



Response to

Department For Transport  
on

# Cross Country Passenger Rail Franchise Public Consultation

Submitted by email to [crosscountry@dft.gov.uk](mailto:crosscountry@dft.gov.uk) on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2018

Author: Dennis Fancett, Chair of SENRUG  
e: [chair@senrug.co.uk](mailto:chair@senrug.co.uk)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

**1.1** This is SENRUG's response to the above referenced Consultation, which was published on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2018 and is currently available on the Department For Transport's website at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/714761/cross-country-passenger-rail-franchise-public-consultation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/714761/cross-country-passenger-rail-franchise-public-consultation.pdf). Responses are required by 23:45 Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

**1.2** SENRUG is The South East Northumberland Rail User Group, an unincorporated voluntary organisation that promotes rail travel and campaigns for better rail services in, within, to, from and through South East Northumberland, representing the interests of both existing and potential rail travellers in the area. By 'potential', SENRUG means those who would use rail services if only the 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. SENRUG has 203 personal members and 13 corporate or business members including 7 Town or Parish Councils (as at 30<sup>st</sup> June 2018). A significantly higher number of people follow SENRUG on social media or interact with it via email, whilst not actually being members.

**1.3** The principle station within South East Northumberland served by the Cross Country franchise is Morpeth. Some SENRUG members are also based in the catchment areas for

Alnmouth and Berwick stations. Northumberland Passengers additionally connect with Cross Country services at Newcastle. This response is therefore predominantly limited to comment on proposals and suggestions affecting Cross Country services at these stations.

## **2. MAJOR THEMES**

Before addressing the specific questions on which respondents are invited to comment, SENRUG first wishes to make some overall remarks on the major themes directly raised or inferred from the consultation. Some of SENRUG's specific question responses in **Section 4** will refer back to these overall comments.

### **2.1 Consultation Proposals Contradict Network Rail's Strategic Vision**

**2.1.1** Network Rail's "East Coast Main Line Route Study – Rail Investment Choices" Consultation published in December 2017 and updated post consultation in June 2018, states, in relation to the Newcastle - Berwick section of the route:

"demand for peak-time passenger travel into Newcastle from the Morpeth direction is forecast to grow throughout the period through to the 2040s. While this may lead to a shortfall in capacity on local commuter trains into Newcastle from the mid 2020s, spare seats on long distance trains could be used to supplement overall capacity."<sup>1</sup>

**2.1.2** However, the DfT consultation on the Cross Country franchise proposes removing calls on Cross Country services at smaller stations and diverting passengers onto local services.

**2.1.3** Thus, Network Rail are saying that rather than make the infrastructure investment to support more local services, they want more stops at smaller stations from operators such as Cross Country. Whereas DfT are proposing removing stops on Cross Country at smaller stations and diverting passengers onto local services. But Network Rail acknowledge local services are or will become crowded and has expressed a disinclination to make the investment to permit further growth in these.

**2.1.4** SENRUG requests a single strategic vision for the rail industry encompassing both Network Rail and DfT. SENRUG's proposal is that the level of Cross Country services at Alnmouth and Berwick is retained at current levels, there is a modest increment at Morpeth to one service each way every 2 hours, with timetable co-ordination between ECML and Cross Country operators (see **Section 2.3**) and investment to support growth in local services.

### **2.2 Proposal to Eliminate Cross Country Calls at Smaller Stations - Overall Response**

**2.2.1** The DfT has correctly identified the biggest problem facing the Cross Country franchise today is crowding. A secondary issue is the desire to improve journey times, and the consultation proposes one way of achieving both requirements could be to eliminate

calls on Cross Country services at smaller stations. Whilst “smaller” is not defined, SENRUG presumes this might include Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick, and comments accordingly.

**2.2.2** At Morpeth station, whilst there is an hourly local service southward to Newcastle, there is no local service northwards (apart from the single morning and evening peak service to Chathill). The market between Morpeth and Edinburgh is strong, with Cross Country providing 5 of the 11 services per day, almost 50%.

**2.2.3** Furthermore, the local service southwards to Newcastle is insufficient, being hourly only, whereas the long-distance operators from Newcastle (LNER, CrossCountry and TPE) all operate up to every 30 minutes during the day. Passengers from Morpeth are constrained in their choice of longer distance services due to the poor connecting opportunities. SENRUG believes the introduction of Cross Country, and augmentation of ECML services at Morpeth over the last 15 years has caused a significant boost in the overall rail market at Morpeth which would be reversed if Cross Country services are now reduced or eliminated without being replaced by additional alternative services.

