

Environment, Development and Transport Committee

Item No.

Report title:	Rail update
Date of meeting:	18 May 2018
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe – Executive Director, Community and Environment Services
Strategic impact Rail services are important for the county as good services promote sustainable growth and ease road congestion. Good services encourage businesses to invest in the county, facilitate business to business interaction and provide services enabling people to get into work and training; as well as being important for leisure trips. This report deals with the direct services between Norwich and Liverpool, which cater for a range of trips including commuting and leisure trips into Norwich; and longer distance links for businesses, students and leisure travellers to the Midlands and north west, as well as connections to onward services for trips to other parts of the UK.	

Executive summary

The East Midlands rail franchise is in the process of being renewed. The consultation issued by government in autumn 2017 included a question about whether the Norwich to Liverpool service should continue as a direct, through service or whether it would be better to split the service, so that it runs only from Liverpool to Sheffield or Nottingham. Passengers would need to change at one of these points for onward services to East Anglia. Norfolk County Council responded to the consultation setting out that we strongly support the retention of the direct through service.

We have not yet seen a response to the consultation from government setting out their intentions. Government was due to issue the Invitation to Tender to train companies in April this year, but had not done so at the time of writing. Bids from train operators are due in by July 2018 and government expects to award the contract in spring 2019, with the new franchise starting in August 2019.

Norfolk County Council will engage with the companies shortlisted for the franchise to set out our priorities for what they should include in their bids.

EDT Committee in March 2018 raised concerns (about the retention of the direct service) and suggested that this be brought back to committee, with the suggestion that a letter be written to Ministers. A draft letter is included at Appendix A highlighting Norfolk County Council's strong views about retention of the direct Norwich to Liverpool service. This is considered the most effective means of making our case at this time.

Recommendations:

Members are recommended to:

- **Agree the text of the letter, set out in Appendix A, to be sent on behalf of the committee to Chris Grayling MP, Secretary of State for Transport.**

1. Proposal

- 1.1. EDT Committee in March raised concern about refranchising the East Midlands (Norwich-Peterborough-Liverpool) rail service. Members are requested to agree the letter set out as Appendix A, which sets out Norfolk County Council's concern that government will no longer require a direct, through service between

Norwich and Liverpool in the forthcoming franchise.

2. Evidence

- 2.1. In autumn 2017 government consulted on the East Midlands franchise. This franchise covers a wide area of, largely, the Midlands and northern England including the direct Norwich-Peterborough-Liverpool hourly service. The main issues in the consultation affecting the county were:
 - Whether the Norwich to Liverpool service should continue as a direct, through service or whether it would be better to split the service, so that it runs only from Liverpool to Sheffield or Nottingham where passengers would need to change for onward services to East Anglia. From the consultation it was not clear how many services would operate from Sheffield or Nottingham to Norwich, or which franchise might operate these
 - Moving the Birmingham to Stansted services from the Cross Country franchise to the East Midlands franchise. (This existing service allows passengers from Norfolk to get to Stansted via a change onto the train from Birmingham to Stansted at Ely. Greater Anglia will operate some Norwich-Ely-Cambridge trains to Stansted from 2019 enhancing our links to the airport.) The consultation suggested that this could allow direct Norwich to Birmingham trains, but did not suggest that government would require this as part of any franchise agreement. It appears that this would be a decision for the operator, who could choose to run Birmingham trains to Cambridge – or elsewhere – instead.
- A summary of the county council's response to this consultation is given in Section 5.1.
- 2.2. Government has not responded to the consultation to set out their intentions regarding what they will specify in the new franchise. It is likely that this detail will be put into the public domain at the time that the Invitations to Tender (see 2.4 below) are issued. We do not therefore know at this time whether they intend to continue to specify a direct Norwich to Liverpool service in the franchise.
 - 2.3. In February the Secretary of State for Transport Chris Grayling announced that Abellio, Arriva, incumbent Stagecoach and a joint venture of FirstGroup and Trenitalia are on the shortlist to receive invitations to tender for the franchise.
 - 2.4. Government was due to issue the Invitation to Tender in April. At the time of writing this has not been published and a verbal update will be given to Committee if appropriate.
 - 2.5. Bids from train operators are due back to government in July 2018. Government expects to award the contract to the winning bidder in spring 2019, with the new franchise starting in August 2019.
 - 2.6. Officers from the county council will engage with the shortlisted bidders, once the Invitation to Tender has been issued, to set out Norfolk County Council's priorities for what train operators should be including in their submission to the invitation to tender. (Whilst train operators need to respond to, and price, government's specification, they can include proposals over-and-above the specification in their bid.) A meeting of the Norfolk Rail Group is scheduled for July and it is anticipated that this can be used to help further influence bidders' responses, although this would depend on the exact timing of government's programme.
 - 2.7. At that time it is likely that train operators will be able to share with us, confidentially, any evidence that might help to support the case for the retention of through services. Currently we have some limited evidence available on the nature of trips that passenger take (ie whether a large number of passengers from Norwich travel all, or most, of the way to the north west; or if passengers

