

NEED FOR EXTRA HARROGATE – LONDON DIRECT SERVICES

Issue 9b

SUMMARY

This paper demonstrates the need for additional faster direct rail services between Harrogate and London Kings Cross on the East Coast mainline. Harrogate is currently served by diesel HST trains as an extension of the Kings Cross to Leeds service. However there are proposals to electrify the line which would enable operation of the existing Mk 91 electric trains as well as the planned IEP electric trains.

Harrogate District is close to the geographical centre of the UK, accessible from north, south, east and west. It attracts large numbers of visitors all the year round, for both business and leisure. Easy access for visitors is vital for the economic future well being of Harrogate & Knaresborough.

The detailed proposals are summarised as follows:

- a) Accelerate the existing morning southbound and evening northbound services. (Section 2)
- b) Add extra morning northbound & evening southbound services each weekday. (Sec. 3.1 & 3.3)
- c) Add extra early morning southbound or reschedule the existing service earlier. (Section 3.2)
- d) Add additional weekend services both ways, especially on Sundays. (Section 3.4 & 3.5)
- e) Operate a two-hourly service every day via Leeds which would require one additional train set on the existing resource base.(Section 4.2)

We ask the Department for Transport, the Office of Rail Regulation and the East Coast Trains bidders, to recognise the compelling case for additional direct services between London, Leeds and Harrogate and to identify viable ways of providing additional services. These have previously been proposed both by incumbent franchisees and such as the 2-hourly direct service previously proposed by National Express in 2008 and granted as contingent rights by the ORR in 2009.

1. WHY HARROGATE-LONDON TRAINS?

Harrogate District is close to the geographical centre of the UK, accessible from north, south, east and west. It attracts large numbers of visitors all the year round, for both business and leisure. Easy access for visitors is vital for the economic future well being of Harrogate & Knaresborough. The latest published estimate of Total Direct Visitor Spend in the District was £331m per year from a total of 6.4 million visitor-days including both business and holiday tourism visitors.

Whilst there are frequent fast services from Kings Cross to Leeds and York, the local connections to Harrogate are poor quality and often ill-timed. Changing trains is seen as risky, inconvenient, and time consuming - whilst the rolling stock falls significantly below most customer expectations! Nevertheless there are nearly three million passenger journeys a year to and from the Harrogate District Stations, and Harrogate provides the largest flow of passengers to and from King's Cross of any regional centre that does not already possess a regular direct service of more than one train per day. With many of the local trains being crowded and with inadequate connectional frequencies for many parts of the day, this demonstrates the community's propensity to generate rail travel.

Over 60 years ago Harrogate enjoyed a regular London-Harrogate-Edinburgh Pullman Car service with up to 10 trains per day. This was cut back in stages until Harrogate had just one direct London service, south bound, Monday to Saturday mornings only. After extensive lobbying, a new northbound service from London to Harrogate was introduced from May 2011, the first NEW service TO Harrogate for over 25 years. East Coast was also persuaded by this Chamber to operate a new direct service in each direction on Sundays which has proved very popular in both directions during the past two years.

The new everyday evening return direct service from Kings Cross to Harrogate completed its first year of operation with very good results, with East Coast Trains saying that over 43,000 passengers used the Harrogate leg of the direct Kings Cross daily services during the year. This was approx.

25% of the total annual journeys, which underlines the importance of direct services between London and Harrogate.

We believe that the London-Harrogate volumes have grown by almost 25% in the past three years. The provision of improved direct services has undoubtedly contributed to this growth. This compares very favourably with the loadings of other services to similar destinations in the region such as Bradford and Skipton. The new direct service has clearly been welcomed not only by Harrogate business people and local residents returning from trips to London, but even more importantly by the thousands of business and leisure visitors coming to Harrogate from London, from South-East England and from East Anglia. It is vital to recognise that Harrogate differs both subtly and significantly from other regional centres because it is a significant destination in its own right for generating inbound travel. For this reason, the case for additional direct services from and to London is very compelling.

