



RESPONSE TO DEPARTMENT For TRANSPORT CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED DIRECT AWARD FOR CROSSCOUNTRY FRANCHISE FROM OCTOBER 2016

Sent by email to XCDirectAward@dft.gsi.gov.uk on 22nd October 2015

1. INTRODUCTION

The DfT emailed stakeholders on 9th October 2015 asking for input on their proposal to make a direct award to Arriva Cross Country for the Cross Country rail franchise, from October 2016, for a period of at least 3 years (email attached at Annex 1). This paper is SENRUG’s response to that request. The DfT asked respondents to comment on 3 specific questions and SENRUG’s responses to these questions are in Section 3.

The DfT also offered stakeholders the opportunity to meet with the DfT team and SENRUG confirms it would like such a meeting.

2. MAIN ISSUE: NUMBER OF CROSS COUNTRY SERVICES CALLING AT MORPETH

2.1 Background

The main change SENRUG wants as part of the new award is an increase in the number of services that must call at Morpeth. This key issue dwarfs other points SENRUG would like to make about the new award. Table 1 demonstrates the introduction of the current franchise saw a reduction of Cross Country services at Morpeth. SENRUG wants to reverse that reduction and indeed slightly increase service provision from pre November 2007 levels, from the current 3 services each way per day to 5. SENRUG believes this can be achieved at no overall journey time penalty for through passengers whilst generating more fare revenue.

Table 1: Previous, Current and Requested Cross Country Services Per Day (Each Way) At Morpeth

	Services Per Day Each Way
Provided by Previous Operator Immediately Before Start of Current Franchise	4
Current Franchise Requirement	2
Current Provision	3
SENRUG Requirement For New Contract Award.	5

2.2 Commercial Case

The reasons why SENRUG wants an increase in Cross Country trains calling at Morpeth are as follows:

- **Population served by station:** Morpeth is a thriving town and commercial centre with a population of just under 87,000 within a 5 mile radius as demonstrated by the following table:

Table 2: Population served by Morpeth Station

Postcode	Area	Population
NE22	Bedlington, Choppington, Cambois	18,163
NE61	Morpeth inc Stannington, Pegswood, Widdrington	32,468
NE62	Choppington, Stakeford	9,507
NE63	Ashington, Woodhorn	27,735
	Total	87,873

Source: Data information from <http://www.doogal.co.uk/UKPostcodes.php> based on 2011 Census. Data includes some very small communities eg Widdrington (within NE61), Woodhorn (within NE63) and Cambois (within NE22) up to 8 miles from Morpeth, though Morpeth is still the nearest inter-city station.

- **Existing services are heavily used.** See attached photo (Annex 2) demonstrating number of passengers waiting for Cross Country southbound service on Sunday 21st Dec 2014 at 11.19
- **Revenue opportunity with no operational penalty:** SENRUG believes more services at Morpeth will increase the market and attract new passengers to rail and thus new fare revenue. Because the local service is only hourly, the option of changing at Newcastle is unattractive and adds a significant time penalty to passengers' overall journey times. The additional services SENRUG has identified could stop at Morpeth (see Section 2.2) within current operational timings.
- **Balanced timetable at Morpeth:** 2 extra Cross Country services each way per day will make significant progress towards SENRUG's goal of an inter-city service (that is either East Coast or Cross Country) serving Morpeth Station every 2 hours in each direction, throughout the day, every day.
- **Development of Morpeth – Edinburgh and Morpeth – York markets.** The previous Cross Country franchise operator told SENRUG the strongest passenger flows from Morpeth on their services were York and Edinburgh. Both these destinations are about 1 hour 20 minutes by rail. However, lack of suitable off peak services suppresses this market. For Edinburgh, passengers do not wish to travel south to Newcastle to change onto an inter-city service then pass back through Morpeth around an hour later. Cross Country services are not so heavily loaded north of Newcastle so additional services at Morpeth represents an opportunity to grow passenger numbers and fare revenue on a less busy section of the route.

- **Reduction of significant timetable anomalies on Sundays:** This issue is dealt with specifically at Section 2.4.