use the line for trips only as far as Nottingham where government might be minded to split the service). Previous data suggested that a relatively large number of travellers make longer distance trips, and there is no reason to suspect that travel patterns will have changed significantly since that time.

2.8. At this current time a letter from Norfolk County Council to government will be able to set out clearly our views that a direct Norwich to Liverpool service should be retained in the new franchise.

2.9. As stated earlier, this can be followed up with engagement with prospective bidders following the Invitation to Tender being issued. This will allow the council to further push the case for retention of the direct service, should this prove to be necessary. At that time we can also consider the case for further direct engagement with government and whether it would be beneficial to engage with other stakeholders to coordinate advocacy and engagement on the issue.

3. Financial Implications

3.1. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

4.1. Highlighting Norfolk County Council's strong views about retention of the direct Norwich to Liverpool service to government is the most effective means of making our case at this time.

5. Background

5.1. As stated in 2.1, government consulted on proposals for the East Midlands franchise in Autumn 2017. The major points in Norfolk County Council's response included that:

- We are completely opposed to any proposals to end the direct rail service between Norwich and Liverpool Lime Street which would be a loss to passengers and the economy in East Anglia and other cities along the line and we would strongly urge government to re-think any future plans to do so.
- We can see merits of a direct train from Birmingham to Norwich. Whilst it is suggested in the consultation, it is not clear whether it would be part of the specification of any franchise, or be down to the operator of the franchise. We consider that if the suggestion in the consultation is pursued, it should become part of the required specification of any new franchise to ensure that it is delivered. A direct train will allow for faster, more reliable and more convenient journeys. Current journey times of around 3¾ hours (cross country via Ely) or 4 hours (via London) are not attractive and make business to business trips by train difficult as journeys cannot easily be made there-and-back in a day.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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If you need this report in large print, audio, braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact 0344 800 8020 or 0344 800 8011 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.

APPENDIX A

Suggested text of draft letter to Ministers

Dear Mr Grayling

East Midlands Franchise

I write as chair of Norfolk County Council's Environment Development and Transport Committee. This committee is made up of Members from across all three main parties and also includes one independent member. This letter has been agreed by that committee and therefore represents cross-party support for retention of the direct, through train service from Norwich to Liverpool Lime Street in the franchise you are in the process of renewing.

The Norwich to Liverpool service provides a vital direct link between East Anglia and the north and north-west. The route enables passengers from Norwich and Thetford in Norfolk to travel directly to places including Nottingham, Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool. The service also provides a vital connection at Peterborough for services on the East Coast Main Line to, amongst other places, Leeds, York and Scotland. Its connection at Ely provides for links to the west Midlands and Birmingham.

The consultation document issued by your department in the autumn suggested that the direct Norwich to Liverpool service might not be retained in the base specification of any franchise. We consider the withdrawal of a direct service would be a threat to the county's economy. It will risk isolating Norfolk from the growth potential to be brought by government's investment in high speed rail connections to the north of England.

The existing direct connection is well-used by travellers including business people, students and leisure travellers. Changing trains would be a disincentive for people to use rail as it would be less convenient and would add to the time taken for journeys. Instead, we believe that government should be retaining the direct service and working with train operators and Network Rail to see how the journey can be made better and faster. This is particularly important given the growth planned within the county, which is more likely to come forward if transport connections are improved in order to make the area more accessible.

There has long been support from across a wide variety of stakeholders to retain this direct service: it is supported by businesses, in academia and by residents. We strongly support its retention and urge you to include this in the specification for the new franchise when it is awarded in 2019.

Yours sincerely

Martin Wilby
Chairman Environment Development and Transport Committee
Norfolk County Council