

Cross Country rail franchise – public consultation

Draft response

Importance of Cross Country Trains to our region

The Cross Country franchise (XC) is of fundamental importance to the rail connectivity of the Leeds City Region (LCR). It is the basis of the LCR's inter-city connectivity to important markets in the West Midlands and South West, as well as an important component of our connectivity to the North East and Scotland.

It also provides the only genuinely fast services (currently only one per hour) between Leeds / Wakefield and Sheffield, and contributes to the offer between Leeds and York. XC provides half the current direct connectivity between Wakefield Westgate and Sheffield (the only fast train) and the only direct connection between Wakefield and York. This means that it is a major carrier of the heavy peak commuting flows on which the Leeds city centre economy depends for its productivity.

It can be seen that the LCR depends on XC for much of its strategic interregional and intercity connectivity. In particular, having only one fast Leeds – Wakefield Westgate – Sheffield train per hour is anomalous (compared with 5tph fast Leeds – Huddersfield – Manchester). We have identified a clear case for this to be remedied; our work (shown in the Yorkshire Rail Network Study and Rail Plan 7) suggests that this would be likely to be a XC-type service, continuing beyond Sheffield towards the Midlands, whether via Derby or via Leicester. We would therefore wish to see plans being developed to deliver this badly-needed service enhancement at the first opportunity under the new franchise. In our response we identify other opportunities for the XC franchise to enhance connectivity between West Yorkshire and Glasgow, South Wales, and the East Midlands.

The Leeds – Sheffield fast service, while it is to receive an additional hourly Northern train from December 2019, will at 2 trains per hour still fall well below the standard of service offered on the Leeds – Manchester route, below standards prescribed by the Yorkshire Rail Network Study, and below the Northern Powerhouse Rail conditional outputs. The proposed new service outlined above would also help address this gap, and we are confident that a 3tph fast service across the operators would be justified commercially on this major axis. In a very large market, rail is underperforming between the Leeds City Region and Sheffield – this is particularly strikingly from / to Bradford and Wakefield.

Clearly there is significant overlap within the LCR between the long distance / inter-regional / commuting markets served by XC at present. If passengers making shorter distance / commuting trips are provided with genuine alternatives in the form of additional fast (regional express) services, helping to address the heavy peak commuting flows being handled, this would enable repositioning of XC as a true intercity operation. Therefore there is no scope for reducing station calls on XC services within West Yorkshire.

In any re-evaluation of the XC franchise geography and service patterns it is the Combined Authority's preference to maintain current direct links to the West Midlands and Bristol.

The Combined Authority shares the DfT's priority for addressing overcrowding on this franchise. The quality of the service offer needs to match passenger expectations for long distance travel. It is clear that elements of the current service are not achieving this at present. Repositioning the Cross-Country operation as a true intercity operation (there are parallels to what is now happening on Trans-Pennine Express) needs to encompass:

- new high-quality rolling stock suitable for longer journeys and business travel, with adequate capacity to cope with the suppressed demand that we believe such an upgraded service would unlock;
- faster journeys;
- improved on-board passenger facilities such as catering;
- better cooperation with other TOCs (such as on timetabling, fares and ticketing, and in daily operations);
- an attractive and passenger-friendly fares and ticketing offer (implying a radical overhaul of both the advance-purchase fares offer and of the reservation system); and
- high levels of reliability allied to improved handling of disruptions in the best interests of passengers.

The responses provided to the consultation within the remainder of this document are based on the recommendations provided in the text above.

The Combined Authority notes that this franchise is likely to have interfaces with future planning for HS2 services between the West Midlands and Yorkshire.

Passenger survey

9 What are the particular services, routes and times of day where you think crowding on Cross Country services needs to be addressed most urgently?

As highlighted in the consultation document and the associated prospectus on the Cross Country (XC) franchise, overcrowding is the Department's priority for passengers in the next franchise and needs to be addressed urgently. Overcrowding on XC services is shown to be severe over long distances throughout the core XC network, and is a clear issue that is no longer confined to peak periods as a result of heavy commuting flows, but is an issue across all time periods throughout the day and across both weekdays and weekends. Left unchanged, this situation would only worsen during the next franchise as passenger numbers increase as expected.

It is clear to see that passenger demand on services operating on the core XC network, both now and in the future, justifies substantially longer trains than currently run. In a congested network, running relatively short four and five-car trains (such as the Class 220 / 221 Voyagers) is not an efficient use of network capacity. This implies that the current Voyager fleet is not suitable for providing the required capacity, and that a new fleet is likely to be the most appropriate response. This is coupled with long-standing issues relating to the quality of passenger facilities on board the Voyager fleet including, for example, inadequate luggage space (also see Q18 for response relating to carriage layouts and the wider quality issues with these trains).

