

House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

07 July 2008

Dear ,

CUTS TO RAIL SERVICES IN EAST MIDLANDS

I am writing to you on behalf of your constituents who use public transport and local supporters of Better Transport living in your constituency. This letter covers the whole of Greater Nottingham as public transport travel patterns obviously cross parliamentary borders and some of the specific examples below may be outside of your constituency, but serve to illustrate what is happening across the region.

BACKGROUND

As you will be aware, new rail franchises commenced in our region late last year. The future of our region's rail services as a result does not look promising, although who to lobby on this is unclear. The Train Operating Companies seem the obvious cause of our concerns and we are indeed in discussion with East Midlands Trains (EMT). However, we do not believe the situation is of EMT's making. The rail industry is now micro-managed by the Department for Transport (DfT) and we believe that EMT is only delivering what DfT has specified. To the best of my knowledge some documents on the franchise bidding process remain confidential and FOI requests may be necessary to get DfT to release them. Service Level Commitment 2 (SLC2) would be of interest, but DfT has so far not placed into the public domain. SLC2 is the timetable defined by DfT and within the SLC2 parameters the Train Operating Companies have very little room for manoeuvre.

TIMETABLE

Over the last few months there has been much discussion on the new timetable that will be introduced in December. From latest information very few of the concerns of stakeholders have been taken notice of and the new timetable is likely to be seriously deficient. This is best illustrated in tabular form, showing the number of trains stopping today and what is planned from December 2008:

Monday - Friday

	WESTBOUND		EASTBOUND	
	2007	2009	2007	2009
Elton (Rushcliffe)	2	1	2	1
Aslockton (Rushcliffe)	10	5	11	7
Radcliffe (Rushcliffe)	10	5	11	6
Netherfield (Gedling)	6	3	7	2

Sunday (Winter)

	WESTBOUND		EASTBOUND	
	2007	2009	2007	2009
Aslockton	6	1	6	2
Radcliffe	6	1	6	2
Netherfield	6	1	6	2

Monday - Friday

	WESTBOUND		EASTBOUND	
	2007	2009	2007	2009
Rolleston (Newark)	12	6	12	8
Fiskerton (Newark)	10	7	10	9
Bleasby (Newark)	10	7	10	9
Thurgarton (Newark)	8	6	8	8
Burton Joyce (Gedling)	12	7	12	9
Carlton (Gedling)	11	4	11	8

Sunday (winter)

	WESTBOUND		EASTBOUND	
	2007	2009	2007	2009
Rolleston	5	2	6	2
Fiskerton	5	2	6	2
Bleasby	5	2	6	2
Thurgarton	5	2	6	2
Burton Joyce	5	2	6	2
Carlton	5	2	6	2

The immediately obvious 50% cut in service weekdays and 75% cut on Sundays for some stations is only part of the story. Timings of the trains that do run almost sign the end of commuter traffic from the east into Nottingham. Examples:

- Commuters that finish work at 17:30 have no train home: stopping services towards Grantham depart Nottingham at 17:34, then nothing until 20:45. Towards Newark there is a 17:17 (which is even tight for those leaving work at 17:00), then nothing until 18:17.
- Netherfield fares even worse with the very last train of the day departing Nottingham at 16:45.
- Heading into Nottingham in the morning from local stations along the Newark line, commuters will have a choice of just *one* train. At Burton Joyce for example this is at 08:21 (previous train is 06:33 and next 10:19). The 08:21 does not call Carlton which gets no 'commuter time' trains at all.
- Note – most trains do still run, they just do not call at local stations.

This is unacceptable and instead of rail delivering a solution to congestion on the region's roads, even more commuters will have to resort to the roads from December.

Then there are hardship stories. One blind man travels daily between Radcliffe and Netherfield, but may now have to give up his job as the train home no longer calls at Netherfield (15:45 from Nottingham). Commuters from Aslockton without access to a car have a serious problem.