**2.2.4** At Alnmouth and Berwick stations, Cross Country services account for 50% of the total train service, both stations having an approximate 2 hourly pattern, alternating with a 2-hourly pattern from LNER. Berwick has no local services and Alnmouth has a single local service to Newcastle in the morning peak plus a single return in the evening.

**2.2.5** Thus, if Cross Country calls at these stations were eliminated or reduced, DfT would need to arrange with another operator to backfill. This could either be additional stops on existing services from LNER (or TPE who will operate along the route from December 2019) or new services, eg from the local operator.

**2.2.6** The existing operators LNER and TPE would both then encounter the exact problem the DfT is trying to solve with Cross Country. Franchise renewals would thus become no more than an opportunity to push a problem from one franchisee to another, without addressing the underlying issue.

**2.2.7** A new service from a different operator would require a significant investment in rolling stock. If done mid-franchise, the DfT would need to fund this through a franchise variation. If done when the alternative operator’s franchise is next renewed, it would still be funded indirectly by DfT through lower franchise premium payments offered as funders factor in the rolling stock investment they would need to make.

**2.2.8** It thus seems more sensible to feed the required investment in rolling stock into the Cross Country franchise, and to solve the problem of crowding on Cross Country services by strengthening their seating capacity by introduction of longer trains.

**2.2.9** As the Hitachi fleet is rolled out to LNER and Great Western, it may be the case that the current HST sets surrendered by these operators could be acquired by Cross Country so that every one of their services is either a double Voyager unit (8 coaches) or an HST (9 coaches).

**2.2.10** In terms of the objective of improved journey times, it does not follow that eliminating calls at the Northumberland stations would permit journey times between Newcastle and Edinburgh to improve. Cross Country services are constrained by other operators on the line, including LNER, who have a skip-stop pattern on alternate trains, slower moving freight trains, and local services between Newcastle and Morpeth. As Cross Country Voyager units have a faster acceleration, they have been able to accommodate the stops at Morpeth without adding to the overall Newcastle to Edinburgh journey time.

**2.2.11** Furthermore, if Cross Country calls at Northumberland stations are replaced by additional local services or new services from another operator, this would require more train paths (which may not in fact be available without infrastructure investment - see **Section 2.1**) and the extra trains would increase both track congestion and platform congestion at major stations such as Newcastle and Edinburgh, with the result that the Cross Country services, and those of the other operators, could be slowed down rather than speeded up.

### **2.3 Need For A Strategic Approach Across All Franchises Sharing A Common Route**

**2.3.1** The section of the East Coast Main Line between Newcastle and Edinburgh is served by two franchises (ECML and Cross Country), soon to be added by a third (TransPennine Express from 2019).

**2.3.2** It would seem that each franchise operator wants to run non-stop between Newcastle and Edinburgh, or failing that, serve no more than two of the intermediate stations at the very most. Apart from early mornings and late evenings, no operator has a service that stops at **all** the key regional locations in Northumberland and the Scottish Borders, namely Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick and Dunbar. Travel between these stations during the main part of the day is therefore impossible, due to skip-stop pattern employed by the operators. In alternate hours (10:xx, 12:xx, 14:xx, 16:xx and 18:xx), 3 trains northbound trains leave Newcastle for Edinburgh within 20 minutes of each other (2 ECML and one Cross Country), yet none has a stopping pattern that adequately addresses the requirement for travel between the key Northumberland and Scottish Borders centres mentioned.

**2.3.3** SENRUG's recommendation is therefore that, in the hours where the East Coast Main Line franchisee (currently LNER) runs two services per hour, DfT mandates that whilst one of these services may be non-stop, the other must serve **all** the intermediate regional stations between Newcastle and Edinburgh. In the alternate hour (where LNER only run one service), the Cross Country train should be required to serve **all** the intermediate regional stations. Thus, there would be a service between Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick and Dunbar every hour, provided alternately by the Cross Country and East Coast Main Line franchisees.

