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(By email only)

18th July 2025

Dear Louise,

Northern Trains Limited response to Network Rail representations – 59th Supplemental Agreement

Thank you for inviting Northern Trains Limited (NTL) to comment on the written representations submitted by Network Rail (NR) regarding NTL's 59th Supplemental Agreement (SA). NTL's 59th SA is an access rights application for a new, 7 days a week, Leeds to Sheffield (fast) service. The below constitutes NTL's response to the representations letter.

Capacity

As referenced in NR's representations, NTL have applied for the quantum of rights in line with what was specified by the ECML ESG timetable work. NTL's subsequent D-40 bid for the December 25 timetable was also in line with the specified quantum. NTL can confirm that all the new Leeds to Sheffield services have been offered back to NTL. No services were rejected by NR.

Whilst NTL are considering a 'soft launch' of the new Leeds to Sheffield service from the start of the timetable change until around the middle of January, this would be a temporary measure to assist with the introduction of the new timetable. At the time of writing, NTL have not agreed to any further reduction of this service and intend to fully exercise the rights being sought in this application after the initial 'soft launch' period, should such a period be agreed. NTL do not expect that any 'soft launch' should preclude or influence a decision on the long term status of these rights.

Addressing Performance Concerns

NTL understands the performance concerns surrounding the introduction of the December 2025 timetable, however the concerns relate to the whole timetable introduction and not just specifically the Leeds to Sheffield (fast) service. NTL is aware that the turnaround times at Leeds station are close to or are at the minimum duration as specified in the Timetable Planning Rules (TPRs). However, most of the proposed services have c.20 minute turnaround at Sheffield, which is well above the required TPR minimum.

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NR have referenced in their representations the importance of a right time departure due to the flight of services leaving Leeds in the same part of the hour as the Leeds to Sheffield (fast). Whilst NTL is not disputing the importance of right time departures, it is the collective responsibility of the industry to ensure a robust and high performing railway, and the focus should not solely be on the introduction of this new service. It is of equal importance that other operator's services along the Leeds – South Kirkby corridor perform highly and that services are regulated accordingly should services not be running on time. NTL is currently working with NR and other operators to review the regulation policies in this area ahead of the timetable change.

Commercial and Economic Benefits

NTL has previously stated in the original application that this new service will create c.900k additional passenger journeys and c.£3.5 million in industry revenue. NTL has reviewed these figures, and they remain accurate.

Duration of rights being supported by NR

NR have stated in their representations letter that they support the application as contingent rights for a period of 1 year with no expectation of continuity. NTL does not support the position taken by NR with respect to this application. NTL does not believe that NR has sufficiently demonstrated in their representations letter why these rights should only be granted contingent rights for 1 year. The duration willing to be supported by NR does not provide NTL, nor stakeholders with any long term certainty surrounding service continuity. Furthermore, NTL has demonstrated that this new service will positively impact passenger journeys and industry revenue but requires longer term certainty to realise these benefits. Whilst NTL is supportive of performance and operational reviews, this should be done looking at the whole timetable, rather than just this service proposal in isolation. NTL ultimately are seeking firm rights for this service however, NTL would be supportive of contingent rights until the end of NTL's current Track Access Contract (December 2027) with a review after 12 months to explore securing the rights on a firm basis. This presents an additional 1 year on top of NR's position and would provide some additional certainty whilst longer term rights are explored. NTL feel that this strikes a balance between the aspirations of NTL whilst the new timetable is bedding in and any issues addressed.

NR's comments on the original Form P and draft SA

NTL acknowledges the several comments made by NR regarding the contents of the Form P and draft SA submitted in May 2024. NTL does not consider it necessary to address each comment made by NR regarding information which has since been superseded by other SA's in the intervening period, or by other events since the 59th SA was first submitted. It should be expected that upon any directions made by the ORR, that any required housekeeping that is non-material to the access rights being sought in this application, will be made to ensure that the consolidated Track Access Contract is correct.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

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Kate Oldroyd
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