

Railfuture East Anglia Branch

Aspirations for the Cross Country Franchise

Introduction

Cross Country have asked for ideas for improvements as there may be an opportunity for some additional investment during their long franchise extension. The East Anglia branch response to this request focuses on the only Cross Country service which penetrates East Anglia, the Class 170 operated Birmingham to Stansted Airport service. This provides the following important benefits for the region:

- Cross country route spanning the country to Birmingham
- Connections to main lines from London; West Coast Main Link, Midland Main Line and East Coast Main Line
- Link to Stansted Airport and to the cluster of companies in Cambridge
- Local rail access for the Ely and March to Peterborough corridor

It is sometimes forgotten that this is just as much an important local service, as a long distance service.

Railfuture East Anglia's short term aspirations focus on the following problems with the service within the branches area (i.e. Peterborough to Stansted):

- Overcrowding
- Reliability and Punctuality
- Comfort
- Late evening and Sunday morning services

There is also scope for short term improvements in the following areas:

- Smart Ticketing
- Fares Simplification

In the longer term the service should be developed with rolling stock significantly better suited to this long distance service providing more capacity and shorter journey times.

The following sections detail the shorter term aspirations:

Overcrowding

Services at peak times can be overcrowded with the hourly 2 car and 3 car Class 170s limiting the capacity on the route. Overcrowding between Ely and Cambridge is particularly acute. **Cross Country should identify overcrowded services and strengthen these services with additional rolling stock, or work with other operators to adjust the timetable and other services to mitigate for this issue.**

Punctuality and Reliability

Punctuality and reliability are particularly important on this route, as it the service is an important link to flights from Stansted so cancellations can cause significant inconvenience. The service also provides an important local transport link, although the Public Performance Measure is assessed by long distance journey criteria where late running of 10 minutes is considered to be on time.

Cross Country only publish a Public Performance Measure for the whole of their network, which shows a punctuality of 84.8% for Period 9 (and an annual average of 86.8%) against a target of 88.7% specified in the Passenger charter. **Cross Country should publish a separate figure for the Birmingham to Stansted Service.**

Train running information over the last 12 weeks published on recenttraintimes.co.uk shows that the late afternoon and evening services from Peterborough to Stansted Airport have a poor performance with all but one achieving less than 90% of services arriving within 10 mins of time. **There should be a strong focus to improve this.**

TOC	Scheduled Times			Count Ran	Count CANC/NR	% Arrivals RT-10m late	Actual Arrival Average
	d PBO	a SSD	Dur				
XC	07:12	08:39	1h 27m	56	0	86%	08:43 4½L
XC	08:18	09:40	1h 22m	57	0	95%	09:42 2L
XC	09:18	10:40	1h 22m	58	1	92%	10:43 3½L
XC	10:18	11:40	1h 22m	57	1	97%	11:42 2L
XC	11:18	12:40	1h 22m	59	0	97%	12:41 1L
XC	12:18	13:40	1h 22m	59	0	98%	13:41 1½L
XC	13:18	14:40	1h 22m	57	1	95%	14:42 2L
XC	14:18	15:40	1h 22m	58	0	95%	15:42 2½L
XC	15:18	16:40	1h 22m	57	1	97%	16:42 2½L
XC	16:18	17:40	1h 22m	56	1	81%	17:46 6½L
XC	17:18	18:54	1h 36m	56	2	83%	18:58 4L
XC	18:18	19:40	1h 22m	58	1	88%	19:44 4L
XC	19:18	20:40	1h 22m	56	1	91%	20:44 4½L
XC	20:18	21:40	1h 22m	55	2	75%	21:48 8L
XC	21:18	22:52	1h 34m	54	2	89%	22:55 3L

Comfort

A subset of the Cross Country 170s have seats having some of the most restricted legroom of any long distance trains in the country providing a claustrophobic and for taller people cramped and uncomfortable travelling experience. In this aspect the trains are particularly unsuitable for the journeys they are used on.

