

## Future arrangements for the 'Great Northern Inners' service – An open letter on Passenger & Taxpayer needs

An Outline Business Case is being prepared by TfL (working with the DfT) that is likely to recommend the devolution of the Great Northern Inners ('GN Inner') service<sup>1</sup> to TfL. This follows on from the 19 June 2020 letter<sup>2</sup> from Chris Heaton-Harris, Minister of State at the Department for Transport to Heidi Alexander, Deputy Mayor, Transport for the Greater London Authority / Deputy Chair TfL. This was sent following TfL's submission of a Strategic Outline Business Case for the devolution of these Services.

We believe that a formal consultation needs to be part of the process of finalising the business case and, at this stage see few benefits, but many possible disadvantages. This is because the railway is already congested (thus a very limited scope for additional services) and there has been recent significant investment in the service (the Class 717 Units). There is considerable risk that improvements due to local supervision and control are significantly outweighed by the adverse impacts on the operation of the "total railway". A model that can increase local involvement that does not lead to, overall, a "worse" railway is the minimum; more local involvement and a "better" overall railway needs to be aspiration.

We do recognise the potential benefits from more localised decision making from Governmental bodies (but see disadvantage #4 below), but see at least 5 potential disadvantages:

1. The railway starts to be operated in a less integrated / standalone manner, leading to less usable timetable, a reduction in capacity and less effective recoveries from disruptions.
2. Adoption of the TfL model leads to ticketing office reductions at stations and a reduction of fare choices, resulting in increased fares (eg loss of low priced weekend travel).
3. Passenger assistance could get more complex (and thus less reliable) for journeys that involve other operators.
4. There are no clear protocols or arrangements defined to protect Hertfordshire Residents.
5. Costs may increase due to loss of efficiencies on rolling stock maintenance; linked to this, key infrastructure improvements on the ECML may be disrupted.

As an appendix we expand on the above with additional detail: 10 practical factors that need to be considered / constrain the operation as regards the "new outcome"; for convenience we have mapped these to the headings in the 19 June letter.

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<sup>1</sup> The GN Inner Services run from Moorgate (occasionally Kings Cross) to Welwyn Garden City and Hertford North and Stevenage (only via Hertford North).

<sup>2</sup> [https://twitter.com/Heidi\\_LDN/status/1275122409344040962?s=20](https://twitter.com/Heidi_LDN/status/1275122409344040962?s=20)

## 10 Goals for the Future GN Inner service provision

		Business case	Out of Boundary	Self-contained	Timing	Costs	Wider implication
1	<p><b>Reliability of operation (including effective disruption recovery) and passenger experience</b> should be a key metric for judging future organisational arrangements for the GN Inners. The service operates with new rolling stock (the Class 717) on a congested railway that already has 4 passenger service operators (GTR, LNER, Grand Central &amp; Hull Trains), with a fifth due (First Group open access service to Edinburgh). Thus, there is limited ability to either increase capacity or provide a significantly different passenger experience without a very significant wider investment in the railway at the southern end of the East Coast Mainline; on the other hand, an additional operator poses considerable risk of more isolated decision making leading to a reduction in overall service reliability and capacity.</p>	Y	Y	Y			Y
2	<p>The <b>timetable design process</b> should continue to be a single integrated activity for Thameslink<sup>3</sup>, Great Northern Outers<sup>4</sup> and GN Inners, designed to deliver the best combined timetable. In particular, the following need to be achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sensible combined service for Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and Potters Bar.</li> <li>• An appropriate balance between users in Hertfordshire and Greater London – in particular, the ratio of points to terminate trains on the Hertford North Branch should remain unchanged between Gordon Hill, Hertford North and Stevenage. Gordon Hill should only be used as a termination point in the peak to the minimum possible levels.</li> <li>• Good interchange (short waits, cross platform as much as possible etc) at Finsbury Park (as the primary goal), and also Welwyn Garden City and Stevenage as practical. Specifically, the timetable should allow speedy journeys for GN Outer and Thameslink users to travel to/from Moorgate and for GN Inner users to travel to/from Kings Cross and St Pancras (and stations south thereof).</li> <li>• Fully supporting the best possible use of the available capacity on the East Coast Mainline between Finsbury Park and Welwyn Garden City, including implications for utilisation further north; specifically, the two track section of railway including Digswell Viaduct immediately to the north of Welwyn Garden City. South of Welwyn Garden City, the slow lines are shared with many Thameslink services and overall utilisation of these lines needs to be highly effective.</li> </ul>	Y	Y	Y			Y

<sup>3</sup> Currently services from Horsham to Peterborough and Brighton to Cambridge; in time also services from Sevenoaks to Welwyn Garden City and Maidstone East to Cambridge.

<sup>4</sup> Services to Peterborough, Cambridge & Kings Lynn.

