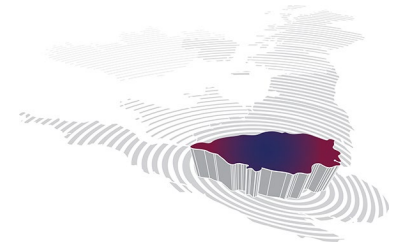




ENGLAND'S  
ECONOMIC  
HEARTLAND



Submitted to  
<https://www.eastmidlandsrailway.co.uk/december2020>

Sent to: [andrew.common@eastmidlandsrailway.co.uk](mailto:andrew.common@eastmidlandsrailway.co.uk)

EEH Business Unit  
c/o Buckinghamshire County Council  
County Hall  
Walton Street  
Aylesbury  
HP20 1UA

11<sup>th</sup> February 2020

Dear Sir/ Madam,

#### **EAST MIDLANDS RAILWAY DECEMBER 2020 TIMETABLE CONSULTATION**

England's Economic Heartland's (EEH) Strategic Transport Forum is the Sub-national Transport Body for the Heartland region. Membership of the Forum covers the area from Swindon, through Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes and across to Cambridgeshire, and from Northamptonshire across to Luton and Hertfordshire.

As the Sub-national Transport Body, EEH is responsible for setting the strategic vision for the transport system, supported by a long term strategy for realising that vision. The Heartland includes the Oxford to Cambridge Arc – a region identified by the Government as being an economic priority for the UK.

Our strategic ambition for the region is to realise its economic potential whilst achieving net environmental gain. Improved connectivity – both infrastructure and services – is fundamental to realising this ambition. This philosophy underpins the framework set out in the Outline Transport Strategy published in July 2019.

Improved rail connectivity is central to the long term future of the region, and will play a key role in ensuring the region meets its obligations to contribute to achieving the carbon reduction targets adopted by Government in summer 2019.

The Forum was extremely disappointed when in 2018, the Department for Transport's specification for the Train Service Requirements and objectives for the East Midlands Rail Franchise led to an unacceptable reduction in connectivity with adjoining regions, in particular with the East Midlands.

The approach to the East Midlands franchise fails to recognise the economic potential of key urban areas, particularly Bedford, Luton and Wellingborough. Improving the connectivity of these towns with enhanced rail services should be a key focus for the East Midlands franchise. Such considerations become all the more important as Bedford's role as a strategic interchange will be enhanced with the delivery of East West Rail.



## **Key Issues**

The East Midlands Franchise is a key franchise for the Heartland region: the Midland Mainline is a strategically important rail corridor both in terms of passenger and freight, as well as providing access to the international gateway at Luton Airport.

The primary concern for the region is the removal of the existing inter-regional through services between London St Pancras and East Midlands that call at Luton/Luton Airport Parkway, Bedford and Wellingborough.

The loss of interchange opportunities at Bedford/Wellingborough mean passengers travelling north of Wellingborough will need to make a cross platform interchange at Kettering. And onward journeys to Derby or Sheffield will require a further change at Leicester.

These proposed changes, even with integrated timetabling and two additional intercity services per hour at Kettering, will reduce the attractiveness of rail as a travel option between the Heartland and the East Midlands. It will extend inter-regional journey times in both directions. It will also undermine the potential for interchange between the East Midlands and East West Rail services when services between Oxford and Bedford begin at the end of 2023.

The changes will undermine our collective ability to realise the agglomeration benefits to be realised by connecting economic opportunities within the Heartland and Midlands Connect. To prioritise long-distance services (to London) to the detriment of improved inter-regional connectivity appears to undermine the need for investment to be used to encourage more sustainable travel patterns in the long term.

Improved inter-regional connectivity is important given the complementary business sectors in the two regions. Both are leaders in professional services, science and technology based industries. Improved inter-regional connectivity would enable the sectors in both regions to realise their full potential. EEH and Midlands Connect are working closely with Network Rail System Operator with a view to identifying how that improved connectivity might be realised.

The timetable consultation proposes the segregation of long distance (EMR Intercity) services with commuter services (EMR Electrics) will see services double between Corby and London St Pancras. These will call every 30 minutes between 06:00 and 22:00, including the reintroduction of some peak services. The Forum supports the earlier and later arrivals as reflecting changes in working patterns.

