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29 August 2018

Dear Sir

Response to Cross Country Franchise Consultation

This consultation response is made on behalf of Railfuture Ltd, the foremost campaigning organisation for the development of passenger and freight railway services in Great Britain. It has been developed by a member of our Passenger Group with responsibility for liaison with Cross Country Trains, in consultation with branches of our organisation.

We have already submitted a response to the on-line consultation, a copy of which is attached. However we are re-submitting in this form to clarify and consolidate our responses to some of the individual consultation questions.

The re-franchising of Cross Country provides a golden opportunity to review fundamentally the scope and style of this franchise, as is apparent from the nature of the consultation. Railfuture would have liked to propose adding a set of Inter-City services, calling only at the cities and major towns on the core network, whilst retaining something akin to the present half-hourly services. However we were advised that Birmingham New Street station was essentially full, with little scope for additional trains.

We have therefore concentrated on improving the existing core services with some minor acceleration where possible, by omitting a few stops, but primarily by seeking to extend the reach of the Cross Country network so that cities and towns beyond the present core can have with direct connectivity with the East and West Midlands and beyond. To this end, an Appendix is attached with a summary of the service pattern that we had in mind when creating our responses. This is not intended as a prescription but as vehicle on which future discussions can be based.

Furthermore we are anxious to improve the passenger environment and believe that

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key to this is the provision of longer trains on Cross Country's core network. Not only would this alleviate over-crowding but enable significant improvements to such factors as seat spacing, alignment to windows, provision of table bays, luggage space and catering provision.

The comments made here and in the attached copy of our on-line response are not confidential, and we would be happy for them to appear on your website and for you to use them in discussion with funders and other stakeholders. We would be more than happy to enlarge on any of the points made here or to work with you to identify the best options for the future.

Railfuture is composed entirely of volunteers with an interest in railway development. It has about 20,000 members nationwide, including members of affiliated rail user groups and is organised into geographical branches throughout England, Scotland and Wales. The Passenger Group has established a formal network of officers responsible for liaison with Train Operating Companies

Yours sincerely

Allison Cosgrove
Railfuture Director, Head of Passenger Group

Appendix – Possible Service Pattern for Cross Country

Regular Services (core network)

- two trains per hour (approx. every 30 minutes) between
 - Birmingham and Bristol/Exeter, with one per hour continuing to Plymouth,
 - Birmingham and Reading, with most continuing to Southampton, one per hour continuing to Bournemouth,
 - Birmingham and Manchester,
 - Birmingham and Sheffield/Leeds;
- one train per hour between Birmingham and Cardiff – replacing the present semi-fast with no stops between Gloucester and Newport (to be replaced by enhanced local service)
- one train per hour to Edinburgh via Doncaster and Newcastle, every other train extended to Glasgow.

Extensions beyond core network (to retain or enhance country-wide connectivity)

- two trains per day extended beyond Edinburgh to Aberdeen, one to Stirling, Perth and possibly Inverness,
- two or three trains per day extended beyond Plymouth to Penzance,
- two or three trains per day extended beyond Exeter to Torquay and Paignton in the winter months, more in the summer;
- one or two trains per day extended beyond Reading to Gatwick Airport and Brighton;
- one or two trains per day extended beyond Reading to Portsmouth (possibly via Southampton);
- one or two trains per day extended beyond Manchester to Preston and Carlisle, possibly Glasgow;
- two or three trains per day extended beyond Leeds to Northallerton, Teeside and the Durham Coast to Sunderland and Newcastle;
- one or two trains per day extended beyond Leeds to Hull
- two or three trains per day extended beyond Cardiff to Swansea

The services from the extremities of the network should have starting/finishing times suitable for the average optional traveller. Since these trains are seen as being additional to the present local services, as far as possible starting and finishing times on the extended part(s) of the journeys should be outside normal commuting times.

We recognise that the demand for the services beyond the network core will be relatively small and we think this can be accommodated by splitting/joining train units at strategic stations.

In this pattern we have assumed that services are focused on Birmingham and allow the bidders to decide on how to join together northern and southern routes. We would urge that North East to South West and North West to South East trains should be timed to be at Birmingham New Street at the same time each hour and as far as possible use adjacent platforms to allow cross-platform interchange. The same could apply also (or instead) to North East to South East and North West to South West trains.