

AVANTI
WEST COAST



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Ian Williams
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Dear Ian,

Response to application for directions: proposed track access contract between Network Rail Infrastructure Limited and First Trenitalia West Coast Rail Limited

This letter provides the response of West Coast Partnership (WCP) to Network Rail's representations to the WCP application to increase services operating on WCML over the previous contract, made under Section 17 of the Railways Act (1993).

The benefits of our application

Our proposal builds on the existing, highly successful, VHF service, introduced in 2008. The key change that our proposed December 2022 timetable delivers is to optimise the proven VHF timetable by providing an additional train in most off-peak hours between Euston and Liverpool Lime Street. This was discussed through the bid at our regular bilateral meetings with NR, at which we shared our approach, findings, and proposals. As part of our bid for the West Coast franchise we considered several potential service structures in order to identify the most deliverable timetable which could best manage the increased capacity utilisation in the off-peak. That this frequency already happens in some peak hours makes it easier to understand the impacts and opportunities of extending the frequency. We therefore decided to take the following measures to ensure these additional services, which form a key part of the overall timetable package, can be accommodated without materially impacting the performance of our own services or those of other operators:

- To ensure trains remain right time when joining the core WCML we have improved the timetable structure of the branching routes. For example, in the Up direction there is an opportunity to improve the performance of services by moving the calls at Macclesfield between trains to add robustness to our delivery of right time presentation on the WCML at Colwich Junction.

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- The additional platform capacity for extra services at London Euston is created through delivering a more consistent all-day pattern with respect to turnrounds. This has reduced the very longest turnrounds, and not squeezed shorter turnrounds, thereby avoiding trains occupying platforms for extended times and potentially increasing delays during disruption. Furthermore, the combination of a new fleet and the operation of peak Liverpool services throughout the day, enables more efficient deployment of the fleet, which reduces the number of ECS movements to and from Wembley depot during the daytime. This consequently reduces the use of the slow lines where most freight services operate.
- At Ledburn Junction, we planned a three-minute margin to apply before and after all crossing moves in the standard hour. This is an improvement on the current ‘three minutes before and two minutes after’ rule that is currently applied. Also, engineering allowances are occasionally applied incorrectly in the current timetable. Sometimes, the allowances are moved from Tring (where they are specified in Up trains in TPR) to Ledburn Junction to act as pseudo pathing time, rather than adding pathing time and having the engineering allowance in the train. We have corrected this to ensure that engineering allowances are at Tring. This, and the above improvements to margin application, will ensure further resilience on this core section of the WCML.
- We have improved the spacing of our Up Direction calls at Milton Keynes Central. Trains to London are currently very bunched and our timetable achieves a much better spread of calls. This reduces the need to use Platform 5, which must be used when two trains are running on headway and need to call at Milton Keynes Central. This reduced planned use of Platform 5 offers signallers more opportunity to regulate the service using the platform during disruption to reduce delays.
- We have reviewed the timetable in both directions to better flight trains between Crewe and Liverpool, based on speed. We have flighted our services to Liverpool Lime Street in front of the WMT Birmingham New Street–Liverpool Lime Street services at Crewe, and in the opposite direction, from Liverpool Lime Street. The WMT Liverpool Lime Street–Birmingham service departs Liverpool at xx:33 calling at most stations; the existing Avanti West Coast Liverpool Lime Street service departs Liverpool at xx:47. If the xx:33 suffers delay, there is therefore a risk of delay to the xx:47 as it catches up. Our new timetable structure, with our two trains departing Liverpool at xx:01 and xx:29 removes this possibility. Also, by increasing spacing between the fast service and the slower WMT service, it increases opportunities for regulation of late running freight on the main line between Weaver Junction and Winsford. Furthermore, changing the departure time from Liverpool Lime Street also allows the two non-stop London trains to be closely flighted together to optimise the use of limited capacity between Weaver Jn and London Euston.
- For resilient performance onto the core WCML, we have included some additional performance time into Avanti West Coast services, adding more robustness to the timetable.
- Operating higher capacity Pendolinos on all Birmingham-Scotland services, instead of Voyagers, providing greater passenger capacity with likely positive impact on station dwell times at times of peak demand.

Except where requested we have not provided detailed timetables, because since the bid submission the wider industry timetable has continued to evolve and has seen significant change as part of the timetable development process. However, many of the concepts we included as part of the bid,

outlined above, are still relevant to ensure the additional Avanti West Coast services can be delivered robustly. As part of our continuous timetable development process we are factoring in these subsequent timetable changes to address any capacity issues that may arise with the new hourly off-peak Euston to Liverpool Lime Street service.