As part of the EMR Electrics services, EEH is pleased to see the improved connectivity proposed for Luton Airport Parkway, and welcomes an express service operating on a half-hourly frequency. EEH expects East Midlands Railway to work closely with Luton Airport Limited and Luton Borough Council to develop and deliver a frictionless interchange experience, including integration with the DART service under construction.

The proposed enhancements to capacity and frequency are welcome given that it enables Thames Link to reinstate peak frequency services to certain stations. This removes the need for rail replacement coach services.

However, the key driver for the proposed timetable appears to continue to be faster journey times to London. By doing so, it bypasses key strategic hubs that require high levels of connectivity.

The refurbishment of rolling stock operating EMR Electric services (those stopping between London St Pancras and Corby), which includes new seating and power sockets, is welcomed. It is disappointing however that the refurbishment will not be completed

before the services are introduced, given the opportunity that the timetable change presents to provide a step change in the product available to travellers.

The consultation material cites a major refurbishment planned for 2020/2021 for EMR Regional services. Whilst the majority of these services sit outside the immediate Heartland geography, they are likely to form a key part of many longer distance journeys to/from the region. It is therefore important to engage with EEH as plans for the new rolling stock are taken forward: for example EMR's plan to replace intercity services that call in the north of the Heartland with new bi-modes.

It is reassuring to see that the Midland Mainline Upgrade programme remains on track to deliver electrification of the line between Bedford, Kettering and Corby. We believe that extension of the electrification network further north should be taken forward as a priority, offering as it would both an improved level of service and the ability to retain acquired knowledge within the industry on delivery of cost-effective electrification. A rolling programme of electrification would deliver improved line speeds, additional capacity and reduced environmental impact to the benefit of both travellers and local communities.

In addition, EEH welcomes planned infrastructure projects that increase resilience and capacity along the route. This includes the quad-tracking of the railway between Bedford and Kettering, the installation of a second line between Kettering and Corby and platform extensions at Bedford, Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby.

### ***Delivering franchise objectives***

EEH strongly encourages the franchisee to use the flexibility within the terms of the franchise to develop proposals that ensure direct services are maintained between key centres of activity in the Heartland and the East Midlands. We strongly encourage the franchisee to view the Train Service Requirements as a minimum specification beyond which they should aspire to improve, as opposed to treating them as the service level to be provided.

A key franchise objective is to improve public perception of the railway. The Forum is concerned that the failure to improve journey times to/from London St Pancras and stations on the EMR Electric Service is inconsistent with this objective. Viewed alongside the introduction of additional interchanges and the delay in completing the refurbishment of rolling stock, we are concerned that public perception of rail as a viable attractive alternative will be reduced.

A second key franchise objective is the need to address growth in demand. The Forum is deeply concerned that the proposed timetable does not adequately recognise the scale of planned growth identified in adopted Local Plans that cover the catchment of the franchise. The scale of Luton Airport's current operations and its proposal to double capacity is likewise overlooked. Given the airport's ambition to achieve a mode shift of 45% of passengers using public transport, this oversight needs to be addressed in finalising the 2020 timetable.

The proposed timetable disregards Bedford's place as a strategic transport hub, a role that will be further enhanced with the arrival of East West Rail. Delivery of East West Rail will be transformative in terms of travel patterns across the region. It is therefore essential that the franchisee works closely with the EEH Business Unit to develop proposals specifically designed to maximise rail use and interchange.

On balance England's Economic Heartland urges East Midlands Railway to refine its proposed timetable so as to ensure direct connections to key stations to the north are



maintained. It strongly urges that the company's submission to Network Rail and the Office of Rail and Road includes proposals that address this issue.

The Forum understands that regional organisations in the East Midlands are echoing similar concerns; specifically requesting the provision of peak northbound calls at Bedford (to East Midlands) where the timetable allows.

The Strategic Transport Forum is keen to hear directly from East Midlands Railway as to how it proposes to address the issues raised in this response. To that end it invites the Company to attend the Forum's meeting scheduled for 15<sup>th</sup> May, at which the Company is asked to present its response for the Forum's consideration.

Yours Faithfully



**Mayor Dave Hodgson**  
**Chair, Strategic Transport Forum**