



Strategic Transport Forum

27th September 2019

Agenda Item 8: East Midlands Franchise

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Forum:

- a) Considers the presentation by the newly appointed franchise operator, Abellio on its ambitions for the East Midlands Railway**
- b) Provides a steer on the key priorities that the Forum would like to see for East Midlands Railway going forward.**

1. Context

- 1.1. In April 2019, the Government announced that Abellio had been successful in its bid to run the East Midlands franchise. A map of the franchise – to be operated as East Midlands Railway - is shown at Annex 1.
- 1.2. The Franchise, which started on 18 August 2019, will run for 8 years until 21 August 2027, with an extension of 2 years callable at the discretion of the Secretary of State.
- 1.3. The East Midlands Railway is a key franchise for the Heartland area. The Forum's agreed position regarding the franchise was set out in its response to the consultation undertaken in autumn 2017 (Annex 2).

2. Franchising Requirements

- 2.1. The Department for Transport set out its objectives for the new East Midlands Railway Franchise in June 2018, these included:
 - To improve the quality, frequency and timings of journeys on the east of the franchise network and to seek to develop new services and connections.
 - Provide the franchise capacity to address predicted growth in demand, working with Network Rail to minimise the impact on passengers and the effective running of train services during redevelopment works.
 - Invest in the East Midlands train fleet to bring this up to world class standard of on-train passenger facilities, and developing a maintenance and stabling strategy for a new proposition for rolling stock.
 - Improve passenger satisfaction and public perception of the railway – including the ticket purchasing experience. In addition, to deliver high speed Wi-Fi and wireless connectivity to passengers.
 - To secure the investment and improvement in the route's infrastructure, including the services to Corby & Kettering, and infrastructure improvement where most needed, to reduce journey times on long distances and to achieve a high level of service resilience and reliability.

3. Strategic Transport Forum Priorities

3.1. In considering the priorities for the Franchise, the Forum identified some key areas of focus. These were in line with the Forum's consultation submission (Annex 2). Forum Members will be keen to ensure that Abellio's presentation captures these ambitions. These include:

- a) **National Significance** – the East Midlands franchise is a key franchise for the Heartland area, an area that has been identified by the Government as being critical to the long term future of the UK economy. Realising the economic opportunity for the area requires investment in infrastructure and services. More specifically it will require both an acceleration in that investment and additional investment over and above that previously planned.

During the lifetime of the East Midlands franchise, the next stage of the East West Rail project will be delivered: this will serve to reinforce the strategic importance of rail infrastructure and services at key hubs – specifically Bedford and Luton Airport Parkway. Forum members will be keen to see that Abellio, in presenting their ambitions for the Franchise, have considered the significant opportunity that East West Rail presents for the railway network across the Heartland.

- b) **Improved Connectivity** - the National Infrastructure Commission in its report to the Treasury highlighted the critical importance of improved connectivity to enabling the economic potential of the Heartland being realised.

Alterations to the timetable on the Midland Main Line in May 2018 perversely created a reduction in the overall level of connectivity in order to accommodate the Thameslink service. This reduced connectivity to/from strategic hubs such as Bedford – particularly to/from the northern parts of the Heartland area. Such a reduction in connectivity is inconsistent with the Government's stated aim of realising the economic potential of the Heartland: it is also inconsistent with the Government's stated objective of addressing the regional imbalance in the economy.

- c) **Journey Times** – changes to the timetable on the Midland Main Line in 2018 led to an increase in journey times for some sectors of the market. Competitive journey times are a key consideration in ensuring that investment opportunities – such as Bedford – are attractive to commercial investors and residents.
- d) **Train Quality** – a concern expressed by the Forum previously has been to ensure that the rolling stock on key rail routes offers a level of passenger comfort and service offers an experience that is consistent with 'inter-city' standard services.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1. The franchise agreement includes – for the first time – explicit recognition of the important role that sub-national Transport Bodies have to play in contributing to the oversight of franchise delivery.
- 4.2. Details of the arrangements to be taken forward need to be fleshed out and an initial meeting of the relevant Sub-national Transport Bodies – including England's Economic Heartland – has been scheduled for October.

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September 2019



Annex 1 – East Midlands Franchise Map

The East Midlands Franchise Network