It may be that the provision of a new fleet for long-distance intercity XC services could enable a refurbished and upgraded Class 22X fleet to be redeployed on regional express services that would complement the intercity services and so pick up much of the shorter-distance demand: in this way capacity could be added while allowing the XC operation to develop its true potential as an intercity operator, while also addressing long-standing shortfalls in train quantum on certain interurban links such as Leeds – Wakefield – Sheffield.

10 Rank the following in order of priority for improvement for your future Cross Country services. Rank 1 for most important to 6 for least important.

more frequent weekday services	-
more frequent weekend services	-
more additional summer only services	-
earlier times of first trains	-
later times of last trains	-
earlier Sunday morning services	-

Given the complexities of the varying markets served by XC services in West Yorkshire, considering long distance / inter-regional / commuting markets as discussed earlier, it is not proposed to rank the individual interventions identified in the table above. Instead, commentary is provided for each intervention in turn.

More frequent weekday services

As outlined in the initial text with this response, we have identified a clear need for an additional fast Leeds – Wakefield Westgate – Sheffield train per hour, and that this would be most likely to be a XC-type service, continuing beyond Sheffield towards the Midlands.

At present, additional XC services are provided on the Sheffield – Wakefield – Leeds – York section in both directions in the evening peak. This is achieved by diverting one service in each direction from the Sheffield – Doncaster – York route, and is used to provide additional peak capacity required to cater for demand on this heavily congested section of the core network. The West Yorkshire Combined Authority requests that these additional services, and the capacity that they provide, are at least retained. Equivalent enhancements to cater for demand in the morning peak would be welcomed.

More frequent weekend services

See comment above on frequency of weekday services within the West Yorkshire context. It is expected that standard hour service patterns on Saturdays and Sundays should match that of the weekday inter-peak, noting that the National Travel Survey demonstrates that the overall demand for travel on Saturday and Sunday is higher than the weekday inter-peak demand. Overcrowding is increasingly becoming an issue at weekends on XC services.

More additional summer only services

No comments on this section. Not directly relevant to the LCR.

Earlier times of first trains

The current XC timetable shows an imbalance in the times of first trains departing Leeds when comparing Northbound and Southbound services. Southbound services begin at 06:11 with a first arrival in Birmingham at 08:11, Bristol at 09:39, and Plymouth at 11:44. Northbound services begin at 08:07 with first arrivals in Newcastle at 09:27, Edinburgh at 11:06, and Glasgow at 12:12.

Based on the times above, there is certainly room for improvement in the first arrivals into a number of key centres on the XC network. It is noted that

additional journeys (some involving interchange) are available across some of these flows with other operators. Considering interchange further, it is noted that journey opportunities from West Yorkshire to the North East and Scotland (changing at York) are more readily available than journey opportunities towards Birmingham and the South West.

The first arrival times for both northbound and southbound services at Leeds are more evenly matched. The first southbound service from Newcastle arrives at 08:11, the first from Edinburgh at 09:11, and the first from Glasgow at 10:11. The first northbound service from Birmingham arrives at 08:01, the first from Bristol at 10:00, and the first from Plymouth at 11:00.

Again there is room for improvement in the first arrivals at Leeds and Wakefield from a number of key centres on the XC network (subject to consideration alongside other operator services).

Later times of last trains

Current southbound services from Leeds have last departures to Birmingham at 21:11, Bristol at 20:11, and Plymouth at 18:11. Current northbound services from Leeds have last departures to Newcastle and Edinburgh at 20:08, and Glasgow at 18:07.

Current northbound services have last arrivals from Birmingham, Bristol, and Plymouth at 23:07. However, current southbound services have last arrivals from Newcastle, Edinburgh, and Glasgow at 21:08 – this should be brought into line with the last Birmingham arrival.

As with the times of first trains, there is some room for improvement in the times of last arrivals and departures at Leeds to / from key centres on the XC network. Again, it is noted that additional journeys (some involving interchange) are available across some of these flows with other operators. The imbalance between northbound and southbound services is also present when considering the arrival times of last trains into Leeds.

Earlier Sunday morning services

Transport for the North's (TfN) Long Term Rail Strategy identifies a specific conditional output to increase the number of services operating on Sundays and public holidays to achieve parity with the weekday inter-peak. There is strong demand for travel on Sundays, with the number of trips exceeding those taken in the weekday off-peak. TfN is clear that Sunday service provision should therefore be at least equal to that delivered during the weekday inter-peak.

Considering the majority of XC passengers are leisure travellers, and the correlation between leisure travel and travel at the weekend, this would support the case for Sunday services to be brought in line with weekday and

Saturday services, in terms of first and last trains, as set out above. It is also preferable for Sunday services to operate on the same clockface pattern as weekday and Saturday services too.

11 What changes would you like to see to the way Cross Country currently sells and provides tickets?

It is expected that the XC franchise holder will work in partnership with TfN to deliver the benefits of its Integrated and Smart Travel programme.