2. SPEED UP EXISTING DIRECT SERVICES

2.1 Faster HGT-KGX weekday southbound morning service 07.34-10.36 (1A15)

The 2011 Eureka timetable actually "slowed-down" the long-established 07.28am departure from Harrogate to Kings Cross. It used to take 2hrs 57mins and arrive at 10.25 but it is now scheduled to take 3hrs 02mins, arriving at 10.36 – 11 minutes later. This is partly due to the "clock-face" timing of departure from Leeds at 08.15 instead of the previous 08.05, causing a planned dwell of 9 minutes but also because the schedule is heavily padded with 5-6 minutes of excess time between Harrogate and Leeds.

Now that the signalling renewal is complete between Leeds and Harrogate, reducing headways to 7-8 minutes, this departure from Harrogate should be adjusted to depart approximately 10 minutes later to e.g. 07.45, prior to Northern Rail's 07.51 departure, from which it would better help to alleviate overcrowding, particularly from Horsforth.

Most of the other xx.15 LDS-KGX services are scheduled to arrive at xx.28 (i.e. a journey time of 2h13 minutes from Leeds.) yet the 08.15 train not due until 10.36? There are no other ECML services arriving about this time to be avoided. Harrogate ought to have similar journey times. We would ask the parties to indicate how they propose to remedy this anomaly?

Some business customers have told us that they prefer to drive to Leeds, York – or even to Doncaster - rather than take the much slower direct service from Harrogate, when the fastest East Coast trains from both Leeds and York to King's Cross at this time of day only take about 2 hours, arriving well before 10.00am.

2.2. Faster northbound KGX-HGT weekday evening service 17.33-20.25 (1D24)

The new evening return service from KGX to Harrogate is very much appreciated, but it is quite slow with an overall journey time of 2hrs 52mins. It currently stops at Stevenage, Grantham, Doncaster and Wakefield before arriving in Leeds at 19.48 where it incurs a 12 minute dwell. As with the morning southbound service, we would ask the parties to indicate how they propose improving this schedule

2.3. Weekend service performance improvements

Similar improvements are sought on the existing weekend services in both directions.

3. EXTRA DIRECT SERVICES NEEDED USING diesel rolling stock

3.1. King's Cross to Harrogate – new morning northbound 07.05-09.45

This service is needed primarily to meet the needs of Conference, Exhibition and leisure visitors from the South East to Harrogate District. It could be achieved by extending an existing KGX-LDS service which could then turnaround in Harrogate to form a mid to late morning departure to London. We ask the parties to explore how this service might be provided through improved deployment of existing diesel train resources.

3.2. Harrogate to King's Cross – extra early morning southbound 06.00-08.51

The current 07.34 direct service from Harrogate to King's Cross does not arrive until 10.36, which is too late for many business people requiring a full day in London – or for international air travellers with morning departures from Heathrow or Gatwick. We therefore propose that an earlier and/or additional service be explored, using available diesel resources that berth overnight at Neville Hill

depot to best advantage and providing an arrival into King’s Cross no later than 0930.

3.3. Harrogate to King’s Cross – new p.m. southbound

Our many visitors, be it for business, conference, exhibition or leisure purposes need a P.M. direct return service to London that avoids the unattractiveness of changing trains in Leeds or York during the evening rush hour. We ask the parties to explore how this can be achieved through improved deployment of existing diesel train resources.

3.4 Harrogate to Kings Cross – extra Sunday morning southbound service 10.30-13.33

Given the popularity of Sunday services and the very limited local services; there is a growing demand for a second southbound direct service – ideally on Sunday mid-morning. Both 10.05 and 11.05 LDS-KGX services are scheduled as HST. One of these trains could start from Harrogate about 09.30 or 10.30 to reach KGX by 12.33 or 13.33. *(We are advised this is feasible but has sometimes been vulnerable to engineering work demanding the use of the diesel HSTs on non-electrified diversionary routes. We would be delighted to accept additional services even if there were certain planned timetable periods where such services could not operate because the resource is needed elsewhere.)*

3.5 Kings Cross to Harrogate – extra Sunday afternoon northbound services 14.03-16.55

As above, we would ask the parties to also explore how they can enable the provision of an additional afternoon northbound service to fulfil demand. We understand that adequate rolling stock resources already exist to enable these Sunday services.