**2.3.4** SENRUG therefore requests the franchise specification requires that alternate Cross Country services, ie one train every 2 hours, should call at each of Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick and Dunbar. SENRUG also requests the terms of the franchise make it clear the operator is expected to liaise with the East Coast Main Line franchisee to ensure there is a

co-ordinated timetable for these stations across both operators, and that such liaison would not be deemed to be anti-competitive practice. The DfT has other means to bring about the complimentary requirement for the East Coast Main Line franchise, either at the next franchise renewal or immediately, since LNER is currently under direct government ownership.

**2.3.5** Consideration should also be given to adding Cramlington, soon to be Northumberland's largest town, to the list of key regional locations in Northumberland and Scottish Borders, for the reasons set in in **Section 4.2 response 12 (35)**. Thus, alternate Cross Country trains would call at Cramlington, Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick and Dunbar.

## **2.4 Proposal to Curtail or Diversion of Alternate Cross Country Services North of York**

**2.4.1** The consultation proposes curtailing or diverting alternate Cross Country services north of York because there may not be sufficient track capacity on the East Coast Main Line between York / Northallerton and Newcastle, and opportunity could be taken to divert alternate services to new destinations, or to use released rolling stock to strengthen the heavily crowded York – Birmingham corridor.

**2.4.2** SENRUG is astonished at the suggestion there may not be track capacity between York and Newcastle. It seems incongruous for government, in the form of DfT / ORR / Network Rail, to a) allocate more paths to the ECML operator (now LNER), b) further allocate more paths to TPE, and then c) say there are no longer enough paths to maintain the existing level of Cross Country services. Government needs to join itself up and not pay Peter only to find it then has no alternative but to rob Paul.

**2.4.3** Further, the elimination of the calls at smaller stations argument (a suggestion that SENRUG does not support - see **Section 2.2**) also seems to be driven by a desire to have a consistent stopping pattern across the network, ie a fewer number of stations regularly served rather than many stations but some with only one or two services per day. The proposal to divert some Cross Country services to new destinations seems counter to that argument. SENRUG notes the success of the former franchisee's "Operation Princess" project which doubled frequency at most Cross Country stations to half-hourly and resulted in a significant boost in passenger numbers, the root cause of the crowding problems the current franchise now faces. SENRUG thus prefers the existing two trains per hour to Newcastle service to be retained as at present. Further comments as to how that can be achieved if there are genuine track capacity constraints are given in **Section 4 response 5 (27)**.

## **2.5 Purpose of Cross Country Franchise**

**2.5.1** The Cross Country serves many purposes, and balancing different objectives is admittedly difficult. However, one key purpose that SENRUG strongly believes should be retained is the ability to travel by train from one end of the country to another, without having to travel via London and make a complex interchange via Underground.

**2.5.2** An inference from the consultation is that shorter distance journeys, and in some cases commuting, gives a poor on-board experience for such long distance passengers, yet SENRUG argues that such journey opportunities are not really marketed by the current operator (or indeed the rail industry as a whole) as a) journey opportunities are not presented on rail ticket booking systems, because they are often slightly longer than the “via London” alternative, b) long distance fares are prohibitively expensive – normally dearer than travel via London), and c) the catering offer is insufficiently attractive or consistent and, at the extremities of the network, sometimes non-existent (see **Section 4 responses 13 (11) and 14 (37)**). Once train capacity is strengthened throughout the network, attention to these issues would make longer distance journeys more attractive. SENRUG’s response also makes further suggestions for improving the journey experience for longer distance passengers caused by frequent churn of shorter distance passengers - see **Section 4 response 24 (39)**.

**2.5.3** Some of the proposals raised in the consultation are counter to the longer journey avoiding London objective. For instance, elimination of Cross Country stops at smaller stations (which have a good, direct service to / from London), or curtailment of Cross Country services at the extremities of the network, make Cross Country less attractive for longer journeys as one or two more changes would be introduced when travelling to and from such stations (one at each end of the journey), reducing the advantage over via London journeys.

**2.5.4** With on-board wifi, a few extra minutes on the journey time is unlikely to be a disincentive for passengers on a journey which in any case is taking a half day to a full day. SENRUG argues the existing journey times, often longer than the via London alternative, would be preferred by customers if only they could see them when booking, and that on-board experience, and direct services rather than changing, are more critical than overall journey length.