We expect the future XC franchisee to continue to accept all the Combined Authority's inter-available 'Metro' ticketing products, such as MCard, for all their services that run within the relevant geography. We would also expect the franchisee to work closely with other regional and intercity operators to ensure that the development of ticketing and sales channels takes place in a coordinated way, with compatible technologies, standardisation and inter-acceptance of tickets, mobile apps etc.

For the "traditional" XC markets: occasional travellers / leisure travellers, who may not be familiar with the workings of the network, making long-distance journeys, the importance of "traditional" ticketing should be acknowledged.

12 What changes would you like to see to the Advanced Purchase on the day (APOD) system?

In its current form, the XC APOD system, under which an unreserved seat can suddenly become reserved mid-journey, causes confusion, disruption and ill-feeling, amongst passengers, makes for a further complication in the already over-complex ticketing system, and is a further erosion of the simplicity of the walk-up railway. It is particularly disruptive on an operation such as the XC services around West Yorkshire where overcrowding is a particular problem.

While advance-purchase ticketing can be a valuable product in making rail travel affordable, the experiment of on-the-day advance purchase ticketing, as introduced on XC, should not be reproduced without significant modifications. One modification might, for example, be that last-minute (for example, on-the-day) AP ticketing should attach to a specific train but not guarantee a seat; this is a practice widely and successfully used for AP ticketing generally both in Britain and elsewhere in Europe.

13 What additional information would be useful to you when planning your journeys or making connections onto other services?

The Combined Authority continues to play a vital role in collating and disseminating integrated public transport information for journeys to, from and within West Yorkshire, via a number of channels including online and via

our Metroline call-centre service. We would therefore expect to continue to receive full information from all TOCs about their timetables, any disruptions, future service plans, and so on.

In terms of the quality of information provided by TOCs themselves directly to the actual or prospective passenger, it is essential that this is clear but comprehensive, is accurate, covers the full journey from door to door (if so required by the user), include fares information, covers all relevant public transport modes, is impartial as between operators, and is flexible to different users' requirements for information and detail levels. While it is no substitute for providing adequate peak capacity on trains, information on likely busyness levels of trains can be useful, especially for the occasional traveller.

14 How would you like the information (in question above) communicated to you?

See response to Q13 above.

15 How do you believe Cross Country staff could be more effective in providing service and assistance that passengers need on a modern railway network?

With regard to the staffing of trains, there is clear evidence that a visible staff presence on board all trains is essential to promoting perceived and actual safety, to revenue protection, and to creating a high-quality passenger journey experience such as through the ready provision of journey information and other assistance (such as to passengers with reduced mobility). While this applies to all rail journeys, we consider it to be particularly important in the "traditional" XC markets: occasional travellers, who may not be familiar with the workings of the network, making long-distance journeys.

Station staff provide reassurance, particularly to non-regular travellers, and can improve the overall journey experience. As XC has a large number of leisure travellers, this is an important factor. All station staff should be in a position to provide impartial assistance to rail users, irrespective of operator. This does not appear to be reflected in user experience, so there may be a case to deploy XC staff at key hubs on the routes served.

16 What comment do you have on improving the overall passenger experience before, during and after the journey?

We believe that punctuality and reliability have generally improved in recent years on XC, and we would wish to see this maintained and improved; this should not however be at the cost of artificially lengthening advertised journey times which are already somewhat slow on some routes, with generous allowances. When there is disruption, this needs to be well

handled in terms of passenger information, seeking to hold connections (XC and others' services), and operational solutions (e.g. stop orders).

From a Combined Authority perspective, we would wish to see far better integration between different train operators in matters such as timetable planning (planning connections, ensuring even service intervals), day-to-day operation and the management of perturbation (holding connections where appropriate, with performance monitoring modified to reflect the passenger experience and avoid current perverse incentives), information (timetable and route information to show all relevant services) and fares and promotions. The Combined Authority would also expect full cooperation of the new operator in the development of new ticketing technologies, including MCard multimodal products. Such requirements should be a requirement for all new franchises / concessions.

17 How could the way in which Cross Country deals with your complaints and provides compensation to you be improved?

The Combined Authority expects bidders to consider passenger feedback on this issue in detail (through Transport Focus research, passenger responses to this consultation, and wider sources of communication).

18 Rank your priorities for improvement to the carriage layout for long distance inter-city Cross Country trains? Rank 1 for most important to 7 for least important.

More seats	-
More table seats as opposed to 'airline' seats	-
More comfortable room for short distance standing	-
Cycle storage	-
Seats that align with windows	-
Greater leg-room	-
Extra room for luggage	-

The Combined Authority expects bidders to consider passenger feedback on this issue in detail (through Transport Focus research, passenger responses to this consultation, and wider sources of communication). In this context, all the factors above appear to offer passenger benefits.

XC provides important long-distance connectivity for the LCR. The on-train offer therefore needs to meet the needs of long distance inter-city travellers, commensurate with other inter-city operations. This means trains which offer an intercity ambience, including comfortable, low-density seating aligned with tables and windows, adequate luggage space, a full catering offer, and rolling-stock without noise and vibration caused by underfloor diesel engines.