4. EXTRA DIRECT SERVICES DESIRABLE IN NEW FRANCHISE

4.1. Four trains a day each way – extra to current East Coast operations

Direct dedicated fast diesel services between Kings Cross and Harrogate were first proposed by Hull Trains in 2008. Hull Trains were established in the year 2000, with just three daily services to London. They now offer seven weekday and five weekend services, using Class 180 trains. We believe this scale of operation is one potential model for London-Harrogate services using very efficient resource deployment.

We would expect services to call at Horsforth as a minimum, given the scale of underlying demand and its proximity to Leeds/Bradford International Airport. Some of our stakeholders have also suggested stopping at Pannal Business Park where a new park and ride facility is planned to meet demand from the more prosperous south side of Harrogate with many executives living nearby.

4.2 Two-hourly service HGT-KGX each way every day – using HSTs or IEPs

Department for Transport is asked to consider including in the new Franchise Specification for the East Coast mainline services several additional extensions of existing northbound services from King’s Cross via Leeds to Harrogate using the existing HST diesel trains sets plus one extra set.

The incumbent franchisee has indicated that it would be possible to operate approximately six trains a day each way between Harrogate and Kings Cross on a seven-day basis on a regular two-hourly frequency of services with the addition of one additional train set into the resource base. Illustrative schedules taking advantage of existing ECML weekday paths and times are shown below:-

Harrogate – Leeds - Kings Cross	Kings Cross- Leeds - Harrogate
05.30 – 05.55 # 06.05 – 08.34	07.35 – 09.49 # 09.55 – 10.15
07.34 – 08.03 # 08.15 – 10.37	09.35 – 11.49 # 11.55 – 12.15
09.34 – 10.03 # 10.15 – 12.28	11.35 – 13.49 # 13.55 – 14.15
11.34 – 12.03 # 12.15 – 14.29	13.35 – 15.49 # 15.55 – 16.15
13.34 – 14.03 # 14.15 – 16.28	15.35 – 17.50 # 17.55 – 18.15
15.34 – 16.03 # 16.15 – 18.30	*17.33 – 19.59 # 20.05 – 20.27*
17.34 – 18.03 # 18.15 – 20.29	18.33 – 20.53 # 20.59 – 21.33
KEY: * = Existing direct services; # = Standing at Leeds Station (Subject to diagrams)	

We understand that a similar service level was contemplated by National Express in 2008 and for which bidding rights existed.

This two-hourly service could be achieved with just one additional diesel HST train set, either through further improved resource deployment or by transfer of potentially available resources from elsewhere. We understand that adequate suitable resource exists with the proposed IEP fleet to robustly fulfil this level of service and therefore ask the parties to demonstrate how they aim to take best advantage of this capability to improve the quantum of direct Harrogate-London services when that fleet is introduced from 2018. Potential electrification of the Harrogate route in CP6 will provide additional flexibility as to how additional services can be provided.

5. WHY IS HARROGATE CURRENTLY BEST SERVED VIA LEEDS NOT YORK?

The primary rationale is that operation to Harrogate is a natural and marginal extension of London-Leeds services, which can be performed with minimal impact both on congestion and capacity and without material conflict with other services around Leeds, whereas this cannot be achieved with a routing via York. The Leeds-Harrogate section has more than adequate capacity and schedules can take advantage of the improved faster schedules that now exist between Leeds and London.

The Leeds-Harrogate-York line is not yet electrified, whereas the main lines from York and Leeds to London are electrified. This means that only diesel trains can operate to Harrogate. The York to Knaresborough track has two single line sections which is a major constraint on capacity and operating hours. Network Rail plan to renew the signalling in modern form in CP5 or CP6.

On the basis of analysis undertaken by the Chamber North Yorkshire County Council is seeking funding to reinstate some parts of the single line sections during the same period so as to facilitate an improvement in frequency for local services. In parallel, easing of serious capacity constraints between Skelton Junction and York are being explored under the CP5 East Coast Connectivity Fund but this is likely to provide segregation of Harrogate line services and will not facilitate additional conflicting movements with ECML trains at Skelton Junction.