**2.5.5** SENRUG’s concern is several of the consultation proposals, if taken together, re-define Cross Country as core business a commuter service between Bristol and York, and do not pay sufficient attention to through journeys from west of Bristol to Newcastle and further north.

### **3. PRESENTATION OF SPECIFIC CONSULTATION QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES**

The DfT has published its Consultation Document in two different formats: the pdf booklet which can be viewed on-line at the address given in **Section 1.1**, or as an odt document which can be accessed by clicking the “Complete a Response Form” link on the same website. The questions in each consultation format are identical but the questions are presented and numbered in a significantly different order. SENRUG has determined that the order of presentation in the pdf booklet is more intuitive for responses from a stakeholder group so has followed that numbering system in its responses below, but the question numbers in the odt version are also given in brackets for each response.

### **4. RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC CONSULTATION QUESTIONS**

Specific responses are grouped under the 7 sub-headings used in the pdf format of the Consultation booklet (see **Sections 4.1 to 4.7** below). The questions posed by the Consultation is in black font, and SENRUG's response is in blue. SENRUG does not have a valid comment to make on every issue, and in such cases, this is stated.

#### **4.1 TO REDUCE CROWDING ON CURRENT CROSS COUNTRY SERVICES**

**1 (9). What are the particular services, routes and times of day where you think crowding on Cross Country services needs to be addressed most urgently?**

SENRUG is aware of localised morning peak crowding on services into Newcastle, and evening peak crowding on services returning from Newcastle. SENRUG is also aware of significant crowding between Sheffield and Birmingham, particularly on Friday afternoons and at the start and end of university holidays

**2 (23). Which of the following potential measures do you think could overcome crowding caused by short distance commuters using long distance Cross Country trains, assuming that suitable alternative services are available?**

**Removing calls from towns closest to the conurbation centre either completely or just at peak times.**

NO

See general comments at **Section 2.2**. In the North East, there are no or insufficient local rail services to take displaced passengers, and the proposal is contrary to Network Rail's East Coast Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy (see **Section 2.1**)

**Retaining calls at such stations but restricting them to pickup/set down only?**

NO

This proposal is impractical and unpoliceable. Savvy customers who understand the timetables would be able to travel as required, but the system would simply disadvantage passengers unfamiliar with the system and would make the rail industry the subject of ridicule.

**Removing the validity of multi-modal tickets on long distance trains?**

POSSIBLY

SENRUG is not aware of any multi-modal tickets available in Northumberland so in general terms has no input on this issue. In terms of rail tickets, in cases where Cross Country services share a route with a local operator, there may be merit in having a price differential between local services with the Cross Country service priced at a marginal premium. This would discourage the use of Cross Country services where suitable alternative local services exist. However, SENRUG submits there are no suitable alternative local services to the

majority of Cross Country services in Northumberland. The proposal would also break the concept of the standard open ticket.

## Other

SENUG believes that, providing longer trains are introduced on the Cross Country network, there should be exploration of limiting some coaches to passengers with reserved seats only. The operator could then restrict allocation of seats in these coaches to passengers travelling say 90 minutes or more on their Cross Country journey. Thus, passengers travelling longer distances would not be inconvenienced by the churn of boarding / alighting short distance passengers, providing greater journey comfort for long distance passengers.

**Provide specific instances where these may be applicable.**

The suggestions under “**Removing the validity of multi-modal tickets on long distance trains?**” and “**Other**” could be considered for short journeys into Newcastle from Northumberland and Durham.

## 4.2 TO IMPROVE THE SERVICE PATTERN AND NETWORK

**3 (10). Rank the following in order of priority for improvement for your future Cross Country services. Rank 1 for most important to 6 for least important.**

more additional summer only services	8
later times of last trains	3
more frequent weekend services	7
earlier Sunday morning services	4
earlier times of first trains	6
more frequent weekday services	5

**NONE OF THE ABOVE.** The greatest improvements SENUG wants to see are:

- 1) **Significantly more seat availability, which could be brought about by the introduction of longer trains throughout the network.**
- 2) **Sensible timetabling with other operators sharing the same stretch of route. At Morpeth for instance, there are two Sunday northbound services within 6 minutes (14:41 LNER, 14:47 XC) then none for almost 3 hours (until the 17:41 XC). The same happens at 11:44 (XC), 11:56 (LNER) then nothing until 14:41 (LNER) and on Saturdays northbound 16:45 XC, 16:54 (LNER) then nothing until 20:01 (LNER). There are only two northbound local services from Morpeth on Saturdays and none on Sundays.**

On Mondays-Fridays, there can be 3 trains within 20 minutes from Newcastle to Edinburgh, but with none of them observing a sensible stopping pattern within Northumberland or Scottish Borders, making rail travel between key provincial towns in the region impossible (**see Sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3**). SENUG would like one operator or

the other (and SENRUG suggests Cross Country) to operate a sensible calling pattern stopping at all of Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick and Dunbar on at least some of their services. There is no local service along this route.