This is likely to imply a different train fleet – preferably coinciding (and at the very least compatible) with the gradual electrification of the critical cross-country axes.

Where and when do you think these facilities are most required?

All services to / from / through the LCR. XC will continue to provide inter-city rail services connecting with the LCR.

19 Rank your priorities for improvement to the carriage layout for local trains on Cross Country? Rank 1 for most important to 7 for least important.

More seats	-
More table seats as opposed to 'airline' seats	-
More comfortable room for short distance standing	-
Cycle storage	-
Seats that align with windows	-
Greater leg-room	-
Extra room for luggage	-

No comments on this section. 'Local' services, as set out in the consultation document, are taken to mean the current Birmingham to Leicester and Birmingham to Nottingham Cross Country services which do not serve the LCR directly.

20 What other comments or suggestions do you have about the on-board experience?

Building on response to Q18.

Wi-Fi should be made available on all trains. It should be modern high-speed network with reliable coverage and adequate bandwidth, with ability to address faults in service. Wi-Fi should be genuinely free of charge to all passengers, regardless of where they booked their tickets or what type of ticket is held. Wi-Fi is however not a substitute for ensuring that voice and data signals (3G, 4G etc.) are not blocked by the carriage structure, as happens on some recent vehicles. The TOC should make reasonable efforts to work with mobile providers to close the most significant gaps in network coverage on main routes.

Wider survey (stakeholder)

23 Which of the following potential measures do you think could overcome crowding caused by short distance commuters using long distance Cross Country trains, assuming that suitable alternative services are available?

Removing calls from towns closest the conurbation centre either completely or just at peak times	N
Retaining calls at such stations but restricting them to pick up / set down only	N
Removing the validity of multi-modal tickets on long distance trains	N

Other?

In line with responses provided to other questions (notably Q9 and Q39), the Combined Authority strongly believes that the most appropriate approach to address overcrowding is through the provision of additional capacity where it is most needed. The measures identified in the questions as potential solutions are all focused on reducing passenger demand, and fail to address the underlying issues. We consider the evidence to show strongly that there is significant demand for XC-type services which is suppressed through inadequate capacity and poor quality. The focus for the XC network should firmly be placed on increasing supply – though this increase in capacity will (indeed should) not necessarily be solely on XC services themselves.

The wording of this question, in attributing the cause of overcrowding to the use of XC services by ‘short distance commuters’, is also problematic. In reality the distinction between different passenger types and the markets served is very much blurred. The binary view of short distance commuting versus long distance leisure trips (not to mention business trips of all varieties) is an over-simplification that does not help in planning for future services and capacity. In particular, it ignores the fact that XC largely is obliged to fulfil this role because of inadequate investment in regional rail capacity.

As outlined in the initial text that precedes this response, the XC franchise is of vital importance to the rail connectivity of the LCR. It provides the only genuinely fast services (currently only one per hour) between Leeds and Sheffield, and there is significant overlap between the long distance / inter-regional / commuting markets served at present. If passengers making shorter distance / commuting trips are provided with genuine alternatives in the form of additional fast regional / interregional services, helping to address the heavy peak commuting flows being handled, this would enable repositioning of XC as a true intercity operation.

Commentary is provided for each of the potential measures in turn.

Removing calls from towns closest the conurbation centre either completely or just at peak times

Removing station calls is an option that the Combined Authority would strongly oppose for stations within the LCR. XC services provide the only genuinely fast services (currently only one per hour) between Leeds and Sheffield, and contributes to the offer between Leeds and York. Within the LCR XC provides half the current direct connectivity between Wakefield Westgate and Sheffield (the only fast train) and the only direct connection between Wakefield and York. This means that it is a major carrier of the heavy peak commuting flows on which the Leeds city centre economy depends for its productivity.

All stations served by XC within the LCR are important economic centres in their own right. Given the high overall market share for leisure trips across the XC network, it should also be noted that the smaller centres are likely to contribute significantly as origins. In some cases, such a Wakefield Westgate, the station doubles as an important network access point to car-borne travellers.

Retaining calls at such stations but restricting them to pick up / set down only

Restricting calls to pick up / set down only can be viewed in the same terms as removing station calls. For the same reasons outlined above, the Combined Authority would strongly oppose such arrangements for stations within the LCR. In addition, there are also very few successful examples of pick up / set down only working well in practice nationally, with such arrangements proving to be confusing to passengers, and also being hard to enforce – and trying to do so risks exacerbating delays and passing them to other services. Such an arrangement would of course need to backfill capacity on those other services.