A further detailed study of the operating economics shows that Harrogate is most effectively served to and from London as an extension of existing services via Leeds rather than via York. The economic modelling demonstrated that the overall industry benefit is increased when services operate via Leeds. As several daily services are already diagrammed with Class 43 diesel trains this option would not require any new rolling stock or extra slots on the East Coast Main Line. Platforms 1, 6 & 8 at Leeds currently used for London Trains would allow trains to reverse without conflict with other services. Hence this is the most efficient and cost-effective way to provide services for Harrogate.

6. WHY HARROGATE NEEDS MORE DIRECT LONDON TRAINS

Harrogate in North Yorkshire is a unique area of high economic growth forming a "golden triangle" with Leeds, Wetherby and York. It is the north-east quadrant of the Leeds City Region, which is the most significant economic driver of the Yorkshire and Humber Region.

Harrogate Town has a population of 72,000, whilst the whole Harrogate District has 158,000, with an older age profile than the Region. It has a predominantly professional demographic profile with higher than average levels of social class, household income, property values and car ownership. Harrogate has been repeatedly quoted as one of the best places to live in the UK. Hence Harrogate attracts upwardly mobile individuals to live in Harrogate and work all over the country - or across the whole world. These factors all indicate a propensity to travel.

Consequently, the route's most significant proportion (approximately 40%) of passenger miles generated is to/from London. According to recent information provided by the existing franchise, London-Harrogate represents the 12th largest revenue flow. It is also the largest flow by volume from London without a regular service of more than a single daily direct service.

Harrogate District is close to the geographical centre of the UK, accessible from north, south, east and west. It attracts large numbers of visitors all the year round, for both business and leisure. The latest estimate of Total Direct Visitor Spend in the District was £331m per year from a total of 6.4 million visitor-days including both business and holiday tourism visitors. Easy access for visitors is vital for the economic future well being of Harrogate & Knaresborough.

Harrogate has a unique combination of Conference, Exhibition and Event facilities located in a Town Centre, alongside many well established visitor attractions. It is supported by numerous nearby hotels, guest houses and restaurants; a combination not matched anywhere else in the UK. These facilities combined with a relaxing rural environment attract international, national and regional corporate, professional and trade events of all types virtually all the year round. Planning

permission has recently been granted for two new hotels, whilst older ones are being updated.

Harrogate International Conference centre is the third largest integrated conference and exhibition venue in the UK after Excel, London and EICC, Edinburgh, but our national and international air connections are inferior, making rail travel more important for Harrogate. Phase 1 of a £45m expansion programme was completed in autumn 2011 which added two new exhibition and event halls and a new entrance foyer. These additional facilities are attracting significant new business.

Conferences, Exhibitions, Trade Shows and Entertainments at HIC attract well over 200,000 business visitors per annum, with around 40% visiting from London and South East. In a recent event survey, 78% of delegates came from outside Yorkshire, but few travelled by rail. Harrogate's poor air and rail connectivity has frustrated the attraction of some major new conferences – and risks losing others to better connected venues such as Birmingham and Manchester.

The largest event at the Harrogate Showground is the Great Yorkshire Agricultural Show which takes place in mid-July each year. With the demise of the Royal Show at Stoneleigh, the Great Yorkshire Show is now the largest agricultural show in the UK. The Harrogate Spring and Autumn Flower Shows are held on the Showground with large attendances. Many smaller events of various types are held on the Showground all year round, with an average of over 600 events and a total attendance of nearly 440,000 visitors a year. The RHS Harlow Carr Garden has over 300,000 p.a.

Harrogate has a large number of successful hotels, guest houses and restaurants that cater for both business and leisure visitors. The Tourist Information Centre says that there are 1,472 bedrooms in hotels and 284 in guest houses within Harrogate – making a total of 1,756 rooms with over 2,100 beds - excluding the surrounding District. These figures far outweigh comparable towns that already have direct London rail services.

Whilst there are frequent fast services from Kings Cross to Leeds and York, the local connections to Harrogate are poor quality and often ill-timed. Changing trains is seen as risky, inconvenient, and time consuming - whilst the rolling stock falls significantly below most customer expectations! Nevertheless there are nearly three million passenger journeys a year to and from the Harrogate District Stations, with many over-crowded trains, confirming the local propensity for rail travel.