2.3 Suggested Services

Whilst SENRUG recognises it will be up to the commercial discretion of the operator which specific services to choose, SENRUG has identified the following services that both meet its objective of plugging long gaps in the combined inter-city timetable and the services also appear to have sufficient slack in the schedule (evidenced by dwell times at Newcastle and / or Edinburgh) to make a stop at Morpeth with no overall journey time penalty. Additionally, many of these services actually arrive at Newcastle or Edinburgh ahead of their scheduled time and are held at signals outside the station, yet still arrive in the station on time. This demonstrates slack within the existing timetable which could be used to support calls at Morpeth.

Table 3: Proposed additional Cross Country southbound services:

Train Code	Eh Wav arrive	Eh Wav depart	Eh Wav Wait mins	Approx Morpeth time	Newcastle arrive	Newcastle depart	Newcastle Wait mins
Monday to Friday							
1V62	12:00	12.08	8	13.20	13.34	13.43	9
1V66	Starts Eh	14.08	n/a	15.20	15.34	15.41	7
Saturday							
1V62	11:59	12.04	5	13.20	13.32	13.44	12
1V66	Starts Eh	14.05	n/a	15.20	15.32	15.41	9
Sunday							
1V56	Starts Eh	09.08	n/a	10.20	10.36	10.39	3
1V66	13:43	14.08	25	15.20	15.35	15.40	5

Table 4: Proposed additional Cross Country northbound services:

Train Code	Newcastle arr	Newcastle dep	Newcastle Wait mins	Approx Morpeth time	Eh Wav arrive	Eh Wav depart	EH Wav Wait mins
Monday to Friday							
1S35	11.29	11.40	11	11.45	13.05	13:12	7
1S47	17.30	17.37	7	17.45	19.05	19:11	5
Saturday							
1S35	11.29	11.36	7	11.45	13.02	13:12	10
1S47	17.29	17.35	6	17.45	19.06	19:12	6
Sunday							
n/a	11:28	11:34	6	11:52	12:59	13:10	11
1S47	17.25	17.28	3	17.45	18.56	19:18	22

2.4 Sunday Anomaly

The situation on Sundays is a particular anomaly at Morpeth, which currently has no local services at all. The only trains serving the station are those operated by Cross Country and Virgin Trains East Coast. As a result there are no southbound services prior to 11:19 and northbound there are no services for over 4 hours (10:28 to 14:40) then 2 trains within 6 minutes (14:40 VTEC and 14:46 XC). There is then a further 5 hour gap (from 14:46 to 19:58) but 2 trains within 8 minutes at 20:48 (XC) and 20:56 (VTEC).

The trains that SENRUG has identified could stop at Morpeth (see Tables 1 and 2) will partly address this anomaly, and in addition to currently scheduled dwell times at Newcastle of 3 to 7 minutes, additionally have scheduled dwell times at Edinburgh of 25, 11 and 22 minutes (one southbound train starts at Edinburgh). It is clear there is sufficient slack in the current schedule for these trains to call at Morpeth. Indeed, in the case of the 14:08 southbound departure from Edinburgh (arrives 13:43), passengers from stations north of Edinburgh wishing to reach stations between Newcastle and Birmingham a little bit earlier could easily change at Edinburgh on to the 13.55 Cross Country departure, so there is no case for not adding a Morpeth call to this service.

3. RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC DfT QUESTIONS

3.1 What Level of Involvement Do You Have With The Existing Cross Country Franchise?

3.1.1 SENRUG represents passengers who use CrossCountry services in Northumberland and the North East and potential passengers who would use their services if only trains went where they want to go, at the time they want to go, at a price they can afford, and in a clean, safe, secure, accessible and easy to understand manner.

3.1.2 Passengers in this area both use the CrossCountry services that call at Morpeth, and to a lesser extent change onto Cross Country services at Newcastle or further south.

3.1.3 SENRUG receives CrossCountry's Stakeholder Newsletter "In Focus" and has a named contact at CrossCountry with whom the group can correspond or contact as necessary. SENRUG has not been invited to Stakeholder briefings or face to face events held in this region. Cross Country accepted an invitation to speak at a SENRUG public meeting in Morpeth in March 2009 which was well attended.

