

August Update on December Timetable Campaign and Other Rail Issues

Many thanks to all those who have taken action over the proposed December timetable to the east of Nottingham. I must mention especially the citizens of Aslockton who are conducting an exemplary campaign. Here are a few comments on where we are today.

1) MPs

Better Transport wrote to all Greater Nottingham MPs. Not all responses are here yet, but so far the results are disappointing, although from certain road obsessed MPs it was predictable. I was hoping, as has happened in other regions, that there would be unified cross-party support for lobbying the Department for Transport (DfT). This is unlikely to happen here alas.

Better Transport does not endorse any political party, but the response from Kenneth Clarke MP must be mentioned for his understanding of the wider issues and intellectual comments, even though Mr Clarke does not offer us much hope. West of Nottingham Dr Nick Palmer MP is doing excellent work, for Beeston station especially, but is promoting rail across Greater Nottingham too.

One observation from a campaigner looking not just at Nottingham but where there have been similar problems elsewhere, it is noticeable how the stations impacted are in solidly Tory constituencies. Is that because the Tory constituencies tend to be in the more rural areas or something more sinister¹?

2) MEDIA

There has been reasonable coverage in local newspapers. To the best of my knowledge the BBC has not covered even though they had the press releases. This does not surprise me. After many years of campaigning I have been unimpressed (to put it mildly!) by the quality of our local broadcast media. If anyone has direct contacts with radio/TV then please speak to them.

¹ Of course, 'rural' areas often have poor links to services and rural poverty is a reality. So such areas often need good train services as it is their only lifeline.

3) CONSULTATION

Nottinghamshire Better Transport is doing its best, but we are a small voluntary organisation and our resources are stretched. Yet if it wasn't for us, few passengers would know of the impending service cuts. As word is spreading we are aware of many passengers and Parish Councils that are not fully aware of what is happening.

EMT has been good with its consultation, even if due to the DfT it cannot offer us very much. The fact remains though that consultation has not reached certain parts of society who will be seriously impacted by the new timetable. As certain key DfT documents are still not in the public domain, we suspect this was the Government's intention.²

Please, if you can spread the word it will be greatly appreciated.

Below there is comment on other train operating companies that have declined to keep us updated on the state of the draft timetables. This is an appalling state of affairs – it is acceptable to keep secret until the very last minute the fact workers can no longer get to work? We will be returning to this topic with some vigour!

4) EMT

Other than a stop at Netherfield on 15:45 Nottingham – Skegness to cater for the Radcliffe blind passenger I am unaware of any movement by EMT. The extra stop is appreciated.

Some EMT comments show a surprising lack of understanding.

4.1) 17:34 Nottingham is sufficient for the p.m. commuter flow.

I have a number of responses that show this is not the case, e.g.

'I work in Derby and my reason for moving to Radcliffe was the convenient train service which meant that I could leave my car at home. At present I get the train from Radcliffe at 06:37am and return on the 17:50pm train from Nottingham. Under the proposals that I have seen there will be a train at 17:34pm from Nottingham (which I will miss as my train from Derby doesn't get in until 17:35pm), the next train is proposed to be at 20:45pm.'

Better Transport only has a very early draft of the new CrossCountry timetable between Nottingham and Derby and Arriva³ has declined to provide us the latest version; an unacceptable situation that we will no doubt be returning to. The old draft we have suggests a 17:28 arrival at Nottingham from Derby which would not

² Service Level Commitment 2 would be of interest. This is the outline timetable given by DfT to EMT. It is secretly guarded by the DfT civil servants.

³ Greater Nottingham's commuter services will be split between three franchises from December (East Midlands Trains, CrossCountry (Arriva) and Northern Rail). In the London area it was recognised multi-franchise operations were not a good idea and DfT has combined franchises to help integrate the railway. In Nottingham the DfT has done the opposite.

be considered a valid connection to the 17:34. We will be requesting that connection is made valid so long as EMT refuses to stop the 17:50 at local stations.