Removing the validity of multi-modal tickets on long distance trains

Removing the validity of multi-modal tickets on specific services is also an option that the Combined Authority would strongly oppose. We expect the future XC franchisee to continue to accept all our 'Metro' ticketing products, such as MCard, for all their services that run within the relevant areas. Removing validity of multi-modal tickets within West Yorkshire would set a dangerous precedent for an area that relies heavily on a range of train operators and services to provide intra-regional connectivity. It would also would prove to be complex in terms of management and finances, confusing to passengers, and would introduce inconsistencies between products (with season ticket validity for example) at a time when the consensus is that railway ticketing is already complex.

Provide specific instances where these may be applicable

N/A

24 If it were possible would you agree with transferring these local routes to the West Midlands franchise:

Birmingham to Nottingham	N/A
Birmingham to Leicester	N/A

No comments on this section. Not directly relevant to the LCR.

25 Would you like to see any other routes or stations transferred to or from the Cross Country franchise?

Yes	X
No	

See response to Q26 below.

It should be emphasised that the Combined Authority is “operator-neutral” regarding its aspirations for future services: the key is that the services should be attractive and well integrated within the network.

26 Which routes and stations and why?

Looking to the longer term, the conditional outputs developed for TfN in respect of Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR), and supported by strategic and economic evidence, provide clear guidance for the future trajectory of the interurban links between the main centres of the North. Alongside working towards significantly faster journeys, there are routes on which this implies a frequency improvement beyond what is committed under any current franchises: these include two fast trains per hour between Leeds and Hull (not including stopping services); and four (possibly in the long run six) between Leeds and Sheffield. These enhancements will not only benefit business and leisure travel, but will also expand the “commutable” range of the Leeds City Region, contributing to productivity.

Beyond linking the ‘core cities’ to move towards NPR targets, which we expect to see extended to cover Bradford too, future XC services may play a role in developing Leeds City Region connectivity more widely – beyond the current XC network. The existing evidence base includes, for example, TfN’s Strategic Local Connectivity workstream and Rail North’s Long-Term Rail Strategy (LTRS). The LTRS in particular identifies an “Interconnected Urban Matrix” of principal towns and cities across the North which should be served by a consistent standard of inter-urban rail service with attractive frequencies and competitive journey times.

Addressing longer-distance interurban / intercity connectivity ‘gaps’ this evidence helps to identify would primarily build up the leisure and business rail markets, and they are likely to include linkages within the wider North where rail has potential to develop further, plus also instances of longer-

distance connectivity where rail could perform better. Relevant examples include from Leeds (and also Bradford) to:

- **Glasgow, via Carlisle:** The Combined Authority has carried out some early business case analysis for such a service, which we would be happy to share with XC. There appears to be a good case for it, particularly if allied to linespeed improvements between Skipton and Carlisle which is considered long overdue and easily deliverable; and complement (but not replace) the service currently offered by XC via the indirect Newcastle route. Leeds services could potentially run through from the East Midlands.
- **East Midlands:** Lincoln, Leicester, Milton Keynes (possibly via Bedford when the route opens) – all of these are significant centres to which Leeds has no, or limited, direct connectivity (note that the forthcoming Leeds-Lincoln Northern Connect service travelling via Barnsley and Sheffield, while welcomed, will not give a competitive end-to-end journey time).
- **Wales:** the Leeds City Region has at present no direct connectivity, and often indifferent connections, to anywhere in Wales (including the North Wales Coast and Cardiff).
- **Cambridge and East Anglia:** again, there are no direct linkages at present to these areas of significant economic and strategic importance.

It should be emphasised that the Combined Authority is “operator-neutral” regarding its aspirations for future services: the key is that the services should be attractive and well integrated within the network. As such, the examples named above may be delivered by any operator, and some of those shown would seem less suitable for a XC-type service but are included for completeness.

The Combined Authority would welcome proposals from bidders to serve Bradford with potential new routes. Bradford is the fifth largest Local Authority in the UK, with a population of 534,000, and an economy that ranks the 11th largest in the UK. Despite this economic scale the city is poorly connected by rail to the wider UK economy. The City of Bradford has seen significant regenerative change in recent years. However, despite these positive regenerative milestones, the city continues to be viewed as having a transport infrastructure which does not appropriately reflect the scale of the population or the economy that it serves.

Of the UK’s ‘core cities’ direct connections are only currently available to Leeds and Manchester, and with those connections being relatively poor in terms of journey time and quality of the passenger experience. This lack of connectivity is striking considering the proximity of Bradford to the XC network, with the city centres Bradford and Leeds being only eight miles

apart, and demonstrates potential for new routes to provide enhanced intra-city connectivity.

27 If the network was unable to cope with all the service enhancement aspirations north of Northallerton on the East Coast mainline, would a:

curtailment of one of the existing Cross Country services be acceptable (with the resources redeployed to enhance other existing or new routes)	-
diversion of one of the existing Cross Country services be acceptable (with the resources redeployed to enhance other existing or new routes)	-

Why / why not?

The initial text that precedes this response sets out the vital importance of XC services to the LCR. It can be seen that the LCR depends on XC for much of our strategic interregional and intercity connectivity. It is essential for the Combined Authority that XC should continue to serve the routes and provide the service levels it does on those corridors that serve the LCR.