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3	<p><b>The East Coast Mainline needs to be operated in an integrated manner</b> with a single set of recovery actions used to respond to and recover from disruptions. For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decisions on services to stations such as Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and Potters Bar should be chosen from trainsets and drivers from the available GN Inner, GN Outer and Thameslink resources.</li> <li>The Hertford North route is an essential diversion route for GN Outer, Thameslink and longer distance services when the line via Welwyn Garden City is closed (both planned and unplanned), and which often results in short-term service reductions on the Hertford Loop; this needs to be retained for the overall passenger benefit.</li> </ul>	Y	Y	Y			Y
4	<p>All <b>existing ticket types and ticketing methods</b> should be retained, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The full range of fares should still be available – ie Anytime, Off-Peak, Super Off-Peak and Weekend. We do not want a reduction to TfL’s binary model of Peak and Off-peak only.</li> <li>The price of no journey should increase, neither through headline price changes, nor times of availability, nor through changes to National Railcards validity times.</li> <li>Through ticketing, supporting all types of ticket, to all National Rail destinations needs to remain available. This to include add-ons such as cycle and seat reservations and PlusBus.</li> <li>Smartcard ticketing needs to remain available for non-London destinations, such as Hertford North to Cambridge.</li> <li>Compensation should continue to be paid on the basis of National Rail’s Delay Repay rules (ie starting from 15 minutes delay, for any cause, including for consequential delays elsewhere on the Railway).</li> </ul>	Y	Y	Y			Y
5	<p>The opportunity should be taken to provide <b>extensions in available fares and ticketing methods</b>, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Payment for travel using Contactless Bank Cards (and Phones with NFC using Apple / Google Pay etc) should be extended to Watton at Stone and Stevenage. Recent practice would therefore provide a linked extension to Knebworth and Welwyn North (intermediate stations between Stevenage &amp; Welwyn Garden City).</li> <li>In accordance with practice on National Rail routes supporting TfL’s contactless product, single fares should be set at half the most relevant existing National Rail return fare and Daily and Weekly capping enabled.</li> <li>Railcard functionality should be enabled for Contactless payments (provided the traveller has pre-created an account, linked their payment method to it and demonstrated they own the relevant Railcard).</li> </ul>	Y	Y	Y			
6	<p>All <b>existing station facilities should be retained</b>, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Passengers should still be able to buy rail tickets through their preferred method, recognising that the method will change depending on the nature, complexity, and frequency of the journey and, will, on occasion include passenger assistance booking. This includes (1) Via Pay as You Go; (2) From a Ticket Vending Machine; (3) On the internet</li> </ul>	Y	Y			Y	

		Business case	Out of Boundary	Self-contained	Timing	Costs	Wider implication
	(including via App), with ticket collection / delivery; (4) On the internet (including via App), with ticket display on device or paper; and (5) In person (particularly important for more complex journeys and occasional users). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Station staffing and ticket office hours should not be reduced.</li> <li>Maintenance targets for stations (eg on lift availability and repair times) should not become less onerous.</li> </ul>						
7	<b>Effective Passenger Assistance</b> , including for journeys also using other TOCs needs to continue. Current reliability of this service is low, and the service is subject to national improvement initiatives. GN Inners need to continue to participate in the national service.		Y	Y			Y
8	<b>GN Inner services meet the needs (and wants) of both Hertfordshire and London residents.</b> It is important that the elected representatives of both can provide oversight on an equitable basis; in particular Hertfordshire residents, who represent a minority of passengers <sup>5</sup> , need to have suitable mechanisms to influence the design and delivery of the service (including the appropriate prioritisation of the service balance between Hertfordshire and London users). TfL and the Greater London Authority may only be in a position to fund selected improvements (eg increased hours of station staffing) for stations within Greater London and suitable mechanisms and funding arrangements should exist so equivalent funding can be provided for Hertfordshire residents. This could be via Hertfordshire County Council or via England’s Economic Heartland.		Y				Y
9	<b>A single depot supports Thameslink, GN Inner and GN Outer train fleets</b> , with Siemens City Desiros in use for both Thameslink and the GN Inners. It will be essential that the new arrangement neither increases costs, nor creates other barriers to effective maintenance, nor restricts information flows about effective maintenance arrangements and achieving prompt in-service recovery (the scope of this is not just Maintenance teams but also Control Teams and Drivers across both GN Inners and Thameslink).	Y		Y		Y	
10	<b>ETCS (European Train Control System) is being installed</b> on the East Coast Mainline, provisionally scheduled to be in use between Moorgate and Drayton Park in December 2021. At this early stage in the project, with uncertainty further exacerbated by Covid-19, all dates must be subject to change, most likely deferral. A change of, and separation in, management at a key stage is could easily lead to an adverse impact on reliability.				Y		Y

<sup>5</sup> In 2018-19, of stations served only by GN Inner services north of Finsbury Park, Hertfordshire stations provide 13.7% of travellers; adding stations served by other operators where GN Inners account for at least 50% of services increases this to 37.7% of travellers, although not all these travellers will use GN Inner services. The ORR’s publicly available data does not split passengers by service nature.