

Response to the DfT InterCity East Coast Consultation

April 2010

London TravelWatch response to the DfT InterCity East Coast Franchise
consultation



London TravelWatch is the official body set up by Parliament to provide a voice for London's travelling public.

Our role is to:

- Speak up for transport users in discussions with policy-makers and the media;
- Consult with the transport industry, its regulators and funders on matters affecting users;
- Investigate complaints users have been unable to resolve with service providers, and;
- Monitor trends in service quality.

Our aim is to press in all that we do for a better travel experience all those living, working or visiting London and its surrounding region.

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Introduction

London TravelWatch welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for Transport's consultation on the Intercity East Coast (ICEC) Franchise. The franchise is due to commence in autumn 2011 following a planned major timetable change in May 2011. The response focuses only on those areas within the London TravelWatch remit, which is between Kings's Cross and Stevenage.

London TravelWatch's responses to the Essex Thameside and Greater Anglia Franchises provide our views on the general consultation questions asked in the Department for Transport's consultation on the ICEC franchise. In addition London TravelWatch's report, 'Aspirations for Rail Franchise Replacement & Renegotiation - Paper 1 - All Train Operating Companies' (2004) <http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/document/1209/get> sets out our general aspirations for train services when franchises are replaced.

Timetable issues

London TravelWatch is limiting its response to timetable issues affecting the London TravelWatch area. London TravelWatch has made a number of representations to the Office of Rail Regulation about the timetable consultations on the East Coast Main Line for the May 2011 timetable change. Our main concern is that in standardising the journey patterns from Stevenage the effective choice of journey has been limited. Under these proposals for May 2011 the Stevenage stopping pattern is that the station is only served fully by trains to Leeds. The other principal destinations of Newcastle, Edinburgh and York are not served effectively. While the specifics of the timetable options have developed, the fundamental concern remains about the service provision from Stevenage to destinations other than Leeds.

Outside of this specific issue at Stevenage, in general the connections and services proposed for May 2011 align with our aspirations for train services. There are issues with the current last and early trains to certain locations on Monday to Friday and most locations at the weekend. London TravelWatch recommends that all locations have last and early services which comply with the following statement from London TravelWatch's report, 'Requirements for Train Services – Principles' (2003):

“All stations in the London TravelWatch area should have first departures that facilitate connections with the first tranche of long-distance services from main London termini such as Paddington, Euston, King's Cross, Liverpool Street and St Pancras International. In addition connections, where possible, should be provided to facilitate catching an early (pre-06:30) Eurostar departure from St Pancras International. In general this

means a first arrival in London by not later than 06:00 on Mondays to Saturdays, 07:30 on Sundays.

In addition, on Sundays within the London Travelcard Zones, rail start-up times should be synchronised with the night bus network in such a way that for any locality with a direct night bus to central London there should be no more than a 30 minute interval between the departure of the last night bus and the departure of the first train.

For the benefit of both long-distance travellers and passengers visiting London for evening entertainment, last departures every day from London termini should be no earlier than 00:30 to stations in the Zones and 24:00 to other London TravelWatch area stations.”

London TravelWatch representations to the Office of Rail Regulation recommend the principles of train service planning follow Taktfahrplan principles. These timetabling principles developed in Europe place considerable emphasis on connections and mirror image timetables.

Additional Suggestions

Customer complaints

Train operators to monitor the demographics of their complainants and promote customer complaints procedures amongst all passengers but particularly for those underrepresented in complainant statistics.

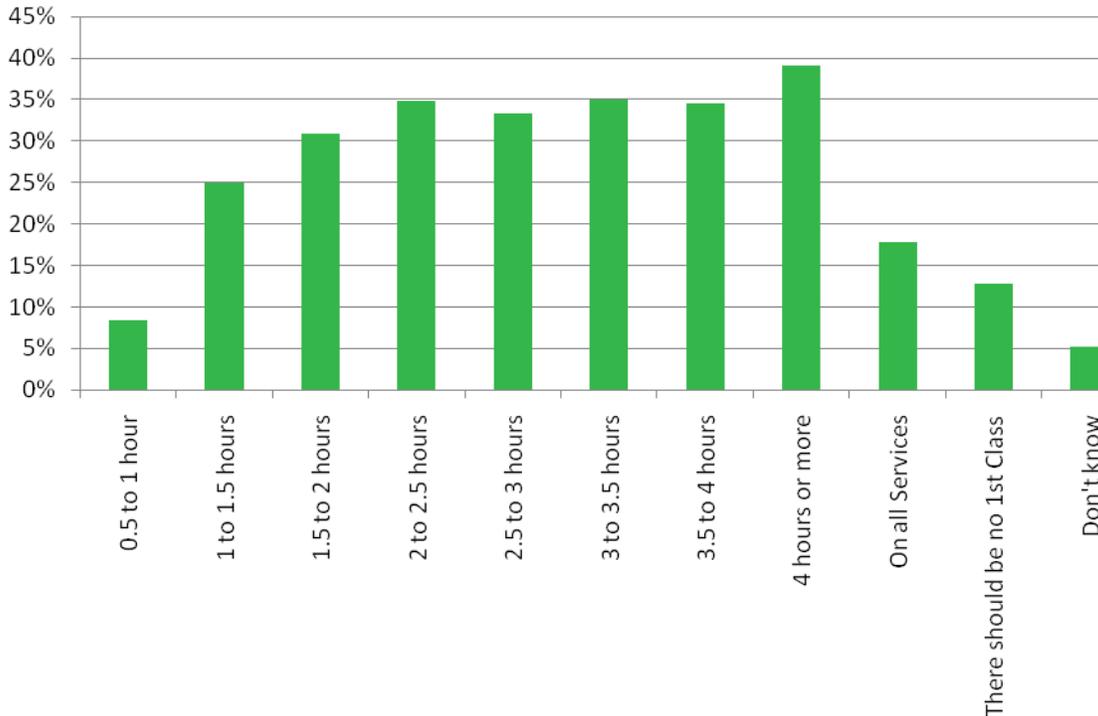
London TravelWatch appreciates that there is a tension in an operator encouraging complaints as this may make the complaints figures appear worse as there are likely to be more complaints. This likely impact should be recognised in the contract and the bidders should be encouraged to enable customers to express their views on the train service. As long as customer complaints are dealt with in a responsive and professional manner the operator can learn from the views fed back by its customers.

First Class Rail Services

London TravelWatch is currently conducting research into first class travel to be completed May/June 2010. This will look at the expectations and requirements for first class fares and the balance with overall capacity. The preliminary findings of this research are shown in Graph 1 and show the response from 600 respondents who were asked to tick which of the 11 statements they agreed with.

What the graph shows is that most people do not believe that first class services should be provided for journeys of less than one hour.

Graph 1 - Graph of Responses to the Question, 'On which, if any, of the following lengths of journey do you believe first class rail services should be available?'



London TravelWatch also asked what facilities passengers would expect in first class for different lengths of journey. These questions revealed that for shorter journeys, those less than two hours, passengers' stated preference was for a premium service rather than necessarily for a full first class offering. It was only for journeys greater than two hours that the majority of respondents stated that the full first class product should be provided in terms of services such as an at seat restaurant service.