ten priorities for East Midlands Trains customers are:

- i) Price of train tickets offers better value for money
- ii) Passengers are always able to get a seat on the train
- iii) Trains sufficiently frequent
- iv) Free WiFi available on the train
- v) Train company keeps passengers informed about delays
- vi) More trains arrive on time
- vii) Less frequent major unplanned disruptions
- viii) Accurate and timely information available at stations
- ix) Well-maintained, clean toilet facilities on every train
- x) Inside of train is maintained and cleaned to a high standard

2.2. The views of other stakeholders about service improvements can be summarised as:

- Achieving journey times to London from Sheffield of 110 minutes, 90 minutes from Nottingham and 60 minutes from Leicester
- Later evening trains
- Improved northbound connectivity from Luton, Bedford and Northamptonshire
- Improved weekend services
- Better airport connections, improving services to Luton and East Midlands Airports

3. Response

3.1. Whilst the Prospectus highlights the importance of the East Midlands franchise in supporting ambition for economic growth in the East Midlands, services operating on the East Midlands main line also have a key role to play in realising the economic opportunities across the Heartland area.

3.2. Indeed, whilst the recent National Infrastructure Commission's Interim Report into the Cambridge – Oxford corridor emphasised the importance of improved east-west connectivity, it is important not to lose sight of seeing improved north-south connectivity being equally important.

3.3. In this context England's Economic Heartland welcomes the addition in the prospectus of a sixth train per hour between London and other towns/cities in the East Midlands and South Yorkshire. However it is concerned that once there is a half-hourly St Pancras – Corby service established, that will be seen as the focus for all stops south of Kettering rather than ensuring that existing northbound connectivity to the East Midlands and South Yorkshire is improved.

3.4. In addition, England's Economic Heartland support the principles of:

- Improved connectivity between London and the East Midlands/South Yorkshire, in particular at Bedford and Luton

- Up to 4 fast trains/hour to serve London Luton Airport
 - Improved evening and weekend services
 - Station improvements in particular at Luton
 - Improved ticketing offer, including value for money tickets, combined bus-rail tickets and smart ticketing
- 3.5. The National Infrastructure Commission's Interim Report served to emphasise the critical importance of improved connectivity enabling the economic potential of the Heartland area being realised. In doing so it highlighted the fact that realising that potential is central to the longer-term future of the UK economy.
- 3.6. Given the importance of ensuring that investment in strategic transport infrastructure and services is integrated with proposals for housing and economic growth, England's Economic Heartland seeks reassurances from the Department for Transport that it will be fully engaged in the process for procuring a new franchisee.

Keith Dove
**Luton Council on behalf of
England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance**

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