As SENRUG's two highest requirements are not options presented by the consultation, SENRUG has ranked the options that are presented from #3 to #8 (rather than #1 to #6)

### Which routes and stations and why?

Requirement 1 applies to the whole Cross Country network.

Requirement 2 applies to the York – Edinburgh section, and in particular Newcastle – Edinburgh (similar arguments might also apply to Bristol – Penzance)

Requirement 3 refers to a specific need for later southbound services from Edinburgh to Northumberland stations and Newcastle, particularly on Saturday nights where the current last train departs Edinburgh at 20:00 (LNER). Further services at 21:00, 22:00 and 23:30 are required.

Requirements 4 to 8 apply to Morpeth.

**4 (24, 25 and 26). If it were possible would you agree with transferring these local routes (Birmingham to Nottingham and Birmingham to Leicester) to the West Midlands franchise, and would you like to see any other routes or stations transferred to or from the Cross Country franchise**

SENRUG has no comment on this issue

**5 (27). If the network was unable to cope with all the service enhancement aspirations north of Northallerton on the East Coast mainline, would a) curtailment of one of the existing Cross Country services be acceptable (with the resources redeployed to enhance other existing or new routes), or b) diversion of one of the existing Cross Country services be acceptable (with the resources redeployed to enhance other existing or new routes)?**

curtailment of one of the existing Cross Country services be acceptable (with the resources redeployed to enhance other existing or new routes)?

diversion of one of the existing Cross Country services be acceptable (with the resources redeployed to enhance other existing or new routes)?

	Yes	No
curtailment of one of the existing Cross Country services be acceptable (with the resources redeployed to enhance other existing or new routes)?		✓
diversion of one of the existing Cross Country services be acceptable (with the resources redeployed to enhance other existing or new routes)?	Possibly	

## Why / why not?

See general comments at **Section 2.4**. An alternative route from York to Newcastle might be acceptable if the journey time penalty were minimal, and if of the same size as that for routing via Leeds instead of via Doncaster for the York – Sheffield section, so that both services could arrive at / depart from Newcastle equally spaced from each other.

SENRUG believes there are significant number of passengers travelling from Newcastle and further north to Sheffield and further south, and it is not clear how such passengers could be conveyed without causing significant crowding on the remaining Cross Country service, if one of the two services between York and Newcastle were withdrawn.

**6 (29). Should bidders be given flexibility to make limited changes to the extremities to the network so that benefits such as reduced crowding in the centre of the network can be provided?**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes, but only if alternative services are provided by other operators
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

The alternative services provided by other operators should have sufficient seating capacity to accommodate those displaced from the Cross Country train, and only a small number of passengers should be obliged to change trains as a result of the change. For example, with the Aberdeen services, there needs to be greater understanding of how many passengers are travelling to from south of Edinburgh. SENRUG believes there is a reasonable community of interest between South East Northumberland and Aberdeen, with Monday - Friday commuting for the oil industry.

**7 (30 and 31). Do you agree (a) that the current level of Cross Country services to the following routes are the minimum that must be specified for and (b) that the changes to the following routes would be acceptable if a similar or improved service was provided by another operator:**

- a) West of Plymouth to Penzance
- b) From Exeter/Newton Abbot to Paignton
- c) North of Edinburgh to Aberdeen
- d) Southampton to Bournemouth
- e) Guildford
- f) Bath
- g) Cardiff to Bristol Temple Meads

For (a) “minimum specification” SENRUG has no comment. For (b) “transfer to another operator” please refer to **response 6 (29)** for North of Edinburgh to Aberdeen. SENRUG has no comment on the other routes.