EMT will cite low usage of trains. This may be so, but rural rail services across the East Midlands suffered grievously under Central Trains and we hoped the new franchises would offer a new beginning, not the start of the end. Appendix A and further comment below explains our thinking.

Other Routes

It is not just east of Nottingham that suffers. Summarising a few other deficiencies in the proposed timetable:

- A key employment area is Beeston, yet cross Nottingham trains hardly exist and the Lincoln – Newark – Nottingham – Loughborough – Leicester service does not call at Beeston (with a couple of exceptions).
- Although fast trains to London are important, traditionally such trains also provided a host of local journeys, such as Beeston to Leicester, Kettering to Loughborough and so on. The new timetable abandons many of these local passengers to the roads if they cannot change their working hours.
- The traditional a.m. business express, 'The Robin Hood' from Alfreton, Langley Mill, Nottingham and Beeston to London is withdrawn completely!
- The new station at East Midlands Parkway has so few trains calling we cannot understand the purpose of this station. We suspect that secretly the rail industry cannot understand why it is being built either.

OTHER FRANCHISES

This paper focuses on East Midlands Trains. Nottingham will also be served from December by Northern Rail with a new service to Leeds. Although Better Transport has contacted Northern Rail, so far this company has not offered stakeholders any hint as to what service they plan to offer. For stations such as Langley Mill (Amber Valley) and Alfreton (Amber Valley) this is vital information; Langley Mill especially ceases to be served by EMT (except for three trains) and it looks like the new timetable will be delivered with zero consultation with passengers.

CrossCountry operate the Nottingham – Birmingham corridor. Here too we do not know how much notice this company has taken of stakeholder comment.

ROLLING STOCK

The EMT franchise started with the dregs of the country's rolling stock on the secondary lines. A number of the trains had been stored out of use for many months. There were insufficient trains. Unsurprisingly reliability has been terrible, as has overcrowding, with one-coach trains appearing instead of two-coach or two-coach instead of four-coach, and so on.

Rolling stock allocations these days are largely decided by DfT and we do not recognise this situation to be of EMT's making. Indeed, our vital three-car 158 class trains were reduced to two-car on instructions from DfT. The coaches released were then sent to Northern Rail.

DfT made much publicity recently of the 1,300 new coaches for the railways. The allocation for EMT is just three coaches.

We already have fewer coaches than needed, let alone capacity to accommodate modal shift in the future. Compare this with the investment going into the Greater London area.

WHY?

Statements from the DfT about the new franchise do not mention any of the above. Why? All resources have gone towards delivering a new service to Corby and extra capacity for London commuters from the south of the East Midlands Region. This leaves the north of the region with very little and the north – south divide in rail investment/development is significant. The positive is in the media 'spin' but not a word about the losers.

THE FIRST GREAT WESTERN EXAMPLE

We cannot help but notice similarities in the East Midlands with what has happened on the rural lines of the new First Great Western franchise. There has been much media interest in the failings of this franchise. There has even been Early Day Motions, e.g. EDM 1211 on this franchise, but local south west MPs collectively have been vocal on this subject for a very long time.

Yet, First Great Western was only delivering what was specified by DfT and this has been discussed at length in the specialist rail industry media.

Events in East Midlands are replicating what has happened in the south west, except so far in our region there seems to have been minimal interest by the media or elected representatives and our inferior rail services into the future are going to happen by default, unless there is greater opposition.

SUMMARY

Appendix 3 gives greater detail on how we come to be where we are today, but briefly, the new franchises for the northern part of the East Midlands are a major lost opportunity:

- No attempt to recover from the stagnation and poor service suffered during the ten years of Central Trains.
- Adding to the above, the planned service cuts all show a process for ultimately closing many rural stations in the East Midlands.
- In practice station closures will not happen due to political fallout and stations will just get a token 'parliamentary' service (see the service to Elton above). To close a station requires close scrutiny, yet to render a station useless by service cuts can be done without any questions being asked.
- No provision for predicted growth, indeed, the new franchises started with insufficient coaches to cater for *today*.
- No requirement on the new franchise operators to deliver modal shift and to grow ridership, especially from rural stations.
- The service cuts do the opposite and force existing rail passengers on to some the most congested roads around Nottingham.

