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Dear Sir

Railfuture response to the DfT West Midlands Rail Franchise consultation

Railfuture is a national independent voluntary organisation campaigning for a bigger, better railway in Britain, so we welcome the opportunity to provide an informed response to the questions this consultation. The response has been coordinated by Peter Rowland (peter@rowland.entadsl.com) the Railfuture TOC liaison for this franchise.

Railfuture recognises the importance of the provision of improved rail services offering more journey opportunities to a wider range of travellers in contributing to wider economic, employment and skills, social inclusion and environmental issues.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Fribbins

Chris Fribbins
Railfuture
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Response to the West Midlands Rail Franchise consultation

Question Area A – Responsive to passengers' needs and aspirations

Improving access to the rail network – a railway for all

Q1: Thinking of the journeys you make by train, or journeys you could make by train but where you decide to use an alternative transport mode instead:

- *what specific changes could be made to make the railway easier and more attractive to use for all; and*
- *why do you think these changes would help?*

Please provide your reasons why and details of the journeys you refer to where

More car parking, with guaranteed availability outside rush hours, would allow more passengers to use services.

Improving access to the rail network – the whole journey experience

Q2a: Do you use your nearest railway station?

If you do not please let us know the reasons why.

1. Most of our members use their local station, unless a poor service forces an alternative.
2. A journey from Coventry to Leicester/Loughborough can be made by a half hour car journey to Leicester which is much more convenient than boarding an hourly service to Nuneaton, potentially missing a half hourly connection, so that the journey can take up to two hours. The direct service to Leicester was severed some years ago to improve the West Coast Main Line, at the expense of the East -West Midlands link. Perhaps Midlands Connect can rectify this?

Q2b: Thinking of your train journeys as a whole, how could we improve your experience of:

- *Finding information and planning your journey*
- *Accessing your railway station in an environmentally friendly way such as by walking, cycling, tram or bus*
- *Accessing your railway station by private car (including car parking and drop off areas)?*

Please let us know the reasons why.

If you are aware of any examples of particularly good or particularly poor connections between transport modes at stations, either within the franchise area or more widely please let us know including reasons why these are particularly good or poor

1. Lack of through tickets onto Midland Metro, to take advantage of the Snow Hill – New St. link, (particularly for travellers from outside the CENTRO area).
2. Lack of connectional information on trains calling at Smethwick Galton Bridge. Passengers boarding or travelling on such trains prior to the Galton Bridge stop need to know what the potential connectional opportunities are.
3. Cradley Heath is a good example of where bus connections are easy, visible and straightforward.

4. Rowley Regis is a station where they are not.

Stations for passengers and communities

Q3: Please list, in priority order, the facilities you would like improved or introduced at the station(s) you use or could use?

For each point that you raise, please provide the name of the station(s) that you are referring to and why you think these improvements are needed.

1. At Stratford-upon-Avon:
 - a) Buffet open earlier in the morning. This station is much used by long distance passengers, such as tourists.
 - b) Ticket machine re-sited into a shaded position, it is often unreadable of sunny afternoons.

2. Many stations, such as Rowley Regis, need more platform seating and waiting room refurbishment, such as has been done at Dorridge.

3. The present layout of University Station currently served by trains mostly provided by London Midland is one of the busiest on the regional network. In recent years the University of Birmingham has expanded and many medical services have been transferred from Selly Oak Hospital to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. There are now proposals to move the Children’s Hospital to the QE site. As the station serves these large institutions the passenger footfall has significantly increased but there is still only a very small entrance and access to the platforms is poor. The new operator should engage with the University of Birmingham, The University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust and Birmingham City Council as to what measures can be taken to improve access to this station, the university and the hospital.

Comfort on board

Q4: Thinking of the train journeys you make, how important are the following on board passenger facilities to you on short distance and long distance train services (1= very important; 15 = not important).

If you do not make one of these kinds of journeys please leave blank.

