

Report to Partnership Meeting 5th October 2012

CONSULTATION

East Coast Franchise - DfT Consultation Response

Response from HITRANS on the InterCity East Coast franchise consultation.

HITRANS is the statutory Regional Transport Partnership covering most of the Highlands and Islands: Highland Council; Moray Council; Orkney Islands Council; Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council) and parts of the Argyll and Bute Council area.

Q1 Do consultees agree that the proposed franchise objectives are an appropriate expression of the priorities that should apply to the new ICEC franchise?

In addition to the objectives stated, we believe that in the HITRANS context the new franchise must also work collaboratively with the ScotRail franchise and the new Scotsleeper franchise, particularly in ensuring equity of passenger benefits including connections and inter-available ticketing. The franchise should also ensure the provision of equivalent seating capacity through the transition to new Super Express Train (IEP), recognising the high recent growth, and strong growth predictions on the Highland Main line.

Q2 Are there any other issues that consultees believe the Department should take into account in determining the length of the new ICEC franchise?

The Scottish Government's commitment to 100 single track km of electrification per annum may result in the roll out of electrification to Aberdeen (phase 4) and Inverness (phase 5) beginning before the end of this franchise.

We would also add that HS2 NE services could continue on the classic route to Edinburgh.

Q3 What are consultees' views on the principle of the new ICEC franchise becoming a multi-purpose train operator along the route of the East Coast Main Line rather than focusing only on the InterCity services provided by the current operator?

The inclusion of local services in the franchise would detract from the Inter-City nature of the franchise and its capability of making premium payments to the DfT. Management focus could become distracted from the core business of running fast trains to the UK capital.

Q4 Do consultees have any comments on which services might be considered for inclusion in the new ICEC franchise and how they might be specified?

The new franchise should specify the existing network with bidders able to suggest service enhancements where there is a business case or where there are logical operational reasons, such as returning to depot or optimising train and traincrew diagrams.

Q5 Are consultees aware of any other rail or non-rail major development schemes that are likely to have a significant impact on the new ICEC franchise?

We would expect the East Coast Franchise to take full advantage, as appropriate, of the Scottish Government's commitment to reduce journey times between Aberdeen/Inverness and Edinburgh. For example, the Scottish Government has committed to introducing faster hourly services between Inverness and Edinburgh; originally between 2015-19, and now by 2025. This may include some resignalling in addition to additional passing loops.

Q6 Are there any research findings, evidence or other publications that consultees wish to bring to the attention of the Department as part of this refranchising process?

HITRANS' InverCity study, analysing Inverness to Central Belt and cross-border demand, highlights the significance of journeys to places other than London. This report is available at

http://www.hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Invercity_Rail_Study.pdf

Q7 Consultees' views are invited on the train service specification, including which aspects should be mandated by the Department and which can be left to commercial discretion; and also on whether or not there should be a change in the specified minimum service level when IEP trains are introduced.

The introduction of IEP with its tight availability diagrams may incentivise the franchisee to flex services and optimise train mileage. We would see the case for a second Inverness service, avoiding the 12 hour layover in Inverness, which of course would also serve the substantial central Scotland population centres of Perth, Stirling and Falkirk.

Connections (and splitting/joining) should be closely managed to ensure minimal dwell times at Waverley, and integration with local and regional services.

We have a concern about journey times north of Edinburgh following the introduction of bi-modes which may be slower climbing Druimuachdar and Slochd than the current HSTs.

Where services are disrupted north of Edinburgh, there must be greater communication between rail replacement bus operators and ScotRail as passengers rarely prefer to travel all the way to Edinburgh from Inverness by bus.

Q8 Consultees' views are invited on the potential for the franchise to serve locations accessible from the East Coast Main Line which currently have limited or no direct services to London

The core network must be protected. Any enhancements must not be ORCATS raiders nor have a detrimental effect on the performance and attractiveness of the long-distance services.

Q9 Are consultees aware of any ways in which improved ticketing, smart ticketing and passenger information might be provided?