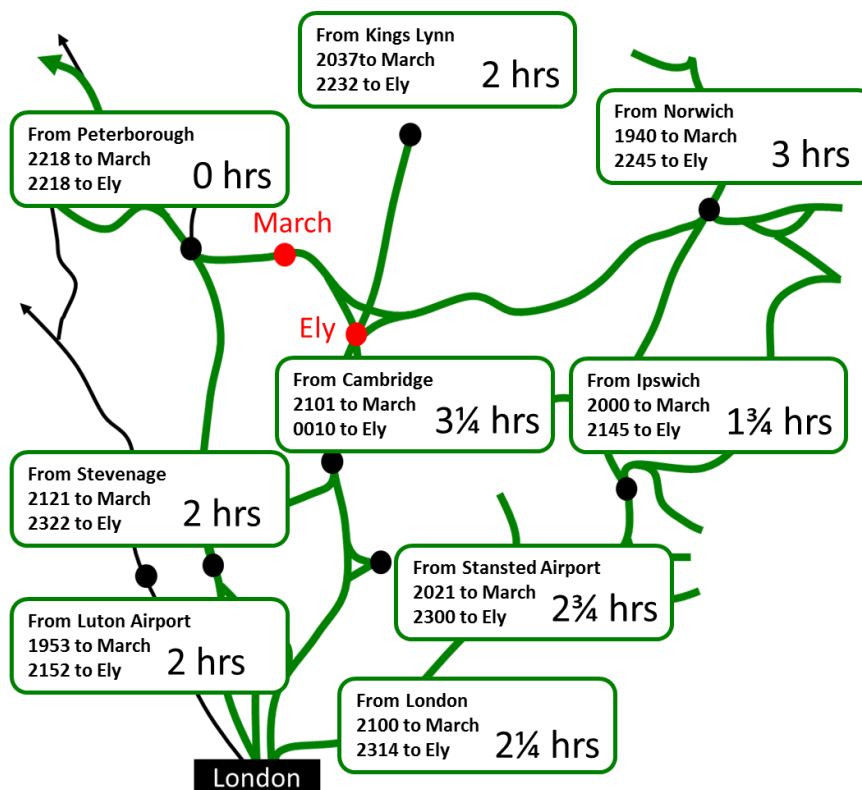
The non-priority seats have been spaced at 26" compared to an ATOC recommended "dimension between seat back squab and the rear face of the seat in front" of 27" (688mm). The deep flat seat back design makes this narrow spacing even more of an issue.

<http://www.rssb.co.uk/Library/groups-and-committees/2013-report-key-technical-requirements-for-rolling-stock.pdf>

The Cross Country 170s should be modified to adopt a seat spacing closer to the desirable figure of 27".

Late Evening and Sunday Morning services

The service provides the main link from Cambridge to March and Peterborough. However, as it is treated as a long distance service, the final service from Stansted to Birmingham is at 20:21, with the final 3 services terminating at Cambridge. This is the dominant reason why the final trains from all over East Anglia to March are significantly earlier than ones to Ely, only 12 miles away, as there is no way of getting from Ely to March after 21:15 in the evening. So, for example, the final train from Cambridge to Ely is 3¼ hours later than the final one for March. This, and other examples, are shown in the chart below.



A simple initial aim would be to extend the 21:27 from Stansted to Peterborough, then after a 28 minute layover return to Cambridge an hour after the current final direct Peterborough to Cambridge service, so improving late evening connections from services on the ECML and a safe connection from the 22:00 from Kings Cross to Peterborough (or tighter one from the 22:10).

The times would be:

- Stansted 21:21
- Cambridge 22:01
- March 22:32
- Peterborough 22:50
- Peterborough 23:18
- March 23:36
- Cambridge 00:10

In a similar way, Sunday mornings have a very late start to the service with the first direct Cambridge to Peterborough service being at 11:00 arriving in Peterborough at 11:51. In the reverse direction the service is even worse with the first service to Cambridge being the 13:18 arriving at 14:08, so no morning service at all. **Cross Country should run additional services on Sunday mornings.**

The East Anglia rail network is also characterised by poorly timed connections resulting in longer than necessary journey times. Cross Country should work were possible with other operators to coordinate timetables to minimise journey times.

Smart Ticketing

Cross Country should work to ensure that Smart Ticketing initiatives are followed even if they are not part of the franchise agreement, with particular reference to the national ITSO Smartcard and the use of Smartphones for paperless ticking. Cross Country should also work with industry initiatives to improve information given to passenger when buying tickets from machines and on the internet.

Fares Simplification

Cross Country should embrace the idea of setting the price of Off-Peak period singles to be close to half the price of Off-Peak returns (rather than the current situation where an Off-Peak single is often only a small amount less than a return). This idea is being pursued by the DfT through a trial, although First Great Western have already gone some way to achieving this with their own policy of pricing singles at 60% of a return.

This would greatly simplify the fares structure by allowing passengers to mix and match different ticket types (Advance, Anytime, Super Off-Peak, Off-Peak) on each leg of a return journey giving a much clearer link between the ticket choice and restrictions for the particular train compared to the current complex choices where return tickets are involved.

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