The whole subject of connectivity at Nottingham for passengers from the west connecting into (or probably *not* connecting into) very low frequency services eastwards has not been fully considered yet. The new employment zone adjacent to Beeston station already has a good flow of passengers and these passengers may have no way of commuting by rail in future.

A significant number of passengers are *not* going to transfer to the 17:34. They will be lost to rail. In turn this will impact on the a.m. passenger counts. So who is for predicting that the 2010 timetable will see morning trains axed due to low usage?

4.2) Improvements elsewhere.

Excellent! The Sunday services to Mansfield and the new (sic) Nottingham – Matlock service is most welcome. But these trains might just as well be in Inverness for the use they are for an Aslockton commuter who gets to Nottingham station after 17:34.

The Matlock service only restores between Nottingham and Derby what we had prior to 2005, when the service was axed.

4.3) Passenger Counts.

I have attended many heated meetings through the days of Central Trains (CT) where passenger figures quoted by CT were vigorously disputed. This is no different today and EMT. There is also data on the website of the Office of Rail Regulation, which too can be debated.

The fact that fares in CT days were often not collected cannot help statistics.

Here is an interesting quote from EMT relating to the overcrowding of the Norwich – Liverpool service:

'Volumes are 20% higher than those provided to the bidders by CT/DfT.'

The 'bidders' are the companies that bid for the new franchise. It shows that even the government and rail industry actually know very little about how many passengers are travelling. Of course, the 17:34 Nottingham commuter train towards Grantham is a Liverpool – Norwich service. So a route known to be overcrowded now has to carry most of the local commuters too. Or does EMT know this will not happen and commuters will just switch to their cars?

One area of concern discovered whilst surveying the Grantham route is that there has been some abstraction from rail to bus due to the concessionary bus pass for

those 60+. Although welcome, the concessionary scheme is under funded and appallingly ill-considered/designed.

4.4) Bingham and Stopping Patterns.

The extra stops for Bingham are of course supported, yet we are confused as to why EMT thinks there is such great potential here, rather than elsewhere.

Bingham population: 8480 and density 2.78 persons/acre

Radcliffe population: 7980 and density 3.80 persons/acre

So there is not much difference between the two in population and transport planners would seize upon Radcliffe's higher density to suggest a greater potential here rather than Bingham.

Compare these figures with Collingham, population 2774. Going back a few years Collingham campaigned for better train services following the axing of key commuter trains by CT. Their campaign was a success and the proposed EMT new timetable actually increases the number of stops there to 39 per day. This is good news for Collingham, but illustrates the random nature of our timetables, which are designed around convenience to the train operator rather than potential demand or the needs of local communities.

4.5) Express or Stopping Train?

The main argument for not stopping at local stations is to speed journeys to Lincolnshire and the coast. This is utter nonsense. Prior to 2005 the Skegness service continued to Derby and through to Crewe. To improve reliability (see PPM below) the service in recent years has terminated at Nottingham with zero thought about connections westwards. The extended journey time for many passengers now having to change trains is around one hour. To now argue that faster journey times are needed is insulting.

'Charter Minutes' are of note too! These were thought up by John Major who thought quality services could be delivered by a piece of paper – 'Customers' Charters'. The railway responded by stuffing extra minutes into schedules immediately before the terminating point of the train, so even a late running train, miraculously, would be on time at its destination. This concept was been grasped with both hands by New Labour and much of what happens on today's railway is driven not by the needs of passengers, but by the statistics, the Public Performance Measure (PPM). It combines figures for punctuality and reliability into a single performance measure. This paper comments a number of times on services that were axed in 2005. This was done not because the trains were empty, but for one reason – to improve PPM. The performance of CT was poor and DfT demanded action, so CT just removed all the poor performing trains from the timetable. We are still suffering the impact of this around Nottingham.

The 'Charter Minutes' are still there though. A good example is the a.m. Grantham line commuter train which happens to be a through Norwich – Liverpool service. As this service doesn't terminate in Nottingham it gets no 'Charter Minutes' locally (these will be stuffed into the schedule at Liverpool), so from Radcliffe to Nottingham this train takes 12 minutes. Yet other trains that terminate at Nottingham take around 16 minutes. And curiously, they take 16 minutes if the train calls at Netherfield and 16 if it doesn't.