**8 (28). Do you think the Department’s minimum specification should preserve exactly today’s pattern of services and station calls rather than offer an opportunity to change?**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

It is unlikely the bidder would wish to reduce calls at larger stations such as York and Newcastle. The implication of the question is whether the bidder should have opportunity to reduce calls at some of the smaller stations, where not all services stop. It should be noted that at such services, the Northumberland stations of Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick being examples, the Cross Country services that exist today are part of the core rail service provision. Reducing or eliminating Cross Country calls at any of these stations without introduction of alternative services would have an extremely detrimental effect. And it is by no means clear that paths would be available for replacement services from another operator. See also **Section 2.2**

**9 (32 and 33). Should bidders have some flexibility to make fewer calls at some stations, for example if that enabled them to accelerate services?**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No

See **Section 2.2** and **response 8 (28)**. Additionally, in the case of Morpeth, Cross Country services were initially introduced without increasing overall journey times between Newcastle and Edinburgh, utilising time trains spent waiting at signals outside Newcastle (southbound) or Edinburgh (northbound). It does not follow that reducing station calls will accelerate services. In fact, it could possibly slow them down, as explained in **Section 2.2.11**.

**10 (34). Should the minimum specification have the number of trains from each station to Birmingham but give bidders the flexibility to decide where the trains go after Birmingham?**

POSSIBLY

This requires analysis as to what destinations south of Birmingham, passengers from the north of Birmingham are travelling to, and vice versa. Anecdotally, SENRUG believes the main market for through journeys beyond Birmingham from the North East is likely to Bristol and the South West, and notes there is a commercial air service between Newcastle and Bristol airports

**11 (36). Are there stations beyond the geography of the Cross Country network that should receive calls that they currently do not receive (include examples and supporting evidence)?**

SENRUG has no comment on this issue

**12 (35). Are there stations within the geography of the Cross Country network that should receive calls that they currently do not receive (include examples and supporting evidence)?**

Cramlington will shortly be the County of Northumberland's largest town, with population of 35,000<sup>2</sup> (39,000 for all of NE23 postcodes<sup>3</sup>). It has a sizeable business community with a growing focus on chemicals, renewable energy, engineering and production. It also has Northumberland's only indoor shopping centre (adjacent to the station) and the county's only multi-screen cinema. The town is also home to a specialist Accident and Emergency hospital, the only one of its kind in England.

The existing rail provision at Cramlington is an hourly local service which is woefully inadequate and needs to be supplemented by a second hourly service (making a 30-minute frequency in total.) This second service also needs to offer some direct longer journey opportunities including Edinburgh, Durham, York and Leeds. Consideration should be given to achieving this requirement through the introduction of Cross Country calls. However, what Cramlington needs, along with Northumberland's other market town stations such as Morpeth, Alnmouth (for Alnwick) and Berwick, is a regular, hourly, semi-fast service stopping at all the mentioned stations, not just one or two isolated calls per day on a skip-stop service which does not then serve the other Northumberland stations.

#### **4.3 TO IMPROVE AND SIMPLIFY FARES AND TICKETING**

**13 (11). What changes would you like to see to the way Cross Country currently sells and provides tickets?**

The software behind the National Rail Enquiry Service (NRES) database makes it very difficult to find through journeys from the North East to the South West on direct Cross Country trains, for all but very savvy customers who know how to use the filters, as the software defaults to the quickest option, which is often the non Cross Country route via London with an intermediate underground journey. SENRUG believes many passengers would prefer a direct train with no changes, even if there were a small time penalty, if that were made available. The new franchisee should therefore introduce ways to make such journeys much easier to find on its own website. Similarly, a single station change at Birmingham or elsewhere in the Midlands would be preferred by most passengers to a journey across London by underground. In short, the new operator should do more to promote longer distance journeys on its own network, in preference to "via London" alternatives.

**14 (37). What changes would you like to see to the current Cross Country current fares structure?**

A direct journey on Cross Country from say the North East to the South West is often dearer than the "via London" alternative (comparing standard off peak to standard off peak, and advance to advance). Cross Country should radically overhaul its fares structure to ensure such longer distance journeys offer better value for money.

**15 (12). What changes would you like to see to the Advanced Purchase on the day (APOD) system?**

APOD tickets are a useful feature and should be retained, however SENRUG does not believe it is necessary to offer a reserved seat with an APOD ticket, just as a passenger buying a walk-on standard off-peak ticket on the day would not be given a reserved seat.

