

Railfuture appraisal of Draft ECML timetable for Dec 2010 (published mid-Oct 2010)

This appraisal was produced by the East Anglia branch of Railfuture – www.railfuture.org.uk.

Introduction

The East Coast Main Line timetable is in the process of being re-written by the Office of the Rail Regulator, Network Rail and the Department for Transport. The aim is to produce a timetable that has trains leaving King's Cross for each destination at the same minutes past each hour throughout the day, with the same calling pattern for each service. This is, of course, enormously complicated, as the ECML is a mixed traffic railway with many busy junctions/nodes along its length. Each node has several services that connects into and out of the main intercity services on the ECML, or join it, leave it, cross it.

One of the purposes of the timetable reconstruction is to provide more paths for the core London to Yorkshire and Northeast England/Scotland services, as well as speeding up the longer distance services, and is an aim to be applauded.

Basic timetable

In the first draft of the timetable the standard departure timings from King's Cross are as follows:

xx.00 York, Darlington, Newcastle, Berwick, Edinburgh. (Some are extended to Aberdeen, Inverness, though none are extended through to Glasgow Central.)

xx.05 Peterborough, Doncaster, Wakefield-W, Leeds.

xx.10 Peterborough, Grantham, Newark-N, every even hour to Lincoln-C, every odd hour to Retford, Doncaster, York.

xx.30 Peterborough, Newark –N, Doncaster, York, Darlington, Durham, Newcastle.

Six of these trains are extended to Edinburgh with varied calling patterns.

xx.35 Stevenage, Grantham, Doncaster, Wakefield-W, Leeds.

xx.48 Open access services to Hull or Sunderland or Bradford Interchange. This xx.48 departure slot varies slightly with operator. The stopping pattern is also variable.

Cambridge line fast services are apparently untouched and depart at xx.15 and xx.45.

Comments

The process of reconstructing this timetable is ongoing and no doubt more changes will be necessary. It will be useful to be informed so that we can make informed comment as the process develops.

The East Anglia Branch of Railfuture have two main concerns about the proposed timetable - 1 and 2 below.

1. Peterborough to and from London.

The very fast and frequent intercity service developed over the years from King's Cross to/from the city has been very important in its development as a very successful centre of economic excellence. Of all the very major population centres along the ECML, Peterborough has claim to the closest economic links with London and thus the railway can justify more stops in intercity services .

The table below compares the current service with that so far planned. It shows the current services in *italics* and the proposed services in **bold** non-italics.

Departures Peterborough

North bound

Hour	Existing		Proposed	
	Time	Total stops	Time	Total stops
05-06:00	-	0	-	0
06-07:00	51	1	43, 58	2
07-08:00	06, 21, 51	3	07, 51, 58	3
08-09:00	01, 21, 46, 59	4	17, 51, 59	3
09-10:00	21, 28, 47, 56	4	17, 51, 57	3
10-11:00	17, 27, 45, 56	4	17, 51, 58	3
11-12:00	17, 23, 46, 56	4	17, 51, 58	3
12-13:00	17, 27, 47	3	21, 51, 58	3
13-14:00	01, 17, 46, 58	4	17, 51, 58	3
14-15:00	25, 56	2	17, 51, 58	3
15-16:00	16, 57	2	17, 51, 58	3
16-17:00	17, 26, 56	3	17, 51, 58	3
17-18:00	27, 52	2	17, 51	2
18-19:00	07, 16, 39, 53	4	18, 39, 53, 59	4
19-20:00	12, 23, 46, 52	4	17, 51, 58	3
20-21:00	21, 28, 46, 53	4	27, 48	2
21-22:00	20, 54	2	27, 48	2
22-23:00	02, 47	2	27, 48	2
23-00:00	-	0	-	0

All northbound trains start at London King's Cross and take 47/50 minutes for the 78 miles to Peterborough.

The current timetable has up to four trains per hour serving Peterborough. Although there are gaps, the frequency overcomes some the apparently random spacing in the service.

The new proposed service level is a repeating pattern of three trains per hour. In theory this should be very good but in practice it is effectively a reduction in service as 2 of the repeating trains per hour run within 5/10 minutes of each other. This is disappointing and it is to be hoped this can be remedied in the final draft. There is also a reduction in early evening departures that could result in overcrowding at the end of the evening peak period.

The xx17 departure will be for Newark-N, Doncaster, York, Darlington, Durham, Newcastle, extended to Edinburgh 6 times a day at 08.17; 10.17; 12.17;16.16;17.16;18.18.

The xx.51 is for Doncaster, Wakefield, Leeds.

The xx58 is for Grantham, Newark, Lincoln or Retford, Doncaster, York.