Nottinghamshire Better Transports believes there are other general but important questions of the DfT that stem from their franchise specifications:

- Government policy appears to have abandoned behavioural change and encouraging modal shift.
- Government policy is failing to take any notice of the impact transport has on climate change.
- Transport investment is concentrated in the south in the London commuter belt, with the north of East Midlands left with little.
- Capacity will be constrained by massive year on year fare increases. There were already 100% fare increases for some Nottingham passengers in May 2008.
- The lack of transparency and a transport policy based on media 'spin'.

CONCLUSIONS

So what are we asking for? The answer is complex. Passengers may only be interested in one specific train. Better Transport looks both to today and the interests of that passenger, but also towards the future and improving rail services as the catalyst to achieve modal shift and arresting Climate Change.

As a starting point, we believe the December timetable should see no passengers worse off than today. Then plans for the development of integrated public transport across the East Midlands Region to meet the needs of the 21st century must be put into motion.

Our full response to the draft timetable in the East Midlands can be downloaded from: http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/nottinghamshire_local_group.

Yours sincerely,

David Thornhill
Chair – Nottinghamshire Campaign for Better Transport

APPENDIX A – This is an extract from ‘Response to Draft December 2008 Timetable for East Midlands’. Parts are in turn taken from earlier papers published by Nottingham Better Transport warning of the dangers ahead for our rail services. Alas our fears have come true and it is a pity little notice was taken of our campaigns some years ago.

3. FRANCHISES – WHY ARE WE CONCERNED?

3.1 Central Trains Franchise History

- 8th March 2000 SRA invites bids for the Central Trains franchise replacement.
- 7th February 2001 SRA halts the franchise replacement process and the status quo continues.
- 19th October 2004 Alistair Darling announces the Central Trains franchise would be scrapped.
- 18th October 2005 DfT announces planned new franchise structure for East Midlands.
- November 2007 Start date of new franchise.
- December 2008 Start of new timetables decided by the new franchises.

So at the very time our rail services should have been enhanced to meet the needs of the 21st century, they have spent almost 8 years in limbo.

3.2 Service Reductions

Through recent years there has been a significant reduction in services operated by Central Trains. Examples:

- 1) The end of through Nottingham – Nuneaton – Coventry services.
- 2) The end of through Lincoln – Nottingham – Leicester – Nuneaton – Birmingham services.
- 3) The end of through Skegness – Nottingham – Derby – Crewe services.
- 4) The end of through Nottingham – Birmingham – Hereford services.
- 5) Key commuter trains withdrawn that serve Nottingham, Lincoln and Derby areas.
- 6) Poorly timed trains that miss vital connections.
- 7) Poorly timed trains that miss vital station stops.
- 8) Poorly timed trains that miss key flows of passengers (commuters, shoppers etc).

The declining and inferior level of service on many routes is the one going forward into the new franchises and may become the norm for the future.

In fact the situation is worse than we feared. Not only has the inferior service become the norm, but at no time did we anticipate that the DfT planned massive cuts to services at certain rural stations. We can see no mention of this anywhere in any DfT document. The following is a summation taken from the Nottinghamshire Campaign for Better Transport submission to DfT during the franchise consultation bid:

- **Services on rural lines in East Midlands have stagnated back in the late 20th century. The status quo on this is not acceptable.**
- **The DfT through the re-franchising process must give a lead on how the rural services can match the needs of the 21st century.**

Not only has the DfT rejected this in totality but decided to deliver a rail service to many communities in East Midlands hardly fit for the 19th century.