<i>Facility on board train</i>	<i>Importance on short distance train services (1–40 minutes)</i>	<i>Importance on long distance train services (over 40 minutes)</i>
Luggage space	7	5
Cycle storage		
Audio passenger information e.g. announcements. Seriously consider quantity of safety announcements.	7	7
Visual passenger information e.g. next stop information need connectinal information on all services	2	1

First class areas	12	5
Catering	10	1
Tables	10	5
Seat trays	15	14
Staff presence	1	1
Plug sockets	10	6
USB sockets to charge USB devices	10	10
Pushchair/wheelchair space	1	1
Baby changing facilities	5	7
Suitable toilets	1	1
Free Wi-Fi	7	10

Q5: We are looking carefully to see what opportunities there are to either extend or provide additional trains to deliver more space/standard class seating for passengers to help reduce overcrowding.

If we cannot create all the additional capacity we need in this way, how do you think we could enable more people to travel and improve the railway's ability to cater for passenger growth (e.g. altering carriages, removing/ reducing on board facilities or introducing innovative solutions)?

Where possible, please provide reasons for your answer.

1. Do not decrease legroom. For many trains, this is already inadequate. Consideration needs to be given to seat configuration, with no return to 2+3 seating (passengers often left the middle seat of the 3 empty), whilst investigating longitudinal tip up seats adjacent to vestibules for wheelchairs, pushchairs and bicycles.
2. Additional capacity during peak travel times is best provided by longer trains. However removal of some seats (those nearest entry/exit vestibules for instance) as an interim measure could provide valuable extra standing space for short journeys. We are totally opposed to the removal of toilets as suggested recently.
3. For trips of less than 30 minutes, other stock could be considered, e.g. Vivarail's D stock.
4. It may be difficult to increase capacity on the St. Albans branch whilst it remains as heavy rail. A change to light rail / tram-train is a potential solution.

Better connections

Q6: Thinking about stations served by the West Midlands franchise, are there any particular locations where you feel that connections between rail services could be improved?

If relevant please provide specific details about the services, times and locations where train times are not coordinated as well as they could be.

Please also provide information on any other factors at stations or on trains that would make changing between services easier and more attractive for you, including your reasons where possible.

1. Improve the signage on the walking route between Moor St and New St stations. Provide some departure information along the inter-connecting route. Make the necessary alterations to the advertised route and signage as the building works proceed.
2. Poor connections needing to be improved, for example - at Crewe, 45 minutes between LM trains from London arriving and Virgin Trains connections to Preston and Scotland departing.
3. At Milton Keynes, 59 minutes between Trent Valley train arriving and Southern train to west London, Clapham Junction and Croydon departing – otherwise an ideal route to avoid the hassle of central London, the underground etc., especially for passengers with luggage.
4. More locally, connections between Cross-City and Trent Valley services at Lichfield Trent Valley are not always reliable. Connections to/from Coventry at Nuneaton poor, as they are sometimes at Rugeley Trent Valley to/from Cannock line.
5. The Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust have moved several centres of excellence from Redditch including Maternity, Oncology, to Worcestershire Royal. Parking is now a major issue at Worcestershire Royal with local residential roads being patrolled by traffic wardens. Unfortunately there is an infrequent bus service and no direct link by rail between both Worcester and Redditch requiring Redditch based patients to travel to University to catch a train to Worcester. It would be useful that in addition to adding capacity on the Hereford to New Street service an additional stop is provided at Barnt Green enable travellers to catch the New Street service to Worcester. There are frequent bus services from outside Worcester Foregate to the Hospital.
6. There is a lack of connectivity between the GWR Cotswold line services and London Midland with those residing in Evesham and Pershore complaining that to travel to Birmingham is slow; usually taking between 1 hour 35 mins and 1 hour 45 mins.

Question Area B – Services that cater for competitive, growing economies

Ensuring rail services meet the needs of the areas and passengers they serve

Q7: In order to make improvements to the network, we would like your views on how specific train services could be changed to better meet demand with a focus on the following areas:

- *Where demand merits it, increasing service frequency:*
 - *In the peak and/or off peak period*
 - *During evenings, Saturdays and Sundays*
 - *In the early morning (i.e. before the peak period)*
 - *Over the Christmas and New Year period*
1. Provide regular half-hourly service to/from Birmingham / Stratford, with trains throughout the day via Solihull. There has been growth between Stratford and Solihull to cope with access to further education (in both directions) and also to the Touchwood shopping centre.