Recent developments in Harrogate District that could increase demand for rail travel include; construction of two new exhibition halls at HIC; opening of the Harrogate International Business School; creation of a new Destination Management Organisation entitled Welcome to Harrogate; adoption of a broad Local Development Framework with new housing and business developments; aspirations for Park & Rail or Parkway Stations; a proposed Bus-Rail Transport Interchange, etc.

7. INEQUITY OF FARE LEVELS TO AND FROM LONDON

Despite the clear strength of underlying demand and continued growth, we also believe that demand from Harrogate (and other ECML destinations) is being effectively suppressed because the fare levels for the most popular walk-up tickets (e.g. Off-Peak "Saver" Return) compare very unfavourably with comparator flows on the West Coast route, where such fares are approximately 55% lower (at June 2013 fare levels*) and where significant competition for conference and exhibition venues exists.

*Examples of fares to comparator conference venues (June 2013 - Off-Peak Return):

- King's Cross to Harrogate @ 204 miles: Off Peak Return = £166 (£0.81/mile)
- Euston to Blackpool @ 226.5 miles: Off Peak Return = £82.60 (£0.36/mile)
- Euston to Manchester @ 184.25 miles: Off Peak Return = £77.30 (£0.42/mile)

The cost of fares is a determinant factor in the decision-making process for businesses selecting the location of exhibition and conferences and we believe it is inappropriate for the North West of England to be provided with the equivalent of an additional subsidy to maintain lower levels of flexible fare tickets.

We ask the DfT and bidders to resolve and alleviate perpetuation of this long standing inequity, particularly given the significantly better frequency now enjoyed on WCML key flows and indicate how the imbalance is to be corrected by the end of the franchise.

8. WHY ARE EXTRA DIRECT LONDON-HARROGATE TRAINS JUSTIFIABLE? (Summary)

Harrogate has the worst provision of direct services to/from London for the size of the underlying demand at comparable destinations on the East Coast Main Line.

For example, it has an underlying demand approaching three times that of London-Sunderland yet is provided with only 25% of the direct services enjoyed by that location. This is a perverse situation in terms of matching supply with demand for passenger benefit and maximising rail industry revenues. It also represents an irrational use of scarce capacity on the congested ECML.

In summary, the principle reasons why more direct Harrogate-London Trains are needed and why they should be a commercial success are as follows:

- High proportion of premium fare passengers all the year round in both directions
- Not primarily dependent on residents travelling to London – many visitors both ways
- Inbound long-distance business passengers and partners for Conferences and Conventions
- Inbound long-distance visitors for Trade Exhibitions, Fairs, Agric. & Hort. Shows, etc
- Inbound leisure visitors to Harrogate Town, Harrogate District & the Yorkshire Dales
- Harrogate business people attending meetings in London or flying from LHR or LGW
- Harrogate residents visiting London and the South-East or flying from LHR or LGW
- Potential for new Parkway Stations & Park & Rail services along the Harrogate Line
- Potential for express bus shuttle services from Harrogate to Ripon and Wetherby, etc.
- Potential for extra trains for big events – e.g. Gt Yorkshire Show, Test Matches, York Races
- Provides substantial extra peak commuter service capacity between Harrogate and Leeds

We ask the Department for Transport, the Office of Rail Regulation and the East Coast Trains bidders, to improve the existing direct services and provide additional services, such as the 2-hourly direct service via Leeds previously proposed by National Express in 2008 and granted as contingent rights by the ORR in 2009. We believe that this could be achieved using existing ECML paths with just one extra HST diesel train set in the route diagram. With the forthcoming bi-mode IEPs it should be a simple matter to serve Harrogate every two hours in each direction, even without waiting for the proposed electrification of the Harrogate Line.



Compiled by Brian L Dunsby, Chief Executive, Harrogate Chamber of Trade & Commerce.

Based on extensive consultation with East Coast, Harrogate Borough Council, METRO, Network Rail, North Yorkshire County Council and the Harrogate Line Supporters Group (now 175 business members)

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