Alternatively, the new franchisee should invest in technology to collect data on board as to where a passenger occupying a specific seat is travelling to, when the ticket is first checked. This data could then link in to the reservation system so that the seat could be re-allocated beyond that point. Such technology would also give the operator the commercial advantage of alerting the Conductor as to when a ticket for a particular seat needs to be checked again. It would replace the custom of the Conductor walking down the train shouting out “any more tickets from Darlington, please” which results in honest customers showing their tickets whilst those attempting to travel fraudulently simply keeping quiet.

#### **4.4 TO IMPROVE ACCESS, INFORMATION AND MAKING CONNECTIONS**

**16 (13). What additional information would be useful to you when planning your journeys or making connections onto other services?**

***At the station but prior to boarding:*** the absence of advertised or expected catering services (including no hot drinks or running out of food) should be communicated well in advance, given passengers sufficient time to make purchases from station shops before boarding the train.

***On the train: prior to arrival at a station:*** information should be provided as to the arrival platform at the next station and the expected time and departing platform of connecting services. When a service is arriving late, it is particularly important to advise passengers whether connecting services are also running late (as may often be the case if several trains are affected by a single incident) and whether connections will still be achieved.

**16 ctd (14). How would you like the information (in question above) communicated to you?**

***At the station but prior to boarding catering information:*** by specific announcement and CIS. Specifically, “standard” announcements including details of the usual catering provision that the operator already knows is not available should be superseded by incident specific information.

***On-board connection information:*** via on board CIS (the information would be too complex for announcement and on-board announcements are often not heard well, and can cause annoyance to other passengers not leaving at the station in question.

**17 (17). How could the way in which Cross Country deals with your complaints and provides compensation to you be improved?**

**Advice not to travel:** where a train company knows it is facing significant disruption and issues an “Advice Not To travel” there should be much greater guidance as to how this affects passengers making complex journeys with more than one operator. Whilst this is an industry wide issue, it particularly affects Cross Country since the network’s geography covers the extremities of the country. If a passenger travelling from Edinburgh to Swansea via Cross Country to Cardiff then Great Western to Swansea, is “advised not to travel” due to weather disruption in Scotland, whilst Cross Country might accept the passenger’s ticket the next day, how does a passenger know if Great Western will?

**Compensation for delays:** given that many journeys on Cross Country involve an interconnection with another operator, and any ticket bought from a station will not have been bought from Cross Country (since they do not operate stations), there must be much clearer information as to which company to apply to for a) journeys involving more than one operator and b) tickets bought from one operator for a journey with another.

**Delay / Repay compensation:** this should be automatic and within 7 days for any ticket bought by card which is restricted to travel on a specific train that was delayed, even if bought from a different operator. Manual Delay / Repay claims should be limited to cases where the delay was caused by a missed connection or some other failure (such as impossible to board due to crowding or provision of incorrect information by station staff).

**18 (38). What more could be done to improve access and provide facilities for those with disabilities or additional needs?**

It seems that when a Cross Country service is formed of two Voyager units coupled together, there might only be on-board staff in one unit, but not the other. Those passengers who need the assurance of on-board staff should be advised in which unit the staff will be. It is difficult to see how this could be achieved without alerting potential fare evaders who would then travel in the other unit!

**19 (15). How do you believe Cross Country staff could be more effective in providing service and assistance that passengers need on a modern railway network?**

SENUG believes that Cross Country passengers are not well looked after by station staff and announcers at major stations in times of disruption. However, SENUG lacks evidence to determine whether this is due to station staff prioritising, or simply receiving clearer information from the own company’s Control Centre, or a general failure to communicate operational information that would exist regardless of who the station staff work for. (There is no suggestion that station staff do not wish to be helpful). SENUG believes there is a case for Cross Country having their own staff at key major stations, or a network of regional managers to evaluate and improve customer experience in a geographic region.

**20 (16). What comment do you have on improving the overall passenger experience before, during and after the journey?**

**Before:** as Cross Country trains can reverse en route, trains may approach stations with coach A either at the front or at the rear. Passengers must be told which way round the train will be before it arrives. It seems this information can currently be transmitted to some station CIS systems, but not others. At Morpeth, in Northumberland, this information is not available. A technology fix is required so that this information is available and displayed at **all** stations on the Cross Country network.