2. Provide train services on Boxing Day and also in late afternoon of Christmas Eve when that falls on a week day.
3. Provide local service serving all stations between New Street and Coventry via Birmingham International (for airport users and staff) from 03:00 onwards.
4. On the St. Albans Abbey line, there is actual and further potential growth in the evenings, which requires an extension of the day-time 45 minute service frequency.
5. Late evening trains and Sunday afternoon from Euston are often very over-crowded with a need for 8 car trains. The incoming operator should investigate the market they are serving and have the flexibility to predict and react to such peaks.
6. The logical terminus for Bedford – Bletchley trains is Milton Keynes for both commuting and shopping / social travel. To allow for this, longer trains and more frequent services are required. Operation of this route with diesel trains brings problems because of the distance from diesel maintenance facilities. An option should be to consider separating this route to another operator with nearer facilities.
7. The current Hereford to New Street service is overcrowded especially in off peak as well as in the peak as highlighted in the DfT public consultation; this is a continuing theme in the local press. Observations have shown on 24th Feb the 16.49 Birmingham - Hereford was full and standing class with 170 passengers (approx. 180% load factor from Birmingham to Droitwich Spa). The current number of carriages are too few in off peak with the regular use of two car 150s with suburban style seating.
8. Currently there is sufficient demand for two trains an hour from Hereford to New Street as proposed by Worcestershire County Council. During the span of the franchise this situation will be exacerbated by the current implementation of the South Worcestershire Development Plan which has 28,600 homes agreed around the city of Worcester and Malvern plus a further 16,500 in Herefordshire, over 50% of which are for the City of Hereford and its environs.

Provide the following service improvements:

- Birmingham – Walsall, via Perry Barr (4 trains per hour)
- Birmingham – Rugeley (limited stop south of Walsall, 2 per hour)
- Improve connections at Rugeley with London – Crewe service
- Birmingham – Wolverhampton (3/4 trains per hour)
- Birmingham – International (all stations 3 per hour)
- Birmingham – Shirley/Whitlock's End (4 trains per hour), every other service extended to Stratford (only one offering present request stops)
- Birmingham – Dorridge (4 trains per hour), 1 per hour extended all stops to Leamington (keeping 1 per hour to Stratford as now)
- More stops at Small Heath and Tyseley on both Dorridge and Shirley trains
- Birmingham – Worcester, via Bromsgrove (2 per hour) (calling also at Barnt Green until Cross-City extension to Bromsgrove completed)
- Wolverhampton to Wellington (all stations 2 per hour) – with one starting Birmingham and terminating Shrewsbury as now.
- Rugby to Stafford (all stations 2 per hour – 1 being the existing London – Crewe)
- Delivery of promised services to Coventry Arena station must be a prior requisite for any new franchise.

- Earlier Sunday morning trains on all local services to connect with first long distance services out of Birmingham (New Street & Snow Hill), International, Wolverhampton and Coventry. Later departures to connect with last long distance train arrivals.
- Improve frequency on all local Sunday services:
 - Cross City line to 3 or 4 per hour
 - Other lines to at least 2 per hour.
- Equalise the final departure times at weekends on the New Street – Liverpool service. These are currently 21:34 from Liverpool, but 20:01 on Saturdays and 19:35 on Sundays from New Street. These are too early.
- *Where demand is low and resources/funding could be better used in areas that need it more, decreasing service frequency:*
 - *In the peak and/or off peak period*
 - *During evenings, Saturdays and Sundays*
 - *In the early morning (i.e. before the peak period)*
 - *Over the Christmas and New Year period*

The incoming operator should look at the operation of trains stopping at the conditional halts between Whitlock's End and Stratford, also between Stratford and Warwick and investigate new technology (e.g. passenger worked signals) to reduce operational costs and overall journey times.

