

Greater Anglia Franchise Consultation
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Your Ref:
Our Ref: GM/
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Dear Sir

GREATER ANGLIA FRANCHISE CONSULTATION

I am pleased to be able to provide you with the views of Suffolk County Council on this key consultation. You will already have received a separate contribution from the Suffolk Rail Policy Group (SRPG) which is a joint group, and has been an important input into this response. The consultation has also been formally considered by the County Council's Cabinet.

The County Council questions the advisability of introducing a new franchise a relatively short time before the Olympics in 2012. Well planned, high quality services between East Anglia and Stratford are key to the success of the Olympics and to realising the potential benefits for East Anglia.

The County Council considers the following to be key issues:

- a) Service reliability and punctuality are of paramount importance.
- b) All High Level Output Specification (HLOS) improvements must be carried forward to the new franchise including hourly services on the East Suffolk line, improved capacity on the Norwich to London inter-city service and improved capacity and train quality on the Ipswich to Cambridge service (with at least two car trains on all services between Ipswich and Cambridge).
- c) The County Council recognises that limited availability of diesel rolling stock means that the trade-off for hourly services on the East Suffolk line is the loss of through services to London. These services were highly valued, so this should not be viewed as a long term position, and should be reviewed in the context of either additional diesel stock or potential for electrification.
- d) Faster journey times between Ipswich and London are required, with a target of one hour or less. Wi-fi provision must be carried forward while current inter-city trains remain in service during the new franchise, and restaurant facilities should be restored.
- e) New inter-city standard rolling stock must be introduced as soon as possible, as referred to in the Greater Anglia Route Utilisation Strategy. Electric multiple units are

acceptable provided that they are purpose built for high speed inter city services, with commensurate levels of comfort and facilities including 2+2 seating and tables, wi-fi with power points, and restaurant facilities.

- f) There is a general need for station improvements throughout Suffolk, and there is a need for enhanced staffing levels at Lowestoft. With the High Level Output Specification enhancement, Ipswich is set to be a key interchange, and must have state of the art passenger facilities including platform access and sheltered waiting, toilets (clean and working) and real time passenger information. The County Council is very disappointed by the delay in installing lifts at Ipswich. Current timetables do not support certain connections, particularly at Ipswich to and from the Felixstowe branch, with some connection times of up to an hour. This should be improved.
- g) Peterborough is also a key interchange for East Anglia with the East Coast main line. Interchange facilities are currently poor, and proposed changes to the East Coast timetable would further disadvantage passengers wishing to make connections with Greater Anglia services. This is not acceptable.
- h) Stowmarket is an area of high growth in Suffolk and should be served by at least an hourly service to London on weekdays/Saturdays.
- i) There are further service frequency enhancements which the County Council wishes to see as early as possible in the new franchise including hourly services between Ipswich and Peterborough using trains of Class 170 quality or equivalent, half hourly service between Lowestoft and Norwich, Monday to Saturday, and an hourly service between Lowestoft and Norwich on Sundays.
- j) Suffolk County Council supports aspirations from Norfolk and Cambridgeshire to improve services on the Norwich – Cambridge line. This should also be reflected in better and more frequent services stopping at Brandon, as the Brandon to Cambridge link in particular is of growing importance to the well being of the town.
- k) The County Council strongly supports community rail partnerships and a new franchise holder should demonstrate a strong commitment to the East Suffolk Line Community Rail Partnership, the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership, and the Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership (the Gainsborough Line).

The consultation also posed several specific questions. These are reproduced below in italics, with suggested responses based in part on the recommendations of the Suffolk Rail Policy Group.

- a) *Respondents are encouraged to consider the appropriate length of franchise and comment as to whether the proposed length is appropriate.*
 - I. Suffolk County Council supports the principle of longer franchises as it is considered that these will encourage investment. However, it is essential that the Franchise Agreement strongly drives enhanced services through the life of the franchise and very high standards of service reliability and customer care.
- b) *Respondents are encouraged to consider the best methodologies for managing disruption and suggest appropriate mitigations.*

Respondents are asked to highlight any areas of particular concern so that the Department can ensure that proposed mitigation measures are acceptable.