So any argument about the need to speed journeys is economic with the truth.

We believe the real reasons for not stopping are to squeeze the maximum number of journeys out of insufficient trains. EMT is woefully under resourced, although we put the blame for this totally in the hands of DfT. And the second reason is any extra stop is a risk to PPM and a good PPM is more important than providing a meaningful service to passengers.⁴

There is one other important development in December. Nottingham sees the restored third train per hour between Nottingham and Derby, plus a new hourly Nottingham – Leeds service. Yet nothing has been done to increase the capacity of Nottingham station and there will be serious risks to PPM. Once Better Transport has received the Nottingham – Derby timetable from CrossCountry⁵ and we have pondered the connections in Nottingham, we will be asking the rail companies how they will manage this. PPM in congested Nottingham will probably mean trains will not be held for even one minute to connect. Today that is not a disaster if there is another train not too much later, but the new timetable means there will be no alternative train. Who is responsible, CrossCountry for running its train 10 minutes late, so with such a small delay has limited responsibility towards the passenger, or is it EMT for not holding the connection a minute?

5) NOTTINGHAM COUNTY COUNCIL (NCC)

NCC's lobbying of EMT is broadly in line with that of Better Transport. The Rail Officer at NCC is - jim.bamford@nottscc.gov.uk.

The 'Poacher Line' Community Rail Partnership needs mentioning too. Although this initially was focused on rural Lincolnshire, the Partnership does now cover the whole route from Nottingham to Skegness. Contact – chris.watson@lincolnshire.gov.uk.

⁴ Better Transport of course supports a good PPM. This is achieved *not* by pieces of paper and fiddling the books. It is achieved by investing in railway infrastructure. Successive governments have thought they could get away with pieces of paper and we are now suffering the result. Current example: Government (Rail Regulator) recently refused the £19m funding to upgrade the desperately needed enhancements to Nottingham station's signalling. The current campaign to reverse this decision is one of the most important that we have locally and support on this would be appreciated too!

⁵ And the Nottingham – Leeds timetable from Northern Rail (NR), who has declined to offer any stakeholder any hint of its proposed timetable. A new service developed in total secrecy. Although we believe this is due to NR delivering exactly what it is told to by DfT, so the lack of transparency is unsurprising.

There is one project looming however where Better Transport will be in conflict with NCC. In September it is likely NCC will apply for planning permission for a massive Park & Ride at Gamston. This will be north of the A6011, immediately to the west of the Gamston A52 roundabout. This environmentally catastrophic scheme is one of the most damaging ever imposed on our local Green Belt.⁶

The proposed P&R usefully serves to illustrate how moribund thinking is these days at both national and local governmental levels. At the very time we want people to leave their cars at home and use public transport, along the A52 corridor we have rail services axed, whilst simultaneously millions is poured into a scheme that actively encourages people to drive along the A52 to a giant car park. It is odd too that such P&R sites suggest it is bad to drive into the City but perfectly OK to drive as much as you want in the County!

6) REGIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY (RTS)

This is part of the East Midlands Regional Plan, sometimes called Regional Spatial Strategy. Few citizens are likely to be aware of this document, yet this is one of the foundations of how our region functions. The work of Better Transport and other campaigning groups often goes unnoticed as we wade through such policy documents, comment and attend public scrutiny hearings.

The draft RTS scrutinised last year was considered unsatisfactory. A revised draft version has only just been published. It is at: http://goem-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal/regional_strategies/rss/empc?pointId=1214396903508#1214396903508

Better Transport has not had time to fully digest the revised RTS, but a quick glance suggests the new EMT timetable conflicts with RTS. This is something Government cannot take lightly, although the DfT does seem to work to its own rules, ignoring all else around it.