The Train Service Requirement provides some flexibility to change the calling pattern, and as a result the changes outlined below are currently being considered to unlock further capacity:

- Swapping of intermediate calls in Avanti West Coast services, to make the LDHS services more flighted alongside other Operators who services typically use slower rolling stock and call at more intermediate stations.
- Transfer of existing calls in Avanti West Coast services that form part of the current Train Service Requirement, to the new Euston to Liverpool Lime Street service. This helps to accelerate existing schedules in order to flight fast services together and maximise the use of capacity.
- Removal of calls in the new Euston-Liverpool Lime Street service that are not required in the Train Service Requirement.
- The scope to provide increased parallel working at locations where there is no grade separation. We can use the calling patterns as a lever to deliver this.

However, the development of the December 2022 timetable remains an iterative process as we continue to collaborate with the wider industry and Network Rail and refine the offer to best suit growing demand across the various AWC markets. The services shown and benefits described may therefore be subject to change.

Network Rail capacity study

The ORR has asked Network Rail to undertake a capacity study for the WCML to confirm the capacity available. We fully appreciate the importance of NR carrying out a detailed study of capacity on the WCML and would welcome the opportunity to provide more detailed information, and assistance, for this study.

Infrastructure capability

The capacity and timetable plans proposed include increasing the Permissible Speed (PS) over certain sections of the route to speeds close to the Enhanced Permissible Speed (EPS), thereby allowing the use of non-tilting rolling stock at speeds greater than 110mph. Our Franchise bid submission explained how this can be done within the current standards and guidance and without intrusive physical intervention. These changes will be augmented by the greater acceleration of the new electric and bi-mode rolling stock against the Class 221 stock it will be replacing.

In its response, *“Network Rail notes that there has been some discussions regarding line speed enhancements. However, there are currently no committed works to increase line speeds on the routes*

specified in the application”, and that it “would need to understand what works the applicant envisaged in connection with this the application to facilitate these improvements”.

WCP notes that the scheme concept was discussed during the bid phase with Ian Dean, NR Principle Track Engineer; Brian Whitney, NR Head of Standards, and David Brookes, Senior Asset Engineer, Track. We have since shared significantly more detail with these NR experts and have received positive responses from them all. The scheme has also been shared at high level with Tim Shoveller, NR Regional Managing Director, and James Dean, NR WC South Route Director, eliciting a similar response. A WCP project team is currently developing the project in conjunction with a Network Rail Sponsor, for delivery in the originally proposed timescales.

Form of contract

We note Network Rail’s comments under the Form of Contract section. At the time of the submission of the s.17 application WCP was in commercially confidential negotiation with train manufacturers and unable to provide any information relating to our preferred new rolling stock, which was therefore referred to as Class (x) and Class (y). Negotiations have now been concluded and we can confirm that we will be purchasing new 125mph capable Class 80x rolling stock from Hitachi. The performance and reliability characteristics of these trains are well understood in the industry and we are confident that with the changes being developed in aligning PS and EPS over some sections of the route the change in rolling stock will not adversely affect identified capacity or performance.

Network Rail comments that *“it may be necessary to undertake further assessments of the infrastructure capability, to understand whether it is possible to operate a higher quantum of electric vehicles beyond those train slots which have already been accommodated”.*

We note also that the WCML capacity study development slide pack, circulated (13 Dec 2019) by Elaine Pocock for discussion for the finalisation of the remit states on slide 5 *“The timetable analysis has shown that up to three additional paths per hour in each direction could be accommodated within the existing WCML timetable structure once the power supply upgrade work is completed for December 2015”*, which would seem to imply that the necessary analysis has been undertaken and included in work that should have been delivered.

Infrastructure improvements

There are no infrastructure improvements required in order to deliver our proposed capacity increases. However, within our Franchise Agreement we have a mechanism that enable us to develop with Network Rail infrastructure improvements - the Minor Infrastructure Enhancement Plan. This funded initiative will enable the implementation of minor infrastructure enhancement schemes to enhance the capacity, flexibility, and robustness of the network. Work has already started to identify potential schemes, these include slow line line-speed rationalisation and improvement around Liverpool South Parkway, and Carlisle station; minor infill electrification; and route clearance works to facilitate more effective diversions. There is also opportunity through the Alliance between WCP and Network Rail to identify and jointly develop ideas that will further enhance the robustness of capacity and performance.

I hope the above information is helpful in developing ORR's position in respect of the conflicting applications. We are committed to working collaboratively with Network Rail to implement the changes detailed in our Franchise Agreement.

Yours sincerely,



Sue Rhymes
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Avanti West Coast