

## **Award of new East Midlands rail franchise**

*Press release by TravelWatch East Midlands*

*26 June 2007*

TravelWatch East Midlands, the independent body promoting passenger transport in the Region, today welcomed the announcement that Stagecoach Group had been awarded the contract to run the East Midlands rail franchise from November 2007, but expressed concern at prospective above-inflation rises in some fares.

Improvements which TravelWatch had lobbied for which will be taken forward in the new franchise include:

- Faster main line services with increased peak period capacity
- A fifth hourly train from St Pancras to serve Kettering (and a new station at Corby)
- Retention of twice-hourly stops at Market Harborough
- A daily through train from Lincoln to St Pancras
- More frequent Matlock-Derby-Nottingham services

TravelWatch East Midlands Secretary Stephen Abbott said: "We welcome the service improvements and are pleased that proposals by DfT to join and split trains at Leicester have been dropped. There has been no published information on connections from Lincoln to London or measures to avoid seasonal crowding to Skegness, and we will be seeking assurances on these points. We also want increased reliability of services on regional and rural routes, including Sundays."

Annual rises in regulated fares will be limited to RPI + 1% in line with national policy. However, says Stephen Abbott, "The expectation that Stagecoach will increase unregulated fares by RPI + 3.4% per annum will handicap passengers, especially those who travel off-peak. Hopefully the promised Smartcard ticketing will provide flexible options for passengers."

TravelWatch East Midlands appreciates the willingness shown so far to listen to rail users in the region and intends to continue a dialogue with the new operator to achieve the level of service which passengers rightly expect.

Stephen Abbott continues: "We welcome the commitment to attract business from motorists and wish to see the promised increases in station car park capacity implemented as soon as possible. We will be carrying out surveys at stations in July to determine how passengers access the railway. The results will be made available to operators and presented at a conference 'Charging or Choice?' to be held in Leicester on 16 October which will examine how public transport can alleviate the impact of road congestion charging".

*-ends-*

**Notes for editors**

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