Southbound

Hour	Existing		Proposed	
	Time	Total stops	Time	Total stops
05-06:00	-	0	-	0
06-07:00	10, 40	2	38	1
07-08:00	00, 19, 40, 46	4	00, 20, 42, 50	4
08-09:00	04, 33, 51	3	06, 28, 41, 55	4
09-10:00	26, 48	2	04, 49	2
10-11:00	05, 18, 37, 57	4	07, 27, 50	3

11-12:00	06, 17, 31, 49	4	05, 27, 50	3
12-13:00	14, 29, 47	3	08, 27, 50	3
13-14:00	06, 12, 47	3	05, 27, 50	3
14-15:00	03, 10, 43, 50	4	08, 27, 50	3
15-16:00	05, 22, 45	3	08, 27, 47	3
16-17:00	06, 23, 47	3	08, 27, 50	3
17-18:00	04, 28	2	05, 27, 50	3
18-19:00	02, 26	2	05, 27, 51	3
19-20:00	07, 20, 26, 46	4	05, 27, 46	3
20-21:00	28, 38, 46	3	05, 27, 46	3
21-22:00	12, 21	2	01	1
22-23:00	22, 59	2	16	1
23-00:00	-	0	23	1

The spacing of the proposed southbound service is much better than that of the northbound. Thus the three trains per hour give an excellent more or less repeating service throughout the day. It is a pity the timings cannot be exactly the same in each hour. The xx.05 service originates in Leeds, the xx.27 in York on the even hour and Lincoln on the odd hour. The xx.50 starts at Newcastle on most hours, with six services extended back to Edinburgh (09.48; 11.47, 13.47; 15.47, 17.47; 20.46 arrivals at Peterborough.)

2. Peterborough and East Anglia to the North.

Peterborough is major urban centre in its own right. It is also the only junction for the rapidly growing population of East Anglia. No doubt past train planners have recognised this and as in the current timetable, stopped most services at Peterborough. For example, currently there are 12 services to Edinburgh and beyond and 15 return services. The proposed timetable reduces this number of services to 6 in each direction to/from Edinburgh only by way of extending the Newcastle service.

The xx.30 service from Edinburgh runs non stop York – London and the xx00 service to Edinburgh from London runs non stop to York.

Generally throughout the day services arrive at Peterborough from:

Stansted, Cambridge, Ely, March	at xx.49
Norwich, Thetford, Ely	at xx.25
Ipswich, Bury St Eds, Ely, March	at xx.38 most odd hours.
Stevenage, Huntingdon etc	at xx.06 and xx.38

Northbound services leave at xx.17 Newcastle and six times to Edinburgh

Connection time from Cambridge	28 minutes
Connection time from Norwich	57 minutes
Connection time from Ipswich	39 minutes
Connection time from Stevenage	11 minutes

Also at xx.51 Doncaster, Wakefield, Leeds

Connection time from Cambridge	2 minutes (or 58mins!)
Connection time from Norwich	26 minutes
Connection time from Ipswich	12 minutes
Connection time from Stevenage	13 minutes

And at xx.59 Grantham, Newark, Lincoln even hour, Retford, Doncaster, York odd hour.

Connection time from Cambridge 10 minutes

Connection time from Norwich 34 minutes

Connection time from Stevenage 21 minutes

(Note that there is an addition service each hour to Grantham at xx27. This is the Norwich to Liverpool service.)

Some of these connections are reasonable but some are clearly not. More work needs to be done on those from Cambridge, currently one of the ECML's main markets.

Generally services depart Peterborough throughout the day to:

March, Ely, Cambridge, Audley End, SIA at xx.18

Ely, Thetford, Norwich at xx.44

March, Ely, Bury, Ipswich at xx.46 odd hour.

Huntingdon etc., Stevenage at xx.18; xx.46.

Arrivals from the north are at xx.04 from Leeds, Wakefield, Doncaster.

Connection time to Cambridge 13 minutes

Connection time to Norwich 39 minutes

Connection time to Ipswich 41 minutes

Connection time to Stevenage 13 minutes

And at xx.25 from York, Doncaster, Retford, Newark, Grantham odd hours, Lincoln, Newark, Grantham even hours.

Connection time to Cambridge 53mins

Connection time to Norwich 19mins

Connection time to Ipswich 22mins

Connection time to Stevenage 21mins

And at xx.47 from Newcastle, Durham, Darlington, York, Doncaster, Newark

Connection time to Cambridge 31mins

Connection time to Norwich 57mins

Connection time to Ipswich 59mins

Connection time to Stevenage 31mins

Clearly most of these connectional times are very poor indeed. Further work is needed in this area. Although it is recognised that many trips start / finish in London, if the Government's objective of modal shift is to be achieved, much more attention needs to be given to journeys between other centres and those that involve changing trains. If the Swiss can do it, why can't we?

As further note : it is odd that the medium sized town of Darlington has two trains per hour to London , two trains per hour to Edinburgh (six times a day three per hour to that city.)

No doubt upsetting the good burghers of Darlington, I would suggest that xx.00 ex King's Cross should miss it out and call at Peterborough instead at xx.50. and the Cambridge arrival at Peterborough of xx.49 modified to give a good connection. Likewise, have the xx.30 ex Edinburgh call at Peterborough at about xx.00 instead of Darlington.

This is a brief preliminary review of the re-write.

Peter Wakefield, Railfuture East Anglia branch chairman – peter.wakefield@railfuture.org.uk.