- I. Whilst bicycles are accepted on trains, it is not possible to take the bike on the bus to complete a journey and the arrangements need to be made to ensure that bikes could be taken on rail replacement bus services.
- II. Closure of routes because of engineering work needs to be publicised in good time, with posters being displayed so that passengers can plan their journey in good time. One week's notice is not considered to be enough time.

c) *Respondents are encouraged to consider which locations may be desirable for future consideration for improvements under these schemes and how such schemes may be funded.*

- I. Replacement of busy level crossings with bridges where possible (Claydon and Elmswell suggested). Stowmarket bridge is already under construction.
- II. Where large new developments are placed near to these crossings, an opportunity could be available. Network Rail would apparently support this approach.

d) *Respondents are also encouraged to consider the levels of service on weekday evenings, Bank Holidays and weekends. It should be noted that, as with all timetable changes, the operator will be required to consult fully with interested parties nearer the timetable change date.*

- I. An hourly interval service is needed on Sundays between Lowestoft and Norwich.

e) *Security Issues, Car Parks, Help Points, CCTV etc.*

Respondents are asked to highlight any areas of particular concern so that the Department can consider these.

- I. CCTV is needed at Needham Market station.
- II. CCTV is needed at Derby Road (Ipswich) Station to deter the high levels of vandalism there. New waiting shelters are needed on both platforms as the existing shelters have been vandalised.
- III. A station car park will be needed at Westerfield to serve the planned residential development within the Borough of Ipswich near this station.
- IV. Real time rail information screens are needed at all stations, integrated with real time bus information.

f) *Fares and ticketing (ticketless travel such as smart cards)*

- I. The current fares structure is too complicated. There are widespread fare anomalies for similar length journeys to and from London from different destinations (e.g. Ipswich and Ely) and these should be reconciled.
- II. Some shorter journeys are more expensive than longer journeys on the same type of ticket and need to be adjusted to reflect distance travelled.
- III. Better revenue protection is needed by train operators.
- IV. Ticket gates at stations only taking the standard small ticket and not the larger ticket is an issue. Ticket gates need to be able to accept the larger ticket too.

g) *Improving service quality*

Respondents are asked to consider the appropriateness of the measures proposed within this section of the specification. Respondents are also asked to highlight any issues that may have been omitted, so that these can be considered further. The Department would also appreciate information on any locations where particular issues need to be addressed.

- I. Clean trains are vital. A clear statement of how this will be achieved should be sought from bidders. Information for passengers at stations and on trains needs to be improved, especially at times of service disruption; this is outlined in this section of the proposed base specification. This must include ensuring that toilet facilities are kept clean and working throughout journeys.
- II. Quality of rolling stock is important and refurbishment of the diesel train fleet in particular is required or replacement with better quality trains.

- III. National Passenger Survey score targets need to be set at a demanding level to ensure that service quality is improved and maintained.
- IV. Bidders for the franchise should be asked to accommodate more than four cycles on trains.
- V. Class 153 single units should not be deployed on services requiring two cars or more, due to the reduced space for buggies, cycles etc.

h) Environmental issues

Respondents are asked to consider what environmental key performance indicators should be set within the franchise specification and whether it is appropriate to require bidders to set their own binding targets within their bids.

- I. Better cycle and pedestrian access to stations. This could be incorporated into station travel plans.

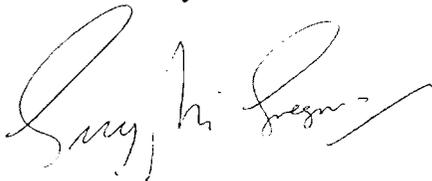
i) Third party schemes (SnOasis, Beccles Loop etc)

Respondents are asked to highlight any other third-party schemes that are likely to be delivered during the life of the next franchise. Local authorities are also asked to highlight any increments or decrements that they would like to propose as part of the franchise specification.

- I. The County Council strongly supports the provision of a passing loop at Beccles to enable hourly services to be provided between Ipswich and Lowestoft.
- II. It is vital that the proposed new station at Great Blakenham is provided when the SnOasis development goes ahead, and is well served by trains as soon as the resort is open.
- III. There is an opportunity for a future Community Rail Partnership for the Ipswich – Cambridge line if funding becomes available.
- IV. Provision of better rail/bus interchange at stations with expansion of schemes such as PlusBus. The County Council would wish to continue the current close working on station improvements and station travel plans.
- V. New development related station opportunities should be identified, including a business case for building a new railway station at Great Cornard on the Sudbury to Marks Tey line.
- VI. Opportunities should be explored to reopen the line from Saxmundham to Leiston to passenger services, as should the reinstatement of the chord east of Newmarket to enable services from Ely to Newmarket.

I trust that these comments are helpful and will be fully taken into account in future decisions in relation to the franchise.

Yours faithfully



Guy McGregor
Portfolio Holder for Roads, Transport and Planning