

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

NON-KEY DECISION – 12/16

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING
AND TRANSPORT

CONSULTATION ON THE COMBINED THAMESLINK, SOUTHERN
AND GREAT NORTHERN FRANCHISE, DEPARTMENT FOR
TRANSPORT, MAY 2012

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To consider the consultation on the combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern Franchise and to agree the response to be made to the Department for Transport.

RECOMMENDATION FOR DECISION: that

(A)	the Department for Transport be informed that in respect of the consultation on the combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern Franchise, East Herts Council submits responses to questions 2, 8, 9, 14, 15, 27, 30 and 31, as detailed in paragraphs 2.10 to 2.16 of this report, as its formal response to the consultation.
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1.0 Background

1.1 A consultation on the combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern Franchise has been prepared by the Department for Transport (DfT), and is subject to public consultation until 23rd August 2012. This consultation seeks views on the contents of the documentation that will be included as part of the Invitation to Tender (ITT) that will be issued to potential providers in October 2012.

1.2 The full consultation document is available for viewing at:
<http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/dft-2012-23/>.

2.0 Report

- 2.1 In May 2012 DfT issued a consultation document on the combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern Franchise. The consultation concerns what should be included in the specification for the combined franchise, which is due to start in September 2013 and run for a minimum of seven years. The consultation started on 31 May 2012 and closes on 23 August 2012.
- 2.2 The new franchise will cover the biggest area of any franchise in the country and will be responsible for delivering rail services across Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Greater London, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Norfolk, Surrey and Sussex.
- 2.3 The scope of franchise includes all of the current First Capital Connect (FCC), Southern and considerable portions of the Southeastern franchise. Although the length of the new franchise will initially be for a minimum of seven years, there is the potential for an extension of up to two further years, at the discretion of the Secretary of State. All services that are currently operated by the FCC franchise will be included in the new franchise from September 2013. For East Herts, this will affect the Great Northern Line, and in particular, the Hertford Loop, which has stations in the district at Watton-at-Stone, Hertford North and Bayford.
- 2.4 At some point between April and December 2014, the franchise will be expanded to include some services currently operated by Southeastern, (i.e. all those that are jointly operated by FCC and Southeastern at present to Sevenoaks, Orpington, Bromley South, Ashford, Rochester to Blackfriars and beyond). It is possible that some further current Southeastern services could be transferred to enable the implementation of the full Thameslink service operations.
- 2.5 In July 2015 all the services operated by the current Southern franchise (including the Gatwick Express) will also be included in the new franchise.
- 2.6 The DfT has confirmed that, subsequent to the evaluation of expressions of interest, the following companies have been short listed to bid for the franchise:
 - Abellio Thameslink Limited (NV Nederlandse Spoorwegen);
 - First Thameslink Limited (FirstGroup plc);

- Govia Thameslink Railway Limited (Go-Ahead Group plc and Keolis SA);
- MTR Corporation Thameslink Limited (MTR Corporation Limited); and
- Stagecoach Thameslink Trains Limited (Stagecoach Group plc).

and DfT expects to issue an ITT to these short listed applicants in October 2012.

- 2.7 The geographic and service coverage of the franchise will change during its life to incorporate the impact of the Thameslink Programme, in terms of the improved services available on its completion, and the operating needs of the network during construction work at London Bridge, as well as the introduction of combined rolling stock.
- 2.8 The consultation outlines that six objectives have been endorsed by the Secretary of State, which are that the franchisee will be required to:
- take a leading role in enabling the successful delivery of the Thameslink Programme, and work collaboratively with the franchising authority (in this case, the DfT) and other industry partners to ensure that the envisaged programme benefits are fully realised on time. This will include but not be limited to: the introduction into service of new trains and depots; managing the return of displaced stock to the owning ROSCO¹; proactively supporting the integration of operations and new infrastructure and train control systems to deliver an enhanced train service;
 - have an effective change management organisation for the Thameslink Programme, implementation of any rail value for money study recommendations and any other industry initiatives that may be required to enable successful delivery of this franchise;
 - support the creation of the future long term franchise that will operate when the Government's investment in the Thameslink Programme has been delivered;
 - ensure the overall passenger experience improves through the life of the franchise subject to value for money and affordability.

¹ ROSCO is the rolling stock company which owns the specific type of rolling stock and leases it to the franchise to use.

This will include but not be limited to improvements in: service quality; retailing; provision of information to customers particularly during times of planned and unplanned disruption; implementing 'smart' technology and integrated ticketing throughout the franchise on an interoperable basis; improving accessibility (including disabled access) and access to all stations and services; passenger security and improving the transparency of information about the franchise;

- ensure that train services perform to the highest practicable reliability and punctuality standards and continue to be amongst the most reliable and punctual services on the network; benchmark and optimise the overall environmental performance and minimise the carbon footprint for the franchise; and
- deliver services in the most cost-effective and efficient manner possible and where appropriate, consider improving alignment and better collaboration between Network Rail and other relevant industry partners.

