

Consultation on proposed December 2019 Trans-Pennine Express timetable West Yorkshire Combined Authority, December 2018

Introduction

This response should be read in conjunction with the Combined Authority's response to the consultation carried out in spring-summer 2017 with regard to the original May 2018 timetable proposals, to the extent that our comments in that response have not been superseded either by events or by comments in this document.

The content of this response is the subject to sign-off at Transport Committee on 11 January 2019.

Summary

The Combined Authority's absolute priority is the reliable delivery of existing services on the core TPE network across the Pennines, with the committed level of capacity provided. Support for service extensions is conditional upon achieving this core objective.

The Combined Authority welcomes any opportunity to improve the consistency and reliability of stopping services between Huddersfield and Manchester, with the overall objective of securing regular hourly all stops services, with half-hourly services at Slaithwaite and Marsden in the peaks.

1. *Liverpool to Edinburgh*

In principle, the Combined Authority continues to welcome the confirmation that this proposed service enhancement is to proceed in line with the original proposals and TPE's franchise obligations. With regard to the specific question of where trains should stop between Newcastle and Edinburgh, the Combined Authority does not have strong views on this, although it may be useful if TPE explore the scope to call at stations not regularly served by Cross-Country trains, providing that any time penalty from doing so does not make it impossible to meet TPE's journey-time requirements.

The Combined Authority's continued support for this proposal being introduced as planned in December 2018 must however be expressly conditional on the matters set out below, in particular with regard to performance and capacity provision on the core network, which must form the priority ahead of any expansion of the network's geographic reach. In other words, the Combined Authority would not support the introduction of the Newcastle – Edinburgh service extensions unless and until the existing network is functioning reliably and punctually, using trains of adequate length to meet peak demand, above all into Leeds.

2. *Local services between Leeds and Manchester*

As you will be aware, the service patterns on the core Diggle axis have been the focus of much attention both before and after the May 2018 timetable change, both with regard to the connectivity and service levels timetabled and to real-world operating performance. The Combined Authority's consistent position has been not to favour

“skip-stopping” or similar patterns on the rail network, and in this respect the Combined Authority welcomes the December 2018 changes as representing the beginning of a move away from this, albeit only the beginning.

Clearly, this route is highly capacity-constrained and some improvements will need to await the Trans-Pennine Route Upgrade programme (TRU), but we believe that some enhancements both can and should be delivered in the shorter term. These include:

- The restoration of a “true” stopping service between Manchester and Huddersfield, operating at least once per hour and calling at all stations.
- An increase in service levels at Slaithwaite and Marsden to 2tph in the AM and PM peaks (in each case in both directions), again to restore pre-May-2018 service levels to those stations. It is accepted that under some service combinations it might not be possible for all the additional peak-only trains to stop at all stations, and a pragmatic view will be needed as to which “extra” trains can accommodate stops at these stations, provided that at least 1tph does stop at all stations between Huddersfield and Stalybridge.

The Combined Authority notes that the current services at Slaithwaite and Marsden, taking TPE and Northern services together, fall short of franchise requirements in the peaks, as well as being inferior to the position before May 2018. While the non-compliances may directly relate to Northern’s rather than TPE’s Train Service Requirement, the reality of this corridor is that the two operations are inextricably linked, and the constraints “caused” by one operator’s service often cause issues for the other. In any event, we retain an open mind as to the potential merits of any “remapping” of certain services if this provides a route to unlocking the service levels we wish to see.

In the longer term, Combined Authority policy favours 2tph on the stopping service between Huddersfield and Leeds via Dewsbury (with the Manchester – Calder Valley – Brighouse – Dewsbury – Leeds service becoming semi-fast), but accepts that this is unlikely to be feasible without additional infrastructure, for which we look to TRU.

3. Operational Performance (Punctuality and Reliability)

Performance on the North Trans-Pennine route continues to fall far below reasonable expectations and franchise standards. Indeed, by some measures¹ Slaithwaite station has the least reliable services anywhere in Britain, and six out of the top ten least-reliably-served stations are on this line; amongst the top 100 busiest stations in the country, nine of the ten with the least reliable services are on the TPE network, including Huddersfield as the least reliable large station of all, with Leeds and York also featuring.

