



Policy and Resources Committee - 9 October 2017 East Midlands Rail Franchise Consultation

Purpose of report

This report outlines the current public East Midlands Rail Franchise consultation and proposes a draft response from this council.

Attachment

Appendix A – Draft ENC Response

1.0 Background

- 1.1 As members will be aware, the district of East Northamptonshire does not include any railway stations. Residents and businesses are therefore dependent on access to services from stations outside of the district. These include Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough stations, which are referenced in the current Department for Transport (DfT) consultation on the future operation of the East Midlands rail franchise. The consultation document can be viewed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-east-midlands-rail-franchise>
The Consultation ends on 11 October 2017.
- 1.2 The purpose of this consultation is to:
- explain the planned process and timescales for awarding the rail franchise which will run from 2019 onwards until at least 2026
 - provide information about the current franchise services and DfT's aims for the new franchise
 - seek views on all aspects of the rail service so that DfT can ensure the new franchise delivers the best possible railway for passengers, communities and business
- It is the latter which proposes changes that would affect stations nearest to East Northamptonshire.
- 1.3 The consultation is a response to challenges that the East Midlands franchise is facing. These include:
- a lack of line capacity, meaning substantial investment in infrastructure is required if additional services were to be run;
 - long journey times on InterCity trains from Sheffield/Nottingham to London;
 - overcrowded trains, particularly on peak time services;
 - limited connectivity to other lines and routes;
 - below average customer satisfaction results.
- 1.4 The stated aim of the changes listed within the document are to improve the experience of passengers by providing more space and comfort, better and more frequent customer communication with the rail operator, improving the reliability and value for money of the service. The consultation document outlines ten top priorities for improving the East Midlands Franchise.:
- Price and value for money
 - All passengers able to get a seat
 - Trains sufficiently frequent
 - Free Wi-Fi available
 - Train companies able to keep passengers informed about delays
 - More trains on time
 - Less frequent disruption

- Accurate and timely information at stations
 - Well maintained toilet facilities
 - Trains clean and maintained
- 1.5 The consultation proposes a number of specific changes to rail services and infrastructure that will have implications for services to and from Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough stations. In turn, these changes could impact on investment, employment and housing development in East Northamptonshire.
- 1.6 The electrification of the line between Kettering and Corby is due to complete by 2019. However, the consultation document also notes that plans to complete electrification of the Midland Mainline beyond North Northamptonshire through to Derby, Leicester and Nottingham have been cancelled. Instead, the Government wants to explore the potential of using 'bi mode' rolling stock and 'alternative technologies' to achieve benefits similar to high speed electric trains
- 1.7 There are other proposals within the document, such as the aim to improve East to West connectivity and the potential for the extension of Thameslink services into North Northamptonshire as well as increasing evening and weekend services.

2.0 Key Proposed Changes that affect East Northamptonshire district

2.1 Station Classification.

The document proposes a solution that involves dividing the Midlands mainline into two distinct markets:

- An InterCity service that will not stop as often at stations served by commuter services. (Under this proposal fewer peak time InterCity services will stop at Kettering and none will stop at Wellingborough)
- A dedicated high quality commuter service from Corby to London which would go via Kettering and Wellingborough.

2.2 It is suggested that by doing this it will lower journey times on InterCity services by up to 20 minutes and, due to longer trains, will reduce overcrowding on the commuter line. However it is felt that this approach would increase the burden on commuters to London by increasing their journey time (without necessarily reducing overcrowding) and also mean that those travelling north from Wellingborough, and occasionally Kettering rail users, would have an increased number of changes to reach destinations to the north.

2.3 Any such changes could also impact on the demand for, and hence delivery of, new housing on the various SUEs being developed across North Northants, including Rushden East. It is also anticipated that they may either reduce the attractiveness of the area to businesses relocating or starting up in East Northamptonshire or that more car journeys will be taken as result.

2.4 Electrification.

A consequence of operating electric trains between London and Corby is also identified in the document as the potential loss of services between London and Oakham and Melton Mowbray as there are no plans to electrify beyond Corby on this route. This could in turn result in reduced services between Corby and Oakham which will impede sustainable promotion of the 'alternative Cotswolds' towns of Melton, Stamford, and Oakham, which have much in common with our market towns of Oundle and Higham Ferrers.

2.5 Thameslink expansion

A further consequence in relation to electrification results from the consultation that is ongoing with Thameslink to potentially include some of 'East Midlands' lines noted in the document. It is possible that this could potentially include at least Wellingborough if not Kettering or Corby. This proposal could bring benefits in terms of lower fares and possible direct routes through to London Gatwick Airport and a variety of other

destinations. However, it is equally possible that the outcome could be that Thameslink could take over the proposed St Pancras – Corby service in its entirety resulting in no increase in competition and no choices in journey times.

