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Department for Transport

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Our Ref: 103723
Your Ref:

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Dear Mr Fancett,

Thank you for your email of 15 April 2014 about the specification of the East Coast Main Line franchise and its effect on Morpeth station.

The East Coast franchise provides a vital service to millions of passengers and that is why we have ensured it will continue to serve all current destinations including Morpeth.

The Department for Transport is committed to introducing class 800/801 trains as part of the Intercity Express programme (IEP) which is worth £5.7bn. The purchase of this fleet will enable the replacement of the entire current fleet used on the ICEC franchise with faster, higher capacity and more environmentally sustainable trains which will improve the passenger experience and support growth. They will bring the benefits of new rolling stock to all ICEC passengers including those travelling to and from Morpeth.

In developing the train service requirements for the Inter-City East Coast the Department has carefully considered the requirements of passengers across the route, and the factors that bidders will consider when developing their proposed timetables. The Department has sought an appropriate balance between protecting current service patterns and providing bidders with the flexibility which will allow them to use their experience and skills to deliver the right services for passengers.

I would like to offer clarification on a couple of specific points in your letter.

Although we are continuing the policy on the East Coast not to specify connecting services, in place since 2011, this does not mean we anticipate that bidders will not consider the needs of connecting passengers. Currently, the 06.36 departure from Morpeth allows passengers to connect with the Flying Scotsman at Newcastle, this then continues to London where it arrives at 10.03. Our specification for the next franchise requires bidders to continue to operate a service from Morpeth that arrives in London by 10.05. It would be unusual for a train company to operate a long distance service of this kind without calling at major conurbations on route. As such it is likely that this service would continue to provide connections at Newcastle.

Although the Department has not specified the exact timing of Monday to Friday evening departures from London to Morpeth after 2020, bidders are required to operate two services from London to Morpeth between 16.00 and 19.00. Commercially minded operators are likely to space these apart to maximise passenger revenue.

Between 2015 and 2020 the franchise is required to offer a direct service from London to Morpeth departing after 18.29 on Mondays to Fridays. Although we have not specified a later departure on Friday evenings it seems likely that commercially minded operators would operate such a service if there is sufficient demand. In addition on Saturday bidders will be required to operate two direct

services from London to Morpeth. One of these services will be required to depart King's Cross after 17.59.

For the reasons explained above, we have no plans to issue an amendment to the franchise specification. The Department is looking forward to receiving innovative bids that provide value for money and build on the success of current services, including those that serve Morpeth.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Thomas