Day-to-day operating decisions have exacerbated the impact of the poor performance: we have received numerous reports of trains that should travel to Manchester Airport being terminated at Manchester Victoria, from where the onward journey to the Airport is anything but straightforward; of stops at Slaithwaite or Marsden being omitted; and of Scarborough trains only reaching Malton – amongst other examples. Where trains only run hourly, the impacts on travellers’ journeys is often unacceptable, and we have heard of situations where such steps have been taken to consecutive trains. This is harming both rail travel and the economies of the communities that depend on rail

¹ Such as quoted on <https://www.ontimettrains.co.uk/stations>, viewed on 14 November 2018.

connectivity. So not only the structure of the timetable but also the management of performance on a day-to-day basis needs closer and improved management focus.

The Combined Authority is aware that TPE is taking steps to seek to mitigate this, including the timetable changes being introduced in December 2018, and it has been pleasing to see evidence of TPE moving away from a “blame culture” towards working positively to tackle the root-causes of the problems. The Combined Authority is in principle supportive of any timetable interventions designed to improve performance, provided that they do not entail compromises to connectivity (either of TPE’s own services or consequent impacts on other operators’ services) that go beyond acceptable limits, as for example removing station-stops or curtailing local services would be likely to.

In this spirit, the Combined Authority has not opposed the principle of the breaking of the cross-Huddersfield links on local services that have proved incapable of being maintained reliably. Similarly, we would not necessarily oppose re-examining the clockface structure of fast services between York/Leeds and Manchester if, for example, a move away from current structure could greatly increase performance or unlock local connectivity at intermediate stations.

Any future service developments must be consistent with radically improved standards of performance. It needs, for example, to be shown that Newcastle – Edinburgh is consistent with this imperative, otherwise it should not proceed. It may be that the industry will need to make mature decisions as to which of the various relevant train operators’ train service requirements and/or other timetable proposals for December 2019 and beyond can and cannot be delivered reliably on present or currently-committed infrastructure. If this proves to be the case, then we would expect:

- (a) to be directly involved in the decision-making, including supplied with all relevant technical information; and
- (b) TPE to work alongside industry partners, including other TOCs, in a spirit of cooperation to achieve the best possible whole-industry outcomes, both in terms of supporting those (such as Network Rail) carrying out the necessary capacity analysis work, and in terms of, if shown to be necessary, being open to compromise on service patterns, routing options and clockface structures.

4. Capacity provision

The current situation regarding train capacity provision on TPE in the Leeds City Region is quite as serious as that regarding punctuality and reliability. While the immediate issues are outside the scope of this consultation, we consider it imperative that no further expansions of the network should take place until peak capacity is at a minimum restored to historic levels and progress is made towards the levels mandated in the franchise agreement. There must be no repeat of May 2018 when the Manchester Airport – York services were extended to Newcastle without sufficient rolling-stock being made available. This means that if, for example, there should be further delays to any of TPE’s new fleets (in particular the Mark 5 and 802 sets), then the provision of adequate peak capacity must take precedence over delivering the Newcastle – Edinburgh or proposed Saltburn extensions.

It appears to us therefore most unlikely that any such extensions could be supported until the full TPE fleet is available and bedded down in reliable day-to-day service, i.e. all of the 68 + Mark 5A sets, all of the class 802 units, and as many class 185 units

retained as required for the “background” timetable on the core routes, including ensuring that local services on the Diggle line are all 6 cars in the peaks². Once this has happened, then we would wish it to be demonstrated how the proposed network extensions would be resourced without any shortening of trains.

5. Longer-term service aspirations

Our 2017 timetable consultation response set out a number of service aspirations that go beyond the current TPE network. These still remain matters the Combined Authority would be keen to pursue.

Instead, we wish to see, for now, TPE concentrate on its core tasks, above all the movement of large volumes of passengers on the York – Leeds – Dewsbury – Huddersfield – Manchester axis (with the ability to reach Manchester Airport and Liverpool regularly and reliably). If meeting this task reliably and with adequate train capacity requires a new approach to the principles of the timetable, then this would be a worthwhile task, and we would be happy to put our resources at TPE’s disposal to help understand the priorities from a Leeds City Region standpoint and help deliver a robust and fit-for-purpose service concept.

² This number might be more than the number originally assumed in the franchise agreement, to the extent that performance-led timetable revisions increase the resource requirement, or franchise remapping leads to TPE being responsible for additional services.