Two specific reasons supporting the preference to retain existing service patterns are set out below:

- **Direct Wakefield – York connection:** XC currently provides a direct service between Wakefield and York (and beyond to the North East and Scotland). Any curtailment of this service would diminish direct journey opportunities between important economic centres.
- **Journeys between York and Sheffield:** Currently the XC service between York and Sheffield via Doncaster offers the fastest journey times between York, the North East, and Scotland to destinations south of Leeds on the XC network. Any curtailment of this service would result in a significant proportion of these trips re-routing through the heavily congested section of route through West Yorkshire, which is already amongst the busiest sections of the XC network.

It is noted that TransPennine Express has a commitment to run two trains per hour to Newcastle, with one of these trains extending to Edinburgh.

In particular, it is not likely to be acceptable to consider terminating the XC services from the South West in Leeds rather than continuing them at least as far as Edinburgh. Connectivity to Glasgow will continue to be required unless / until direct intercity services from Leeds via Carlisle can be delivered. We would add that terminating XC services in Leeds is likely to be undesirable from an operational perspective as it would increase the congestion caused by trains arriving from the west and terminating at Leeds.

28 Do you think the department's minimum specification should preserve exactly the existing pattern of services and station calls rather than offer an opportunity to change?

Yes	
No	X

Comments:

The Combined Authority sees no reasonable justification for restricting bidders to historic pattern of services and station calls, but as set out above some connectivity needs to be regarded as essential and therefore must be prescribed. Bidders should consider the importance of XC services to our region as set out at the start of this document.

29 Should bidders be given flexibility to make limited changes to the extremities to the network so that benefits such as reduced crowding in the centre of the network can be provided?

Yes	
Yes, but only if alternative services are provided by other operators	X
No	

Comments:

The Combined Authority agrees that flexibility should be given to bidders to make limited changes to the extremities to the network so that benefits such as reduced crowding in the centre of the network can be provided. In line with responses provided to other questions (notably Q9 and Q39), the Combined Authority strongly believes that the most appropriate approach to address overcrowding is through the provision of additional capacity to serve the core XC network by providing better rolling stock, and potentially cascading the existing Class 22X fleet to shorter-distance services of the regional express type. Careful consideration would clearly be required in terms of ensuring that suitable alternatives are made available, and ensuring that interchange arrangements, where necessary, are well planned and of a standard that meets passenger needs, backed up by attractive through fares. More detailed market analysis, including data on passenger origins and destinations, would be required to allow more informed response.

While most of the service reductions at the edges of the XC network are unlikely to have great impacts on the LCR, there are a few instances that are not welcomed – in particular the further downgrading of the Leeds – Glasgow services: until the route via Carlisle is upgraded, this remains our primary link to this important economic hub, and the road connections are equally lacklustre. As set out earlier within this response, rail journeys to places like Aberdeen (as a significant economic centre) and the South West (notable for leisure trips) are currently suppressed by the poor rail offer.

There may be scope to revisit the need for very long distance through services (e.g. Aberdeen – Penzance) as long as connectivity to extremities is retained from the majority of the network core.

30 Do you agree that the current level of Cross Country services to the following routes are the minimum that must be specified for:

West of Plymouth to Penzance?	N
Exeter to Paignton?	N
Newton Abbot to Paignton?	N
North of Edinburgh to Aberdeen?	N
Southampton to Bournemouth?	N
Guildford?	N
Bath?	N
Cardiff to Bristol Temple Meads?	N

See response to Q29.

31 Do you agree that the changes to the following routes would be acceptable if a similar or improved service was provided by another operator:

West of Plymouth to Penzance?	Y
Exeter to Paignton?	Y
Newton Abbot to Paignton?	Y
North of Edinburgh to Aberdeen?	Y
Southampton to Bournemouth?	Y
Guildford?	Y
Bath?	Y
Cardiff to Bristol Temple Meads?	Y

See response to Q29.

32 Should bidders have some flexibility to make fewer calls at some stations, for example if that enabled them to accelerate services?

Yes	-
No	-

See response to Q23. Removing station calls is an option that the Combined Authority would strongly oppose for stations within the LCR.

It is considered that, particularly on the route via Leeds, that there is limited scope for accelerating services due to pathing issues. It is also noted that existing scheduled timings are already quite slack.

33 On what routes could this be introduced?

N/A.

34 Should the minimum specification have the number of trains from each station to Birmingham but give bidders the flexibility to decide where the trains go after Birmingham?

Yes	-
No	-

Through links from the West Yorkshire beyond Birmingham towards Bristol and the South-West, whilst possibly experiencing demand suppression from the use of rolling-stock unsuitable for longer-distance journeys, are important for the region's economy and to provide a sustainable alternative to car and air travel. They should therefore be maintained: any possibility of substituting indirect connections, such as via interchange at Birmingham New Street, would represent an unacceptable deterioration in the service offer and would lead to drops in rail use in the business and leisure sectors. Furthermore, interchange at Birmingham New Street remains a very poor experience for rail passengers.

