

## **Text of Enquiry Submitted via DfT Website – 15 April 2014**

(DfT website promises response within 20 working days)

I am concerned the specification for the new franchise, as published on the DfT website, specifically tables 1A-1F and 2A-2F, fails to protect the existing level of provision of East Coast services at Morpeth Station. Some of these services (particularly point 1 below) were only introduced at the "Eureka" timetable change in June 2011, after the DfT had published a first draft which it subsequently admitted had given insufficient consideration to Northumberland. This franchise specification appears to be making the same mistakes again. Other issues, such as point 3 below, are hopefully a simple drafting error from DfT.

Please confirm if my understanding of the franchise specification requirements, and in particular the points 1-7 below, are correct, or whether I have misunderstood the documents in any way.

1. The all important Morpeth Monday to Friday southbound connection to the Flying Scotsman service with current arrival in London by 09:40 is no longer a specified requirement. The earliest requirement for arrival in London from Morpeth reverts to 10:05, making that 10:00 business meeting impossible once again. Although the operator is required to retain the two direct services from Morpeth to London, it is not stipulated that one of them must offer a connection at Newcastle to the Flying Scotsman. And the Flying Scotsman itself will only be required to arrive by 09:50 (current arrival time 09:40).
2. The northbound Friday only service from London at 19:00 is not a specified requirement. The new operator will only be required to offer a service at 18:30, the same as the Monday to Thursday requirement.
3. From May 2020, the new operator will not be required to offer an evening departure from London to Morpeth on Mondays to Fridays at all.
4. On Saturdays, the new operator will only be required to offer 1 direct service from London to Morpeth; currently 2 are provided (departing London 16:30 and 18:00)
5. On Sundays, the new operator will only be required to provide 4 northbound services at Morpeth; currently there are 5. (There are no local trains on Sundays so Morpeth only has inter-city services)
6. On Sundays, the new operator will only be required to offer 1 southbound service at Morpeth, and that will not need to be a direct train to London. Currently, there are 2 services, one of which is a direct train to London. Again, since Morpeth has no local services on Sundays, the number of inter-city services calling at Morpeth is crucially important.

7. The franchise specification does not include any improvements for service at Morpeth, either immediately or from the introduction of new rolling stock in 2020.

South East Northumberland is not yet seeing any signs of economic recovery. It is vital that a reasonable rail service to London is maintained and improved in order to aid the economic recovery of this region. It is strange that when it comes to HS2, the DfT is the first to argue that improving rail connections to London will assist economic growth in the areas served, yet in the case of South East Northumberland, an area more in need of economic stimulus than perhaps any other part of the UK, the DfT seems content to overlook the vital contribution rail connections play in supporting local business and economic growth.

If the DfT agrees with my analysis of the franchise specification, can you please confirm you will be able to issue an amendment to bidders so that at least the current level of service provision at Morpeth is protected, both from start of franchise and from 2020.

Kindest regards

**Dennis Fancett**

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