- *Increasing or decreasing service levels on a seasonal basis to better match travel patterns during these times*
- *Reducing the number of stops at stations used by few people to provide quicker services for through passengers*
- *Increasing the number of stops at stations where demand is higher than the current train frequency merits*
- *Adjusting the times of first and/or last services where this better meets today's travel patterns*
- *Introducing new routes or services and providing new links to stations including those not currently served by the franchise e.g. to other regions*
- *Reopening railway lines currently not used by passenger services*

There are a number of routes within the West Midlands which do not currently have passenger services. Some are used for freight and some are moth-balled. Many of these, if re-introduced, would provide an economic and/or social benefit. Lines include:

- Walsall to Wolverhampton, via Willenhall
- Walsall to Aldridge

Considering the areas set out above, are you aware of any opportunities to improve, reduce or change rail services to make better use of resource and meet the needs of existing and prospective passengers?

Please provide reasons and evidence to support your views where possible.

Q8: *Some services between stations operate with irregular gaps between trains.*

In these situations, it may be possible to make changes to the service pattern in order to operate a service with a more evenly spaced timetable. More information on the passenger advantages and disadvantages of this are available on page 38.

Considering this information, and assuming the same amount of seats would be provided per hour, in principle would you prefer either:

- *A service that operates to an evenly spaced timetable so that gaps between trains are regular (with potentially fewer trains/longer journey times); or*
- *A service that operates at irregular times with more trains per hour, however there may be a mixture of long and small gaps between services at some stations.*

Please explain your reasons. If you are aware of any routes or locations where you feel that a more evenly spaced timetable can or should be operated please provide details

Provide a regular interval service between trains New Street – Wolverhampton – Shrewsbury (should be every half hour). It should be franchise requirement that where more than one TOCs operate the service, then they must negotiate between themselves to ensure regular interval services are provided.

Q9. *The West Midlands franchise currently provides an hourly service from London Euston to Crewe via Stoke-on-Trent.*

Passenger numbers have grown significantly. There is an issue however that some of the stations between Stoke-on-Trent and Crewe have shorter platforms that can only cater for four carriages. This means trains either have to be limited to four carriages and often become crowded or they are longer but have to run directly from Stafford to Crewe, missing out Stone, Stoke-on-Trent, Kidsgrove and Alsager.

We would like people's views on whether the current service should continue to operate as it does now, or whether a direct route from Stafford to Crewe should be run at all times, providing a consistent timetable and allowing longer trains to operate. It is possible that this service could be provided by another operator through another franchise.

We would ensure that there is no reduction to the number of services per hour at each station between Stafford and Crewe via Stoke-on-Trent. We are currently exploring options for through services to alternative destinations for passengers at these stations, for example to Birmingham.

Considering the information outlined above, which of these options would you prefer and why?

- *Maintaining the current direct London Midland service from London Euston to Crewe via Stoke-on-Trent; or*
- *Operating the current Euston to Crewe service directly from Stafford to Crewe, and providing an alternative service for stations between Stafford, Stoke-on-Trent and Crewe which would provide new links to destinations south of Stafford.*

Where possible please provide your reasons. If you have a priority for which new destinations an alternative service between Stafford, Stoke-on-Trent and Crewe should serve please let us know here.

The second option is preferred. Longer trains have operational difficulties due to short platform lengths at Kidsgrove, Stone; whereas there is demand for longer trains to deal with overcrowding elsewhere on this route.

Provide a service to Stone, Kidsgrove, etc. by means of a new hourly service between Birmingham, Stoke and Crewe (operated as 'all stations' from Wolverhampton).

Managing disruption

Q10: During railway disruption what information would you like to know, and when and how would you like to receive it during:

- *Known disruption such as engineering works*
- *Unplanned disruption such as signalling issues?*

Please provide your reasons and examples of where this works well either by the existing train company or elsewhere on the wider rail/public transport network

The most important factor when disruption occurs is the need for a staff presence whose priority is assisting passengers deal with their onward journey.

When disruption occurs, there needs to be improved information through public address and information screens as to its degree and scope. Recommendations should be offered for alternative services. Ensure TOC-specific and train-specific tickets are always made valid for suggested alternative services and/or routes.

Managing major events

Q11: In what ways can the franchise operator provide better services, ticketing and information for passengers to serve major events?