- 2.6 The North Northants Joint Planning Committee, Wellingborough Borough Council and East Midlands Councils have responded to the consultation. The former gave particular emphasis to the impact on Policy 17 – North Northamptonshire’s Strategic Connections - of the proposals. In particular, the proposal to abandon the electrification of the Midland Mainline between Kettering and Sheffield is contrary to the plan. The Wellingborough Borough Council response focused on concerns re increased journey times and possible failure to address overcrowding.
- 2.7 The draft response from this council for councillors’ comments can be found at Appendix A. Please note that the consultation document asks specific questions that consultees can answer within their response. The proposed response in Appendix A does not use these questions, as it is considered that the issues highlighted are more fundamental than the suggested questions and therefore it is more appropriate to comment on the document as a whole.

3.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 3.1 The decisions on any changes to the Rail Franchise resulting from this consultation will be taken by DfT. It is therefore for them to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment of their final proposal. As identified, it is probable that some of the proposed changes in the consultation could impact negatively on East Northamptonshire residents (including those with protected characteristics) and this is highlighted in this report and the draft response. However, there are no direct equality and diversity implications as a result of this report.

4.0 Legal Implications

- 4.1 There are no known legal implications arising for this council as a result of this report.

5.0 Risk Management

- 5.1 The key risks arising from the consultation proposals are that:
- a) Demand for housing or employment development planned for the District will be reduced, with consequent impacts on the local economy and investment in infrastructure projects.
 - b) Residents’ quality of life will be affected by the proposals, which could increase journey times or over-crowding.
- The proposed response highlights these risks and seeks the provision of alternative solutions under the forthcoming franchise offer.

6.0 Resource and Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no known direct impacts on council resources as result of this report.

7.0 Constitutional Implications

- 7.1 There are no implications for the Constitution as a result of this report

8.0 Customer Service Implications

- 8.1 There are no known customer service implications for this council arising from this report.

9.0 Corporate Outcomes

- 9.1 The council’s objectives in making the proposed response to this consultation are to

contribute to the outcome of Good Quality of Life by influencing the nature of services to nearby rail stations and thereby maintaining or improving connections to other areas for our residents and businesses.

10.0 Recommendation

- 11.1 The Committee is recommended to consider the draft response at Appendix A and approve it's submission to the Department of Transport, subject to any further comments of amendments they may make.

Reason –To enable the council's views on the implications of the proposals for the East Midlands Franchise on East Northamptonshire to be communicated to Government

Legal	Power: Local Government Act 2000 - Part 1 provides powers for the council to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.				
	Other considerations:				
Background Papers:					
Person Originating Report: Sharn Matthews, Executive Director ☎ 01832 742018 ✉ smatthews@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk					
Date: 21/9/17					
CFO		MO		CX	

Draft East Northamptonshire Council response to East Midlands Rail Franchise Public Consultation

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The district of East Northamptonshire does not include any railway stations. Residents and businesses are therefore dependent on access to services from stations outside of the district. These include Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough, Bedford, Peterborough, Stamford and Huntingdon stations.

1.2 This consultation proposes changes to the East Midlands rail service currently operated by East Midlands Trains (EMT) for the Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough stations.

2.0 East and West

The desire to increase east to west services involving the East Midlands route expressed in the consultation is supported by this council in the light of the proposed development of the Cambridge/Oxford Corridor. Currently there are few viable ways of transferring between the East Coast Mainline, the Midland mainline and the West coast Mainline. (East Northamptonshire falls between the first of these pairs of lines) From Wellingborough or Kettering it requires travelling to Leicester to then get a train to Nuneaton or Birmingham or the other direction to Peterborough/Stansted Airport, both of which are reasonably slow and mean a long journey time between Wellingborough and Peterborough and Birmingham for connections elsewhere on the West or East coast mainline. Often travelling into London and walking to either Kings Cross or Euston and then getting the train out of London again is quicker to get to Cambridge or Stanstead or indeed Birmingham. An increase in services and a lowering of journey times on these East to West routes would therefore be welcomed.

3.0 Changes to journey times and connections

3.1 This council notes that the overall aim of these changes is to improve the experience of passengers by providing more space and comfort, better and more frequent customer communication with the rail operator, improving the reliability and value for money of the service.

3.2 Whilst the top ten priorities for the proposed changes are fully supported by the East Northamptonshire Council, it is suggested that two important priorities that are of great importance to passengers have been omitted. These are that:

- journey times between destinations should not increase
- the need to change trains should be kept to a minimum.

3.3 This council has significant concerns that the proposed changes are likely to result in passengers travelling to or from Wellingborough and Kettering both experiencing increased journey times and needing to change trains when travelling to destinations north of Wellingborough and Kettering.

3.4 As well as having an adverse impact on East Northamptonshire residents accessing these stations for rail travel, the resultant slower journey times for

London will in turn inevitably have an impact on the demand for, and hence delivery of housing in North Northamptonshire, including the various sustainable urban extensions in the area such as Rushden East.

3.5 The Rushden East SUE is anticipated to provide an additional 2500 homes which will add to the significant planned growth in Wellingborough. All these locations are expected include as a driver to development and sales of homes that they are in a locations within easy, fast and frequent access into London. Any extension of travel times in this direction would reduce the likely rate of demand for, and hence delivery of these homes.

