

From: David Sidebottom
Sent: 07 April 2015 16:53
To: Dawson, Phil; mark.garner
Cc: David.Reed@
Subject: Virgin Trains East Coast's application for a new track access contract

Hello,

Thank you for sending Transport Focus details of Virgin Trains East Coast's application for a new track access contract.

1. Form P

Transport Focus notes that:

the contract is to run from the Principal Change Date in 2016 until the PCD in 2025;
it replaces the Section 17 application made by East Coast on 28 April 2014, our reply ref. 0705c15;
that application is being formally withdrawn;
the application has three parts:
Part A runs until May 2019, and includes current East Coast services and the services included in the 48th. to 52nd. SAs, our reply ref. 0502b15,
Part B runs from May 2019 until May 2020,
Part C runs from May 2020;
journey time protection is a "commercial imperative for EC....Competitive journey times attract (passengers) to rail."
it assumes the current level of OA.

Transport Focus notes the outline pattern and frequency of services in the application, which are designed to meet VTEC's franchise obligations in terms of passenger needs and franchise finances.

2. VTEC paths per off-peak hour

Part	total hourly paths	LDS			NCL as dest./origin			EDB			other destinations			
		no./hr.	stops	j/t	no./hr.	stops	j/t	no./hr.	stops	j/t	no./hr.	dest.	stops	j/t
A: until 5/19	5	2	3/4	2/13	0			2	4/7 or 8	4/22 and 4/43	1	NNG or YRK	3 or 5	1/27 or 2/21
B: 5/19 to 5/20	6	2	2	2/07 and 2/01	1	7/9	3/06	2	2/7 or 8	4/07 and 4/33	1	LCN or HGT	3 or 7	1/41 or 2/42
C: from 5/20	6 or 7	2	2	2/00	1	6/8	3/03	2	1 or 2/7 or 8	4/00 and 4/26	1	LCN or HGT	3 or 7	1/41 or 2/41
											every 2 hours	MBO	4	2/41

VTEC's application states that when the full Thameslink timetable is operating from December 2018 there will be eight inter-city paths an hour, peak and off-peak. There are some hours in the current timetable when two OA trains are operated, for example 11.00: 11.21 to Sunderland, 11.48 to Hull, and 16.00: 16.03 to Bradford Interchange and 16.50 to Sunderland. New OA applications and VTEC's full timetable will therefore test the ECML's capacity.

3. Services on the ECML

Hence the intense interest in the capability of the ECML with regard to the services that stakeholders believe should be provided for passengers. A recent example is the JMP report, dated September 2014, issued for the Consortium of ECML Authorities: *Prospectus for investment in the ECML*. Its approach is possibly best summed up by this, from page 2:

The East Coast corridor is really important to UK plc.

Network Rail has issued:

A draft ECML Capacity Options Report to support Access Application Process; September 2014, with the remit to *provide the industry with Network Rail's position on available capacity on the ECML from 2020*.

In December 2014 a report into the ECML's capability: *Group Strategy – Capability Analysis ECML 2020 Capacity – Timetable Assessment Report* (2020 capacity report). The report finds that:

an eighth LDHS path can be accommodated on the route, alongside Thameslink's off-peak and peak suburban service;
however, *the full ECML ITSS cannot be accommodated in several locations, particularly between York and Edinburgh*.

The timetable patterns considered in the report do not exactly copy those in VTEC's application.

The ECML is the only main line on which "open access" operators run services in partial competition with the franchised TOCs. The two OA companies – Grand Central (Alliance Rail Holdings) and First Group's Hull Trains – are linked to two applications for more OA paths – Alliance for hourly London to Edinburgh, with Stevenage stops down in the morning, up in the evening (our latest ref. 2507a15), and First's ECTL application for five paths daily (o/r 0903c15). Both are for limited stops, and concentrate on the market for travel between London, Newcastle and Edinburgh.

First's application states that paths have been identified for services which are "consistent" with current operators on the ECML, and can be "accommodated alongside the aspirations of ...Virgin Trains East Coast". However there are further OA applications from Alliance Rail (GNER) for Bradford Forster Square and Cleethorpes services. Transport Focus notes the comments in the letter from the DfT to the ORR, dated 17/3/15 on the ORR's web site.

4. What do passengers want of a timetable?

The Form P commentary emphasises four major features of timetables:

- i. Frequency: overall the application increases frequencies on all the main routes, although there are reductions on some smaller flows; see iv. below. Passengers will welcome the improved frequencies to Lincoln, Bradford Forster Square, Harrogate and Edinburgh, and the increase in Sunday trains.
- ii. Reliability: most of the commentary focuses on the reliability features of the IEP trains: redundancy such as two pantographs, the Class 800's dual-power and the Class 801's "get out of jail" stand-by diesel engines, the higher number of spare trains than now, but robust, workable, timetables are equally as important for a reliable service. Transport Focus notes the continued use of some shortened InterCity 225 trains.
- iii. Fast journey times are seen as important (see 1. above), with journey times reduced, but two important services will suffer from fluctuating journey times, and from May 2020 will be slower than in December 2016. The extensions to Aberdeen and Inverness are shown in part A as extensions of Edinburgh services taking 4 hours 22 minutes from London to Edinburgh, then in part B of trains taking 4 hours 7 minutes, finally in part C of trains taking 4 hours 26 minutes.

iv. Connectivity: there are clear issues here with some services. Peterborough, with its role as a major interchange for much of East Anglia, is a station that passengers expect to provide through services to all the stations on the ECML itself at which VTEC calls. The current timetable, and that from May 2016, meets that need. However, the full timetable from May 2020 will not provide through trains to Retford, and only every two hours to Grantham and Newark NG. Newark NG will lose its through trains to Edinburgh. Passengers will welcome the new two-hourly services between London and Lincoln, Bradford Forster Square, Harrogate and Middlesbrough, and the hourly service between Stevenage and stations York to Newcastle..

5. What will have to be ready?

Section 5 of the Form P lists what is required of Network Rail to operate the proposed timetables: detailed timetables from all ECML operators, and NR work to develop a detailed timetable for all ECML and off-route services, PPM modelling, an updated regulating policy, and a service recovery strategy, timetable planning rules will have to be reviewed, completion of the planned infrastructure works to increase capacity, such as grade separation at Werrington Junction.

All this will have to be as “transparent” as possible to passengers.

6. Conclusion

Passengers will expect the industry and its regulators to properly assess the demand that generates the flows on the ECML, and create paths and timetables that best meet passengers’ needs.

‘Network benefits’ are important - it is important to plan a route in its entirety - which should ensure the **overall service** on routes meets passengers’ needs to the **greatest possible extent**. There must be no significant disbenefit to any existing flows of passengers, and the granting of new track access rights should not frustrate the industry’s ability to develop a timetable that maximises overall capacity and, especially, utility to passengers.

Some issues arise from the outline service pattern provided in the application:

the reduction in connectivity for Peterborough,
the reduction in frequency between York and Edinburgh from May 2020,
for stations north of Edinburgh, the reversion, after one year of faster timings, to previous journey times, c. 20 minutes slower.

Transport Focus supports the application, which will provide more capacity and connectivity, but believes passengers will expect that further development work will refine the timetable outputs to address the issues listed above, and more closely match their needs.

Kind regards,

David Sidebottom

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