# railfuture

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For the attention of Strategy & Planning Assistant

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## Improving Connectivity Consultation

Dear Sir,

We are pleased to submit this response on behalf of **Rail***future*.  Railfuture is a national independent voluntary organisation campaigning for improved rail services on a bigger better network.

If you require any more detail or clarification please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours faithfullly

*Chris Page*

Chris Page
Railfuture
Vice Chairman

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# Response to Improving Connectivity consultation

## Introduction

Railfuture welcomes the opportunity to respond to this Network Rail consultation entitled "Improving Connectivity."  We recognise that the consultation uses East Anglia as a case study, and so our responses refer to East Anglia, but should also be applicable to any region of Great Britain.

We long been an advocate of the Swiss concept of the taktfahrplan.  We have closely followed the work developed by Jonathan Tyler regarding this concept in a British context.  We feel that the East Anglian railway network lends itself to the gradual establishment of a type of taktfahrplan, but recognise that its implementation will be a gradual and lengthy process.  It must be a process that once embarked upon it should be a firm and continuous process that every timetable change must refer and defer to.  We recognise that the current timetable is probably necessarily London-centric and it does not cater for a growth right across the network.

We note that the consultation offers a timetable pattern built from these 3 principles:

1. Using cross-platform changes to simplify connection and avoid train service duplication
2. To order arrivals and departures at interchange stations to minimise waiting times between connecting trains
3. To construct a consistent timetable with sufficient flexibility to respond to variations in demand.  The resulting timetable comprises a 'core' service as its basic framework with additional trains overlaid as required.

Before embarking on an attempt to answering the consultation questions below, we should firmly state that we would want the establishment of a **fourth principle**, namely:

4. To establish what the core economic settlements are in a (the) region.

Once the core economic settlements are established, **the fourth principle must be that they are connected by through trains** even if this means this principle being implemented in stages.  In the East Anglian context we consider that the core settlements are:

> Peterborough;
> Cambridge;
> Norwich;
> Ipswich;
> Colchester;
> Chelmsford;
> London including Stratford.

Most of the key nodes on the list are connected by through trains currently and with full electrification of the network we would expect completion of this aspiration.  We will assume that the (East Anglian and national) network service pattern will rapidly evolve to 2tph minimum on each route.

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## Responses to questions

**1.     Do you think there is potential in this approach and agree that further development work should be undertaken to understand costs (operational and infrastructure) and benefits?**

We do agree with this statement.  We understand that there will be costs but if there are benefits that outweigh these costs in environmental sustainability including carbon reduction, social mobility, educational opportunities, quality of life improvements, regeneration etc by allowing freer movement across the network and more efficient use of it, those costs will be worth it in 'payback' terms.

**2.     What is your opinion on the trade-offs described in this document?**

The authors of the Report offer some interesting ideas on how improve connectivity. However these will have to be carefully weighed against slowing down many journeys as suggested along the GEML or by changes of service at Newmarket, for example.  Velocity and volume combined with safety are the railway's greatest attribute.  Speed must be continually enhanced wherever possible as a competitive tool and it must not be sacrificed on the back striving to achieve the three key principles.

**3.     What is your opinion on having to change trains on a journey?**

Bearing in mind the caveat above of what we have termed the fourth principle, many current users are well used to changing trains at say (in an East Anglian context) Peterborough, Ipswich, Ely, Colchester, Marks Tey or Cambridge.  If a systematic programme of good connections at each of these nodes so that all connect seamlessly at the next node and so on, were to be introduced and it worked every hour or every half hour with discipline throughout the day, **many more users** would have the confidence to use the network.

**4.     Would your opinion on changing train alter if the principles in this study were adopted, such as cross platform interchange, better passenger information, shortened waiting times and holding connections in the event of minor delays?**

Bearing in mind our fourth principle, we do understand that through trains cannot be provided between every link owing to capacity constraints and so the adoption of the principles of the study would open up the network to many more journey opportunities. These opportunities are there currently of course, but relatively few potential users undertake them owing to the problems identified in the question.

**5.     Do you have any ideas of further improvements which could be implemented that would improve your opinion of changing trains on a journey?**

One idea might well be the implementation of a zonal fare structure and smart card that enables the whole network to be available to the user.  The implementation of the TfL Oyster Card zonal smartcard has hugely the simplified access to the network and enabled users to feel confident in using it.  East Anglia's network could well be the place to start planning a simplified, easy to understand and use fare structure.

The London network is entirely 'turn up and go' so changing between routes there holds no terrors.  In East Anglia a minimum of 2tph would go a long way to creating such a 'turn up and go' network.

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**6.    What parts of the British rail network do you believe would benefit from this approach?**

East Anglia would be a good place to start the application of a systematic study of connections at the key nodes of Peterborough, Ely, Cambridge, Broxbourne, Cheshunt, Stratford, Romford, Shenfield, Witham, Marks Tey, Colchester, Manningtree, Ipswich, Stowmarket and Norwich and the implementation of timetable changes to correct anomalies. The concept should be gradually moved out of East Anglia throughout the national network. Maybe, on the other hand, there is central point at which to start a timetable revolution, such as Birmingham New Street.

**7.    Do you have any concerns about the approach and principles described in this study?**

There are political and economic imperatives that must not be overlooked, such as the 'Norwich in 90' campaign.  It must be understood that these imperatives must be given in to on occasion in spite of what might be termed the more logical 'three principles' operational convenience.  The user's interest should always be at the forefront of change.

There is always a danger of what seems 'a good idea' from afar does not sit well with those whom 'the good idea' will affect, as for example, the tram-train concept for the Felixstowe line.  We accept, however, 'change' however difficult to contemplate, often needs to be examined very carefully.

**8.    Do you have any ideas for how the approach described in this study can be improved or developed?**

We have mentioned the idea of the fourth principle.  In any such future report the authors should be cautious in giving out too many 'good ideas' from afar, as this encourages more locally based respondents to worry about detail which draws attention away from the positive concepts that certainly need thinking about.

Work with Jonathan Tyler to see if he has conceptual processes which would enhance the good ideas that have started this debate.