ICEC trains serve a dispersed population across the HITRANS area. Walk on fares, inter-available with ScotRail, and other local products must be retained while recognising the customer benefits of the strong trend towards electronic, pre-purchase, operator-specific ticketing. Electronic ticketing should include mobile phone ticketing and QR code / near field communication ticketing should be considered for roll out. Where customer printed ticketing is accepted it would add to the versatility of such products if they could be used without the requirement for the customer to be in possession of the credit / debit card used in their purchase.

Q10 Do consultees support the use of NPS scores to monitor and improve service quality of the ICEC franchise? Are there any other approaches that might be more effective in securing improvements in customer experience?

NPS scores are a useful tool which is supported by the RTPs. It does not, however, monitor non-users' expectations, which are important for gaining new customers. We also suggest that the SQUIRE regime, which applies to the ScotRail franchise, deserves wider use, perhaps in a re-developed form.

Q11 What are consultees' priorities for improvements to the stations managed by the ICEC franchisee?

ICEC manages only Dunbar in Scotland, an anomaly. ICEC stations south of the border may differ from those north of the border in terms of gating/revenue

protection, SQUIRE-type inspections and a concept of 'peakiness' that is London-centric regarding ticket validities.

Q12 What do consultees believe are the most important factors in improving safety and security (actual or perceived)?

In terms of personal safety, key expectations would be that stations should be well lit, covered by CCTV and be staffed as far as reasonably possible. On trains, staff should be very visible and adequately trained to deal with incidents.

Q13 Are there any increments or decrements to the DfT's proposed specification that stakeholders would wish to see and would be prepared to fund?

The Sunday southbound Inverness-Kings Cross service makes local calls at Carrbridge, Newtonmore, Blair Atholl and Dunkeld. This has now been mitigated by a following ScotRail service introduced in Dec 2010. The transfer of these calls should result in a reduced journey time.

IEP will presumably also bring about an end for the need for platform staff to despatch trains at intermediate stations and thus a cost saving.

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Appendix- HITRANS BRIEFING ON ICEC

HITRANS is responding to the DfT's East Coast consultation due on 18 September. The franchise is to be let from Dec 2013. Transport Scotland has already identified its priorities as:

- Reduced journey times and connectivity south of Edinburgh;
- Retention of Aberdeen and Inverness through services
- Review of Aberdeen and Inverness departure/arrival times
- Review of IEC services to provide peak capacity at Edinburgh

Background

Scottish Ministers have a role in providing non-binding guidance in cross-border franchises.

The recent failures of GNER and National Express to maintain the EC franchise draws into focus the need for careful business planning.

The once a day Highland Chieftain EC service provides high quality, high capacity journey opportunities to Central Belt and cross-border. The InverCity study found that 25% of journeys south of Inverness are cross border with demand at 45000 journeys per year split between sleeper, Chieftain and journeys requiring interchange in the Central Belt.

The successful franchisee will introduce 5-car 315 seat and 9-car 627 seat bi-mode Super Express Trains (IEP) from 2018. We may assume that it is up to the franchise to determine which variant is deployed in place of the 541 seat HST, but we are keen to ensure that capacity should be maintained as now. Replacement of the 225 electric fleet is an option to be determined.

The following points should be considered:

- Interaction with Scottish sleepers including diversionary paths
- Freight and open access path requirements
- The need for flexing revenue protection, and gating policy Edinburgh north
- Penalty fares policy vice ScotRail
- The Sunday southbound Chieftain makes local calls on Sundays but since Dec 2010 there is a following FSR train
- The HST provides enhanced cycle including tandem carriage
- EC provides a high standard on catering and on board service
- the timetable recast of 2005 and 2008 created connecting services from north of Inverness to complement the east line
- through ticketing is important for connectivity to/from the periphery
- connections at Waverley between Inverness and ECML services should be optimised and understood at times of disruption
- 'Peakiness' ex Kings Cross in the morning for long journeys that become off peak for the majority of their running time should be acknowledged.
- Calls should be balanced to Newcastle York and Peterborough only
- Inverness am departure time could be earlier to allow a longer working day in Edinburgh and an earlier arrival into Kings Cross; pm arrival in Inverness is about right and avoids 'peak hour crush' ex Waverley
- Wifi and Passenger Information Systems should be in all vehicles

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