Please provide details of any specific events, the reasons why services need improving and any examples of best practice you are aware of.

Ensure the operator has sufficient stock that can be used for special events.

Question Area C – Making sure you feel valued and safe

Fares and ticketing

Q12a: What are your views on the value for money you receive for your train journeys in the franchise area when compared to other transport choices available to you?

Q12b: Does the range of ticket types available meet your needs or are there specific examples of new types of fare that you would like to see introduced?

Where possible please give the reasons for your answer.

1. There is current confusion concerning smart ticketing. The current operator has a smart card, but this is currently incompatible with that operated by CENTRO which only covers bus and tram.
2. With the imminent extension of the Metro to provide a link from Snow Hill to New St., there is a need for through ticketing between rail, tram and rail, notably for journeys starting from or finishing outside of the CENTRO area.

Paying for your journey

Q13: We want to make it easier for passengers to pay for their journey and reduce the number of people travelling without tickets. Some of the potential options to help achieve this, subject to affordability and deliverability, could include:

- a) *Providing suitable, working ticket machines at more/all stations, including unstaffed stations, to ensure that passengers always have the ability to purchase a ticket before they travel, including when booking offices are closed;*
 - b) *Promoting and developing new and innovative options for how people pay for their journey, such as the wider roll out of smart ticketing (where journeys are paid for with an electronic card), bank card or mobile phone payments and working with other retailers to sell tickets;*
 - c) *Removing the Permit to Travel machines, encouraging passengers to use the ticket machines at stations to ensure they have a valid ticket to travel;*
 - d) *Promoting and looking at options to increase the range of services available from the booking office – for example some areas such as Merseyside use rail station ticket offices to provide attraction tickets and tourist information at key locations;*
 - e) *Undertaking a review of ticket office opening hours so that they offer a consistent and easy-to-use option for passengers;*
 - f) *Further roll out of ticket barriers;*
 - g) *Ensuring that ticket barriers, where provided, are in use consistently;*
1. The provision of ticket barriers at Birmingham New Street should deter fraudulent travel but they are frequently left open and unattended as are the barriers at Birmingham Snow Hill and Birmingham Moor Street.
 2. Do not remove 'permit to travel' machines; they are most useful when ticket machines do not work or are vandalised.
 3. The current operator has often failed to ensure that ticket offices are open at the times stated and any new operator should address this concern.
 4. Some stations do not have ticket machines managed by the current operator.eg Ledbury where there is significant footfall.
 5. The new operator could sell combined tickets for leisure facilities at its outlets as Mersey rail does.
 6. Opportunities should be taken to look at deployment of staff and Driver Controlled Operation of trains. This would free up the guard/train manager to check tickets, deal with passenger queries and offer a more visible presence on trains. This would be most productive where inter-station travel times are short, such as the St Albans Branch.
 7. On long distance services, where service diagrams are constant, an opportunity to choose one's own seating position similar to the aircraft seating system.
 8. Smart ticketing will offer benefits to travellers, but it must incorporate incentives to use (similar to Oyster). However, such tickets will only be usable with check-in/out machines

at all stations in the network and for train conductors to have hand-held checking devices.

- h) Looking at options to provide better visibility of staff and ticket checking on-train, in particular to ensure that passengers undertaking intermediate journeys away from major stations are likely to have their ticket checked; and*
- i) Continuing and developing arrangements to prevent and deter ticketless travel to ensure that passengers are strongly encouraged to purchase a ticket, with staff available to support the process.*

Considering the options above and any other ideas you may have, in order of importance please list what you think are the priorities for the new operator to focus on to:

- a) ensure it is as easy as possible to pay for your journey; and*
- b) deter people from travelling without a valid ticket?*

Please provide your reasons and state if you are aware of any specific locations where it is difficult to buy tickets or where people travel without a valid ticket.

1. Provide mobile squads of enforcement officers to regularly target suspected locations and services.
2. Ensure that all Moor St and Snow Hill barriers (including the Livery Street exit from Snow Hill and the platform 1 exit at Moor Street) are staffed during the working day and on Saturdays.