3.1.4 By far the biggest issue SENRUG has wished to raise with Cross Country management is the need for more of their services to stop at Morpeth. SENRUG has on several occasions submitted proposals for additional stops at Morpeth on existing services. However, SENRUG lacks the conviction that these proposals are ever

genuinely considered by operational managers, and no detailed response has ever been received.

3.2 What Things Would You Like To See The Current Franchise Continuing To Do?

3.2.1 Cross Country currently has 3 services per weekday stop at Morpeth against a franchise requirement of 2. We want to see this continue and indeed the number of services stopping at Morpeth extended, as explained in Section 2.

3.2.2 SENRUG applauds the introduction of “Advance on the Day” tickets though thinks the system needs some tweaking as SENRUG believes that when a passenger without a seat reservation boards a train there should be clear information as to whether a vacant seat will remain free for their entire journey. Further, SENRUG has as yet no evidence from anyone ever being able to purchase an “Advance on the Day” ticket for a journey to / from Morpeth and suspect the system has not yet been rolled out to all services.

3.2.3 SENRUG also applauds the recent introduction of a hot meal offer (though so far only has negative feedback from members who have sought to use this service). SENRUG notes Cross Country say in their introduction to their new offer (In Focus e-magazine issue 24) that “fewer people make long journeys” but SENRUG submits that if the through journey opportunities (avoiding London) were better promoted (see 3.3.2), there would be longer journeys on CrossCountry services; hence SENRUG’s support for this initiative.

3.3 What Would You Like To see Change In The Current Service Provision?

3.3.1 The biggest change SENRUG wants to see is more Cross Country trains calling at Morpeth. This argument is set out in Section 2.1.

3.3.2 SENRUG wants **all** rail ticket booking systems (but particularly Cross Country’s own) amended to better highlight direct journey opportunities on Cross Country services between the North East and the South West. Currently; even Cross Country’s own booking system will in most cases default to the “via London” option. SENRUG believes there are many customers who would appreciate avoiding the inconvenience of crossing London by underground. Even a same platform interchange between Cross Country services (eg at Oxford for Morpeth to Bournemouth) is preferable to many passengers than crossing London by underground. The majority of customers are not savvy enough to realise that Cross Country journeys can often only be identified by specifying “via Birmingham”. With the trend away from ticket office sales to home booking, SENRUG expects the operator to do more to promote journey opportunities on their own services.

End

Annexes 1 and 2 follow

Annex 1 Text of Email Received From DfT on Friday 9th October 2015

Annex 2 Photo of Passengers Waiting for Cross Country southbound service at Morpeth on Sunday 21st Dec 2014 @ 11.19)

ANNEX 1: CONSULTATION REQUEST

Text of Email Received From DfT on Friday 9th October 2015

Dear All,

We are writing to you as you have been identified as a stakeholder for the Cross Country Trains rail franchise. The current contract expires in October 2016, and the Department is seeking to negotiate a new contract for at least 3 years with the incumbent operator Arriva Cross Country. We are also happy for you to contact other local interest groups as required when preparing your response.

As the contract is relatively short and the scope for change is anticipated to be fairly limited, we are seeking views of key stakeholders as we consider the specification for this contract.

We would like you to consider the following questions:

- (a) what level of involvement do you have with the existing Cross Country franchise?
- (b) what things would you like to see the current franchise continuing to do?
- (c) what would like to see change in the current franchise service provision?

The team are also happy for you and any other relevant local interest group to meet and discuss any aspect of this franchise and the proposed direct award franchise.

I would be grateful if you could provide us with a response by **23rd October 2015** and intimate whether or not you would like to meet the team.

Regards,
Cross Country Direct Award Team

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ANNEX 2: PHOTO: PASSENGERS WAITING TO BOARD CROSSCOUNTRY SOUTHBOUND SERVICE AT MORPETH (Sunday 21st Dec 2014 @ 11.19)