**Catering Offer:** this is very hit and miss in both standard and first class with numerous incidents of food having run out, hot drinks not available, or catering staff not on the train. The offer needs to be consistent (especially in first class) and extended to the extremities of the network. See also **response 16**.

**Connections information:** see **response 16 (13 and 14)**

#### 4.5 TO IMPROVE THE ON-BOARD EXPERIENCE

**21 (19).** Rank your priorities for improvement to the carriage layout for local trains on Cross Country? Rank 1 for most important to 7 for least important.

SENUG has no input on this issue

**22 (18).** Rank your priorities for improvement to the carriage layout for long distance inter-city Cross Country trains? Rank 1 for most important to 7 for least important.

More seats	1
More table seats as opposed to 'airline' seats	4
More comfortable room for short distance standing	7
Cycle storage	6
Seats that align with windows	3
Greater leg-room	5
Extra room for luggage	2

**Where and when these facilities are most required.**

These facilities are required equally throughout the network, with room for standing being (prioritised #7) particular required for morning trains arriving in, and evening trains departing from major city centres.

**23 (20).** What other comments or suggestions do you have about the on-board experience?

None, only the comments already made about more seats / longer trains, catering, on-board staff and on-board CIS for next station connection information.

**24 (39).** Which initiatives would you suggest to try to reduce the disturbance caused by the 'churn' of passengers alighting and boarding at frequent station calls?

Prior information to waiting passengers at each station as to what way round the train is approaching would allow passengers to board in the correct coach, reducing walking through from one carriage to another. See also **response 20 (16)**.

Once train seating capacity is strengthened, a smarter seat reservation system could permit concentration of seat reservations for passengers travelling 90 minutes or more into certain coaches, with passengers for shorter journeys or with no seat reservations into other coaches. This would reduce “churn” for passengers on longer journeys. See also **response 15 (12)**

The above two initiatives could be coupled with advance information to passengers on train loading and occupancy by coach, so passengers board the train at the most appropriate point.

More luggage space and the elimination of APOD passengers having seat reservations and then finding their seat already occupied, would also allow the process of boarding passengers to flow more smoothly.

#### **4.6 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIPS**

**25 (40). Are there any improvements to the level stakeholder engagement by Cross Country that you would like to see and how could stakeholder engagement be improved?**

There has been a focus on engagement with, and in some cases funding for initiatives of Community Rail Partnerships. However, there are many professionally orientated voluntary pro-rail campaign groups such as SENRUG that for various reasons are not constituted as CRPs. Indeed, a group seeking to represent long distance / inter-city type passengers that travel on Cross Country services is less likely to be a CRP, as such groups tend to support branch lines with local services only. Therefore, support for and engagement with passenger organisations should specifically include non CRP groups.

**26 (41 and 42). Does Cross Country provide a sufficient level of support to relevant Community Rail partnerships in your experience?**

As SENRUG is not a CRP, it can not comment on this question.

**Has their support improved in the last year to 18 months?**

Engagement with SENRUG (not a CRP) has improved in the last 18 months, following the appointment of regional stakeholder managers. Nevertheless, SENRUG would still like to see regional stakeholder forums focussing on services, operational issues, stations and on-board experience, which is a wider range of issues than the recent CRP forum addressed.

**27 (43). Provide ideas on what more you feel the franchise could do to help the relevant Community Rail partnerships?**

As per question 25, the funding available to CRPs should be extended to be accessible to other voluntary groups which are not CRPs. SENRUG accepts the DfT might wish to introduce some kind of pre-qualification criteria to confirm such a group attains minimum standards for management and organisation. Funding for such groups could include customer surveys, consultant studies for new service proposals, station and bus / train integration improvements.

#### **4.7 VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

**28 (21 and 44). Any other comments?**

Please see SENRUG's general comments in Section 2.

**End**

#### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> East Coast Main Line Route Study – Rail Investment Choices, December 2017, page 47:  
<https://cdn.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/East-Coast-Main-Line-Route-Study.pdf>.  
SENRUG's response to the December 2017 consultation is at: <http://www.senrug.co.uk/widescope/resources/18-02-25-network-rail-ecml-route-study-response.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> From Cramlington Town Council website: <https://www.cramlingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> 2011 Census data for all NE23 postcodes from <http://www.doogal.co.uk/UKPostcodes.php>