7) HISTORIC ARGUMENTS

Papers published by Better Transport have time and time again detailed how our local services have been systematically destroyed, either by design (see item on PPM above) or incompetence.

Here are a few current examples, using the example of 21:52 Grantham – Nottingham, which is last stopping train of day currently but in proposed timetable is ‘express’.

- The last train of day from Leeds via East Coast Main Line arrives Grantham 21:55, three minutes after the 21:52 Nottingham train has gone.

⁶ Details of the proposal are at: <http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/large-static/eplanning/docs/SC-1273%20scoping%20opinion.pdf>.

- 20:30 Kings Cross – Grantham 21:39 remarkably does connect into the 21:52, except for some weeks daily through June/July engineering work saw the train retimed to arrive Grantham 21:55. There was no attempt to retime the now non-connection and passengers towards Nottingham were left stranded.
- The last fact was true also for 21:48 Grantham – Boston (20:51 from Nottingham) which sits at Grantham 17 minutes just waiting the London connection. But during the engineering work sat at Grantham for its 17 minutes then departed a few minutes before the London train had arrived.
- For years CT failed to run any meaningful service on Sundays due to staffing issues (problems being suffered by EMT too although not quite so badly) and services to local stations were consistently cancelled or replaced by bus (which tended to bypass local stations) for years. Better Transport has many examples of passengers who used trains regularly on Sundays but gave up on Sunday travel long ago. To use lack of passengers as a reason for axing our Sunday services is outrageous.

Here for completeness is what Better Transport has previously said:

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).*

Then it is claimed there are insufficient passengers using the local stations. Is it surprising?

8) WHAT NEXT?

Better Transport will be drip feeding the media specific topics, putting local and national Government on the spot on transport related policy and lobbying the train companies.

Here are possible topics beyond the immediately obvious:

- Youths with bikes/skateboards safely travel by train between Netherfield and Radcliffe during school holidays and weekends to use the Radcliffe cycle/skateboard park. What plans has NCC to provide a similar facility in Netherfield once the youths can no longer reach Radcliffe?
- What plans has NCC in conjunction with other local councils to fund a bus service from Nottingham to Grantham via the local communities once passengers are abandoned by rail? Even towns well served by bus such as

Bingham and Radcliffe are poorly connected – Radcliffe centre to Bingham for example is only hourly. Aslockton has no meaningful bus service to Nottingham.

- £19m funding for Nottingham re-signalling is essential.
- What impact will there be on commercial property prices in Beeston when white collared skilled workers in Rushcliffe can no longer easily get there due to poor rail services.
- Impact of local communities east of Nottingham being severed from west of Nottingham due to non-existent connections.
- Nonsense of Gamston P&R versus rail.
- A52 MMS.⁷
- Bingham already suffers from commuter parking in the town centre. This can only get worse if any commuters to the east now drive to Bingham for the train. This may be true for Lowdham too, which like Bingham gets extra trains and other stations fewer.
- Responses from certain MPs show how their party has abandoned any pretence of being 'Green'.
- Impact on Concessionary Bus Pass on public transport in general.
- Supporting passengers' rights for taxis home if their connections fail in Nottingham.
- The abandonment by Government of any policies that promote modal shift or tackle climate change.
- Transport policies are contrary to various Local and especially Regional Spatial Strategies.
- Left hand of Government knows not what the right hand of Government is doing, with conflicting policies issued.
- Inflation busting fare rises, yet poorer service.
- Lack of transparency and meaningful consultation by some train companies.

9) BIBLIOGRAPHY

There is much background on this subject. Some papers from Better Transport go back years when we predicted exactly what is happening today. We told you so gives us no satisfaction. I will endeavour to get all the papers on our website as quickly as possible: http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/nottinghamshire_local_group.

David Thornhill
Chair – Nottinghamshire Campaign for Better Transport

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⁷ MMS = Multi Modal Study. These were carried out some years ago at a few million pounds cost, to look at transport along corridors. The road elements of these MMS have tended to lurch forward. The public transport elements are forgotten. Gamston P&R is a good example.