35 Are there stations within the geography of the Cross Country network that should receive calls that they currently do not receive (include examples and supporting evidence)?

The Combined Authority and Leeds City Council are working in partnership to progress the business case for a rail station at Thorpe Park to the east of Leeds on the York / Selby line. The implementation of the scheme will be subject to the relevant rail industry approvals, availability of funding, and technical and business case feasibility. The strategic purposes of Thorpe Park station would be as follows:

- Parkway station: catering for longer distance, typically business trips to urban centres such as York and Manchester;
- Connecting existing and new office, leisure and retail developments at Thorpe Park to employees and customers throughout the region;
- Connecting new residential areas in the East Leeds Extension and at Thorpe Park to local urban centres such as Leeds, Bradford and York for typically commuting and leisure purposes; and
- Strategic P&R: seeking to capture shorter distance, typically commuter and leisure trips to urban centres within West Yorkshire.

36 Are there stations beyond the geography of the Cross Country network that should receive calls that they currently do not receive (include examples and supporting evidence)?

See response to Q26. The Combined Authority would welcome proposals from bidders to serve Bradford with potential new routes and address the other connectivity gaps that have been set out.

37 What changes would you like to see to the current Cross Country fares structure?

Clearly we have concerns about the current APOD arrangements. That is not to say that AP ticketing is not a valuable way to generate additional rail travel and modal shift, particularly amongst price-sensitive leisure travellers who may well otherwise drive or fly. On the contrary: we consider that there is a real need for XC to reconsider its ticketing offer more widely, in particular to offer genuinely attractively priced tickets for medium-to-long-distance journeys, an area in which at present XC performs poorly in comparison to others such as East Coast. To take an example, for a one-day business trip from Leeds to Birmingham booked one or two days in advance, there is rarely if ever an attractively-priced AP offer (ticket prices of well over £100 are typical), and the only alternative offered is a full-priced Anytime Return at £133 for a journey of less than 120 miles each way. In practice, those who are 'in the know' will book (taking an example of the 08:11 train from Leeds) an Anytime Day Return from Leeds to Chesterfield; an Off-peak Day Return from Chesterfield to Derby; and an Anytime Day Return from Derby to Birmingham – at a total cost of £51.90 and offering full flexibility for a day trip. However, those who are not 'in the know' are likely to consider the offer unacceptable – and many will simply drive, at a petrol cost (the only marginal cost perceived by motorists) of around £40.

The longer the journey, the less effective the existing fares structure appears to be at attracting custom: taking the example of a weekend leisure trip (Friday to Sunday) from Leeds to Plymouth booked a month in advance, again there are no competitively-priced AP products: using these, the return journey would be likely to cost between £140 and £156; restricted off-peak tickets are available from £175.30, but the cheapest return ticket which allows a departure from Leeds before 10:00 is £208.50, and to travel before 09:00 the fare is a staggering £387.40. Based on single occupancy, the petrol cost of a return car would be around £108 – but many such journeys will not be made by solo travellers.

Information presented by Transport Focus at the XC Industry Workshop (11 June 2018) clearly showed that the top priority for improvement, identified by passengers (by an overwhelming margin), is the lack of value for money offered by the current XC fares structure.

It is hard to escape the impression that the current franchisee at present fails to promote travel other than short 'hops' between centres such as Leeds to Sheffield or Derby to Birmingham, and we consider that this needs to change if we are serious about intercity connectivity promoting economic linkages and achieving modal shift from car and air.

As such, it is our view that, XC should be required to overhaul substantially its ticketing and fares policy, particularly to:

- Withdraw last-minute AP ticketing with seat reservations (see response to Q12);
- Expand the range of competitively-priced tickets for middle- and long-distance travel; and
- Actively promote leisure travel, including via an enhanced AP ticketing offer.

38 What more could be done to improve access and provide facilities for those with disabilities or additional needs?

The railway faces a national challenge in upgrading the physical accessibility of stations on the historic network to standards that meet modern expectations in terms of inclusive design, with many stations (and some trains at present) still being unusable to some sections of society, such as those with temporarily or permanently reduced mobility. Within West Yorkshire, we have worked closely together with TOCs, Network Rail, DfT and local authorities to help deliver accessibility improvements, and would expect the relevant authorities to prioritise similar efforts on the core XC network. The Combined Authority considers it essential that the highly successful Access For All funding stream continue to be made available to Network Rail during Control Period 6 and beyond, at least on its present levels.