Personal security

Q14: What could be done to improve security to make your train journey better and encourage more people to use rail services?

This could include on the way to or at the station or on board the train.

Where possible please provide specific details and your reasons why.

Moor Street and Snow Hill stations rarely have a visible staff presence on the public areas in the late evenings, the time when one is most likely to experience or fear serious anti-social behaviour.

Customer experience

Q15: What represents good service for you on your rail journey and what could be improved or introduced to make you feel more valued as a customer and encourage you to recommend the railway to others?

Please state whether you are referring to long or short distance services and give reasons including any relevant examples of outstanding customer service experiences, related or unrelated to passenger rail services.

A member's delay repayment compensation included payment of additional expenses incurred as a result of missing a Eurostar service from St Pancras, including a taxi fare to another station and surcharge to travel on a later Eurostar train.

However the operator should ensure that where there is a delay of 30 minutes or more passengers are made aware of their right to delay repay compensation. This should be done by announcements on the train, announcements on the station, or by leaflet. All should mention where to obtain the claim form.

It is noted that Virgin Trains automatically make a payment of compensation where a passenger has booked on line and the scheme applies in accordance with the Passengers Charter. It is hoped the new West Midlands operator will look at ways of making it easier for passengers to be compensated.

Q16: How could the provision of information on rail services be improved and what additional information would be of use to you when planning or making your journey e.g. seat availability, journey times, and connection information?

Where possible please provide reasons for your answers.

1. Provide more regional pocket timetables, rather than just line-specific ones. This would suggest extra rail journey possibilities, beyond the passengers' regular journey.
2. Display route diagrams in carriages, including interchange and connectional information. Again this may suggest extra rail journey possibilities.
3. Given the degree of interchange at Birmingham between New Street and Moor Street /Snow Hill stations; attention is needed to provide appropriate train departure information between these linked stations

Local identity and ownership

Q17: Should the railway have its own identity representing the areas it serves rather than the train company that operates the services e.g. a specific brand on services that run within West Midlands area?

Please give us a reason for your response to help us understand your view.

Most passengers have no interest in who owns the franchise running the trains, and except in the rare cases where there is more than one (as for services to London), they have no choice. Repainting stations and trains when an operator changes is also often perceived as unnecessary and wasteful expenditure. So, if required and economically justified – brand by area or type of service, rather than by owner (or leaser) of trains, or operator of stations.

Question Area D – A considerate, sustainable railway

Communities and the rail industry working in partnership

Q18: How could communities, businesses and/or other organisations within the public, private and voluntary sectors be encouraged to play an active part in the running of the railway stations or services in their area?

Provide either a regional or TOC wide forum of rail users.

Q19: Based on your experience or knowledge of the railway, how do you think train services, railway stations and supporting services should be delivered so that they consider and support the environment, equality and the communities/areas they operate within?

Conclusion

Q20: If there are any additional areas that you think it is important for us to consider that have not already been addressed in this consultation please explain them here.

The need to provide additional capacity is going to be very challenging given that many projects have been put back to Control Periods 5 and 6. The decision to delay electrification schemes will have a major impact on the ability to provide extra carriages by 2017. It is also understood that line speed improvements from Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury have been shelved and the ability to provide an enhanced service from Worcester to Birmingham New Street is not possible without infrastructure improvements. For reconsideration, we nominate the Camp Hill curves to provide extra capacity to Birmingham Moor Street close to Curzon Street (for HS2) and the Bull Ring and the partial redoubling of Leamington Spa to Coventry to enable Cross Country services to use that route for all journeys, which frees up capacity on the Solihull route.

A new station is currently being built at Kenilworth. Passengers from this large and growing town are most likely to want a service towards Leamington Spa (for London) or to Birmingham (via Coventry). The line from Coventry to Leamington is not currently served by West Midlands trains. They should be. This requires a re-mapping exercise and a new service. It is understood that Cross Country trains are not likely to want to stop their trains at Kenilworth (other than occasionally).

Delivery of promised services to Coventry Arena, Bermuda Park and Kenilworth station must be a prior requisite for any new franchise in the WM.