2.9 The consultation is framed by a series of questions to which the DfT welcomes a response. Not all questions are of relevance to the East Herts area. Therefore, only those questions considered to be of particular pertinence to the district have been addressed. These questions have been considered and the proposed responses to them are as follows:

2.10 *Q.2 Do consultees have any other specific aspirations for the new franchise that they wish to bring to the Department's attention?*

While recognising the benefits of economies of scale, there are some concerns that, with this being the biggest franchise in the country, the ability to influence decision making and maintain successful working relationships could be compromised within such a large organisation. It is therefore important to ensure that smaller elements of the franchise area (such as the Hertford Loop within the current FCC franchise) do not get overlooked and that sufficient resources are allocated to allow for the significant improvements to service delivery that will be required over the seven year franchise period. Likewise, the franchisee should be required to ensure that personnel are assigned on a local area basis so that successful relationships can be built and maintained with local authorities. The ability to carry out successful dialogues and influence decision making is particularly important in this respect.

- 2.11 *Q.8/ How might better use be made of the capacity currently available?/Q.9 What steps might bidders be expected to take to meet passenger demand and what might be the most appropriate mechanisms for managing demand?*

Capacity issues for the Hertford Loop have been highlighted in various Rail Utilisation Strategies (RUSs). These include: station/platform capacity issues (both at points of origin and destination); frequency of service; identified peak crowding; and forecast growth on inner suburban services. In particular, the July 2011 London and South East RUS forecasts a significant increase in the numbers of commuters using National Rail services into the capital during the weekday morning peaks. This is only likely to be compounded by future development in the district, and it should be noted that the emerging East Herts District Plan could have the potential to add significant numbers of dwellings in the area.

Importantly, the 2011 London and South East RUS also identified the potential for additional services on the Hertford Loop line into Moorgate, to allow a frequency increase to 10 trains per peak hour, following completion of the Thameslink programme. It is considered essential that the future franchisee should be compelled to implement this proposal as part of its contract to bring these benefits to this recognised overcrowded line.

- 2.12 *Q14 Do respondents believe Great Northern trains which do not serve the Thameslink core route should remain as part of this franchise or be transferred to the new Inter City East Coast franchise?*

The Hertford Loop, as a mainly commuter and leisure route, would have very little relationship to Inter City provision and would be liable to suffer from reduced consideration under more strategic service line considerations.

Conversely, within the Thameslink franchise, it would be likely to benefit from timetabling considerations that could enable better connections within that section of the network to facilitate speedy travel to wider destinations e.g. Gatwick and the south coast (post-Thameslink completion). It would therefore be considered preferable for the Great Northern line to remain within the Thameslink franchise area.

- 2.13 *Q15 What improvements would respondents like to see made to Great Northern services as part of the combined franchise and*

what is the rationale for this?

With regard to rolling stock, the Hertford Loop currently utilises units of type 313/0. These carriages were introduced when the line was electrified around 1976, some 36 years ago. Despite refurbishments, these units are not equal to currently expected standards as they have no lavatories and no electronic information systems for passengers. While it is recognised that, due to tunnel dimensions, many other more modern units would be unable to negotiate the route into Moorgate, the Par to Newquay line in Cornwall has similar operational constraints yet it runs 313 variation stock that includes lavatory provision. The future franchisee should therefore be required to upgrade the existing stock to at least the standard of the Par to Newquay line.

The 2011 London and South East RUS identified the potential for additional services on the Hertford Loop line into Moorgate, to allow a frequency increase to 10 trains per peak hour, following completion of the Thameslink programme. This would be of immense benefit to existing passengers who are well documented as experiencing regular overcrowding on the line. East Herts district also has a relatively high carbon footprint and the Council is committed to reducing this where at all possible. Extra capacity on the Hertford Loop to lessen existing overcrowding could influence travel patterns and encourage more sustainable journeys to be made. It is therefore considered essential that the future franchisee should implement this proposal as part of its contract to bring these benefits to this recognised overcrowded line.

2.14 *Q.27 What are the priorities that respondents consider should be taken into account to improve the passenger experience of using these services?*

Communications should be improved throughout the franchise area, with every effort made to relay accurate information in a timely manner. Free WiFi would enable customers to access the most up to date information without incurring costs for those many passengers with pay as you go mobile phone arrangements or for those without smartphones but who have devices (such as iPods and laptops) that enable WiFi connection. It would also make the waiting experience more pleasurable.

Waiting rooms, public areas and lavatories, where provided, should be maintained to an acceptable standard.

2.15 *Q.30 What priorities would respondents give to car parking and cycling facilities at locations where these are fully used?*

While additional car parking spaces may be important at particular locations, there is some concern about how parking is delivered. If not well planned there can be negative impact on the adjacent highway network and/or on access to stations by other modes.

Cycle parking should be proportionate to demand and should be provided in secure, covered (where possible) locations, with good surveillance.

2.16 *Q.31 What sort of ticketing products and services would you expect to see delivered through 'smart' technology on this franchise?*

The introduction of 'smart' ticketing is supported, particularly, the introduction of Oyster. The Oyster scheme currently operates on the West Anglia Main Line and its branch line to Hertford East station. There is an obvious anomaly whereby Hertford North station (on the Hertford Loop of the Great Northern Line) lies within the same settlement as Hertford East station yet fails to benefit from Oyster. It would therefore be sensible to use the re-letting of the franchise as an ideal opportunity to press for Oyster provision as far as Hertford North.

However, it is considered most important that traditional staffed ticketing mechanisms are maintained for those users unfamiliar or unable to use 'smart' technology.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

Consultation on the combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern Franchise, Department for Transport, May 2012:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/dft-2012-23/>.

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