Station access is also about “fixing the link” between rail stations and the actual origins / destinations of rail passengers’ journeys – that is, ensuring that routes to and from the station are obvious, pleasant, accessible and convenient. Without getting this right, then however attractive the rail service itself, modal shift and mobility improvements will be compromised. Achieving this, where much will lie physically beyond the boundaries of railway land, depends on cooperative effort between the station facility owner (with Network Rail) and the local authority, and new franchisees / concession-holders across the network should be required to work on this vital area, including actively approaching local authorities to develop and implement schemes. It also, however, depends on the local authorities being adequately funded to address their responsibilities.

The introduction of a new XC inter-city fleet would also enable the accessible class 22X fleet to be cascaded for use on a regional express routes where older and less accessible trains are in use.

39 Which initiatives would you suggest to try to reduce the disturbance caused by the ‘churn’ of passengers alighting and boarding at frequent station calls?

The Combined Authority believes that the disturbance caused by the ‘churn’ of passengers alighting and boarding on XC services is primarily caused by a current lack of on-train capacity in the core of the network. The most effective way to reduce this disturbance is therefore through provision of additional capacity.

As outlined in the initial text within this response, we have identified a clear need for an additional fast Leeds – Wakefield Westgate – Sheffield train per hour (beyond the second one committed under the Northern franchise) and that this would be likely to be a XC-type service (see initial text on this matter for further details). This service would go some way in helping to address the heavy peak commuting flows currently being handled, enabling XC to be repositioned as a true intercity operation, and subsequently helping to separate flows of passengers over shorter and longer distances (reducing the level of ‘churn’).

The response provided to Q9 identifies that levels of passenger demand for services operating on the core XC network, both now and in the future, justify substantially longer trains than currently run, enabling both forecast and suppressed demand to be addressed and quality uplifts to be delivered. The provision of longer trains would clearly go a long way to address the severe levels of overcrowding experienced at present throughout the core of the XC network.

In addition to providing additional capacity in the core of the XC network, the response to Q18 relating to carriage layouts sets out the importance of providing adequate luggage space to cater for different passenger needs, particularly longer distance leisure travellers. This improvement, along with other improvements to the general layout of carriages, could also make a significant contribution to reducing the disturbance of passenger ‘churn’.

Specific attention should also be paid to the on train access and storage for cycles, pushchairs, etc.

The Combined Authority welcomes the invitation to bidders to develop ideas to ‘segregate’ passengers better according to the distance they are travelling, perhaps by having a more intelligent allocation of reservations to seats or compulsory reservations in certain carriages. It is difficult to see how the provision of different carriage layouts (in terms of seating configurations, luggage space, etc.) to match different passenger types / needs could be successfully implemented in practice without numerous unintended consequences. The separation of passengers into specific ‘types’ is not easy to achieve in reality.

40	Are there any improvements to the level stakeholder engagement by Cross Country that you would like to see and how could stakeholder engagement be improved?
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Prior to the 2016 Direct Award, stakeholder engagement with the Combined Authority was very limited. Engagement has subsequently improved with the introduction of Stakeholder Managers.

XC is of vital importance to the rail connectivity of the LCR. It can be seen that the LCR depends on XC for much of our strategic interregional and intercity connectivity. That being the case, we would like to reemphasise our willingness to engage, and that we wish to continue to have much greater direct involvement with XC, both in our own right and as appropriate (such as at a more strategic level) via Transport for the North.

41 Does Cross Country provide a sufficient level of support to relevant Community Rail partnerships in your experience?

Yes	-
No	-

No comments on this section. The current Cross Country franchise does not relate directly to any existing or proposed Community Rail Partnerships within the LCR.

42 Has their support improved in the last year to 18 months?

Yes	-
No	-

No comments on this section. Not directly relevant to the LCR.

43 Provide ideas on what more you feel the franchise could do to help the relevant Community Rail partnerships?

No comments on this section. Not directly relevant to the LCR.

44 Any other comments?

Summary of the most important matters for the West Yorkshire Combined Authority:

- **Overcrowding / capacity:** The current Voyager train fleet is not suitable for providing the required capacity on services operating on the core XC network. Passenger demand, both now and in the future, justifies substantially longer trains than currently run. A new fleet is likely to be the most appropriate response, and also makes best use of network capacity.

Considering that the XC franchise is of fundamental importance to the rail connectivity of the LCR, measures to address overcrowding should focus on increasing supply rather than reducing passenger

demand through measures such as removing station calls, pick up / set down only arrangements, or removing the validity of multi-modal tickets.

- **Leeds – Wakefield – Sheffield:** XC currently provides the only genuinely fast services (only one per hour) between Leeds / Wakefield and Sheffield. While it is to receive an additional hourly Northern Connect service from December 2019, it will still fall well below the required standard. There is a clear case for this to be remedied; this would likely be a XC type service, continuing beyond Sheffield towards the Midlands.

This would also provide much needed additional capacity to address severe overcrowding on the Leeds – Wakefield – Sheffield route. If passengers making shorter distance / commuting trips are provided with genuine alternatives in the form of additional fast services, helping to address the heavy peak commuting flows being handled, this would assist positioning of XC as a true intercity operation.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 29 August 2018