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Dear Joe

The potential for increased on-rail competition - a consultation document

I fully support the need to increase on-rail competition. It would offer more through services to London and other main centres from towns which either do not currently enjoy such services or only receive one or two such trains per day such as was the case for Grand Central from Sunderland to York and London and First Hull Trains from Hull to Doncaster and London. It would also offer lower fares - particularly lower walk-on fares - than the current Franchised Operators (FOs) offer eg Grand Central York to London.

The current system is far too heavily weighted in favour of the existing franchised operators. The restrictions placed on Open Access Operators (OAOs) raise so many barriers that they mitigate against applications by all but the most determined companies with sufficient resources available to persevere.

The two most serious of these restrictions are:

1. The requirement to avoid abstraction of revenue, leading to prevention of calls at intermediate points by the OAOs eg Grand Central services from Sunderland to Kings Cross are unable to call at Doncaster, even though the restricted pathing (see 2 below) would enable such a call without adding to the overall journey time. In the case of the Wrexham and Shrewsbury rail company, the prevention of calls at key important stations en route was a major factor in the ending of the service.
2. The limited number of paths available and the priority given to the franchised operators limits the number of trains which can be run by the OAOs and leads to extended journey times eg Grand Central Sunderland to London services take over two hours from York to Kings Cross due to restricted pathing. An additional issue on pathing occurs where lesser used/freight only routes are used by OAOs and Network Rail restrict train speeds unnecessarily eg Grand Central Bradford to Kings Cross service, leading to extended journey times.

I support the proposals at para 5.25 “we would assess the overall impact on users of the railway, the overall impact on non-users such as motorists, and the impact on cost to government. In doing so we would be able to fully weigh up the costs and benefits of access applications.”

Yours sincerely

Graham Collett