3.6 Rushden East will also create significant employment opportunities as well as provision of homes. It is probable that some of these businesses will either be looking for fast connections to London or be looking to use rail services to the north of Wellingborough and Kettering. Slower journeys south or reduced services northwards, particularly to Leicester, (combined with higher likelihood of changing trains at Kettering) are likely to increase the use of cars on these routes rather than more sustainable rail travel. The lack of fast, direct access to London and Luton airport will also affect the attractiveness of the area for international business investment.

3.7 The proposals for more direct services at Corby are to be welcome in relation to the proposed Tresham Garden Village which will provide 1500 homes to the east of Corby although the emphasis in that development is for sustainable employment within the development so demand should be low.

4.0 Commuters and Peak Services

4.1 The document suggests that the long journey times on InterCity services (*those services from Sheffield, Nottingham and Derby to London*) are because of these trains stopping at Kettering, Wellingborough, Bedford and Luton when they are already busy with passengers from further north. This creates overcrowded and slow InterCity services. The proposal attempts to solve this issue by dividing the service into two distinct markets which, according to the document, would create an additional 1000 seats in peak hours and solve the issue of long journey times for InterCity passengers.

4.2 The suggestion is that 'commuter' trains will be extended to up to 12 carriages to counter the loss of InterCity services. Wellingborough is currently served by four trains per hour during peak times, if all InterCity services no longer stop; this will be reduced to just two per hour, a 50% decrease in peak time service. East Northamptonshire Council does not consider this to meet the stated objective that trains are sufficiently frequent from this station unless additional commuter services are also provided. The position will be similar at Kettering although the proposed level of reduction in InterCity lines is lower. In addition, the replacement commuter service would stop at Bedford and one of the Luton stations at least. Whilst the InterCity services may save a minimal amount of time by not stopping at Kettering or Wellingborough, trains from Wellingborough and Kettering would take longer due to the number of stops increasing.

4.3 Whilst the increase in the length of trains to up to 12 coaches may increase capacity slightly, as would the fact that the trains have no passengers from further north than Corby, would it be enough to counter the fact that half the trains no longer stop at Wellingborough and two train loads of Wellingborough

and Kettering 'commuters' would be getting on one, extended, train? This is highly debatable. This would also be before any passengers get on at Bedford, Luton or Luton Airport Parkway, although it is recognised that access to alternative Thameslink services from these three stations may partially negate the impacts of these proposals in these locations.

4.4 The increase in the number of intermediate stops will also have effects on the number of passengers using the trains. It is acknowledged that starting the trains at Corby would decrease the crowdedness of the service when arriving at Kettering, however if two train lots of passengers get on at Kettering then the same at Wellingborough, then the service picks up more passengers at Bedford and Luton/Luton Airport, where normally it wouldn't stop, it is obvious that the 'commuter' trains, by the time they get to London will be very busy and possibly overcrowded. It is a struggle to see how this meets any of the aims or objectives of the franchise or how it solves any of the aforementioned challenge

5.0 Off Peak services

There is little within the document regarding off peak services which can often contribute to perceptions of quality of life for residents. It is therefore assumed that these will remain the same in terms of frequency. Clarification is sought on page 29 of the consultation document where reference is made to off peak services increasing to Kettering and Corby but there is no mention of Wellingborough in the sentence. Can this council assume that any additional services to and from Kettering and Corby would also stop at and serve Wellingborough as well? If this is the case then this should be made explicitly clear within the final franchise. If this is not the case then further consideration will need to be given to the likely impact of such changes.

6.0 Thameslink & electrification

6.1 Consultation is apparently ongoing with Thameslink to potentially include some of 'East Midlands' lines. It is assumed that this could potentially include Wellingborough station (and possibly Kettering and Corby stations). This could act as an alternative service to East Midlands trains and could dramatically reduce overcrowding. It would also potentially offer direct routes through London to Gatwick Airport and Brighton and a variety of other destinations. The Thameslink service could be a vehicle to create cheaper options for people travelling into London by increasing competition and the availability of cheaper tickets. This could create a better value for money service for passengers. However, this is not guaranteed nor is any specific timescale for this outlined.

6.2 This council is also concerned that a consequence of operating electric trains between London and Corby also identified in the document is the potential loss of services between London and Oakham and Melton Mowbray as there are no plans to electrify beyond Corby on this route. This reduces links with key locations to the north and west of East Northamptonshire, particularly in relation to the 'alternative Cotswolds' towns of Melton Mowbray, Oakham and Stamford which share many characteristics with our market towns of Oundle and Higham Ferrers. This will hinder the promotion of the area for sustainable tourism.

7.0 Conclusions

- 7.1 Overall, the East Northamptonshire Council objects to the proposal to cut InterCity services calling at Wellingborough and reduce those calling at Kettering as we believe that these will adversely affect the experience of our current residents and deter future residents and businesses by increasing journey times without necessary reducing overcrowding.
- 7.2 In addition categorising travel from Wellingborough (and to a lesser extent Kettering) as a commuter service into London ignores those passengers that commute north to Leicester and Market Harborough.
- 7.3 We recognise that potential benefits of other aspects of the consultation such as inclusion in the Thameslink area and greater East-West Connectivity but would suggest that further information is required before their full implications can be assessed for East Northamptonshire.