

Phil Dawson
Regulation & Track Access Manager
East Coast Mainline Company Limited
East Coast House
25 Skeldergate
YORK
Y01 6DH

Your Ref
Our Ref 15-05
Ask For David Young
Direct Line
Email

07 April 2015

Dear Mr Dawson

Section 17 Proposed Track Access Contract (2016-2025)
East Coast Mainline Limited t/a Virgin Trains East Coast (VTEC)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on your proposed Track Access Contract for operation between 2016 and 2025.

We have reviewed the proposals and South Yorkshire PTE very much welcomes the many benefits the additional rolling stock and infrastructure investment brings over the course of this proposal. We also look forward to the benefits that the new IEP trains will bring in terms of more seats and faster journeys.

As well as providing strategic connections to London and the North East and Scotland, the ECML franchise plays an important role in linking Doncaster with Wakefield and Leeds. Currently there are two ECML services per hour linking these stations, which are complemented by an hourly Northern stopping service from Doncaster to Leeds, and a Sheffield to Leeds service joining the route at Fitzwilliam. Our understanding of your 2020 proposals is that the ECML service between Doncaster, Wakefield Westgate and Leeds is reduced to hourly, as the other hourly Leeds service is not proposed to call at Doncaster. This is a critical route as identified in the Sheffield City Region Transport Strategy, 2011-2026 and it is essential that the current level of provision is maintained and not diminished.

SYPTe and West Yorkshire Combined Authority feel that both the Doncaster and Sheffield to Wakefield Westgate and Leeds local services should operate twice-hourly, and this is reflected in the Conditional Outputs of the Yorkshire Rail Network Study. We are currently told that such half-hourly operation is not possible due to the need to accommodate long distance services, both franchise and open access.

**SOUTH YORKSHIRE PASSENGER
TRANSPORT EXECUTIVE**

11 Broad Street West
SHEFFIELD S1 2BQ

Enquiries: 0114 276 7575
Facsimile: 0114 275 9908
sypte.co.uk

VAT Reg: GB 599912961

Interim Director General:
David Young

Interim Director of Strategy:
Julie Hurley

Principal Solicitor and Secretary:
Steve Davenport



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Without a Doncaster to Leeds twice-hourly local service, we would strongly urge you to consider a Doncaster stop as described in the service marked 'G' in the diagram of Appendix 2C, to avoid detriment to the current provision. We realise that your proposals include an additional Doncaster to Leeds two-hourly service extending to Harrogate, but at the moment, this is planned to operate via Hambleton so would not serve Wakefield Westgate.

As an aside we would strongly support the improvement offered by the proposed introduction of an hourly Doncaster, Newcastle to Edinburgh service, an enhancement on the current provision. There has been local concern over the level of direct connectivity provided by the ECML franchise between Doncaster and Scotland, currently two-hourly. Your proposed hourly service pattern is therefore a welcome improvement.

In summary, SYPTE is supportive of VTEC's application, but we consider that the issue of the stopping patterns on the Doncaster – Wakefield – Leeds section certainly needs strengthening to ensure that there is no detriment to connectivity on a corridor which is critically important for the Leeds and Sheffield City Regions.

Yours sincerely



DAVID YOUNG
INTERIM DIRECTOR GENERAL

cc. *David Reed, ORR* ()
Mark Garner, Network Rail ()