



north east combined authority

Phil Dawson
Regulation & Track Access Manager
Virgin Trains East Coast
East Coast House
25 Skeldergate
York
YO1 6DH

Date 7th April 2015

Our reference:

Your reference:

The person dealing with this matter is:

Tobyn Hughes
Managing Director, Transport Operations
North East Combined Authority
c/o Nexus
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Dear Phil

Virgin Trains East Coast (VTEC) – New Track Access Contract Industry Consultation

Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on the above proposals, which were received by Nexus on 6th March 2015. Nexus functions as an executive body of the Combined Authority in respect of Tyne & Wear, and is the owner and specifier of Tyne & Wear Metro. As such it may be appropriate in some cases for NECA and Nexus to respond separately to consultations, to address discrete strategic and operational issues. However, on this occasion I would like to offer the following single response.

The North East Combined Authority is a legal body that brings together the seven councils which serve County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland. Our ambition is to create the best possible conditions for growth in jobs, investment and living standards, to make the North East an excellent location for business, to prioritise and deliver high quality infrastructure and to enable residents to raise their skill levels and to benefit from economic growth long into the future. To deliver these aims we have united to speak with one voice to Government, business, investors and partners.

The importance of the East Coast Main Line as an economic driver cannot be understated. The route underpins the strategic connectivity of the North East, connecting the region to key markets along the route, and providing both passenger and freight connections to the urban areas along the trans-Pennine corridor, in South Yorkshire and in the Midlands.

Continued investment in the East Coast Main Line is crucial to supporting and facilitating economic growth in the communities it serves. A study commissioned by the East Coast Mainline Authorities consortium suggests that a further £5bn in GDP could be generated by

improved passenger services. This is particularly true in the North East. In its Strategic Economic Plan, the North East Local Enterprise Partnership stressed the need for faster journey times between Newcastle and London to reduce barriers to travel and bring markets closer together.

As such, the proposal to increase connectivity to and from North East England is welcome. NECA is aware of several applications for access to the East Coast Main Line, which demonstrates the strength of the market between London, the North East and Scotland. However, NECA understands that capacity on the route north of York is heavily constrained and that ORR is currently examining how this capacity can be most effectively utilised. NECA is concerned that this capacity constraint may lead to unpalatable choices between long distance and inter-urban services. Whilst welcoming this proposal, NECA would like to understand Network Rail's thinking as to how this constraint to improved connectivity can be resolved.

I therefore look forward to hearing from you in this respect.

I am sending this letter by e-mail and by post.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Toby Hughes', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Toby Hughes
Managing Director, Transport Operations

cc Mark Garner, Customer Manager - Network Operations, Network Rail, Floor 4B, George Stephenson House, Toft Green, York. YO1 6JT