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Dear Sam

Wrexham, Shropshire and Marylebone Railway (WSMR) – Application under Section 17 for a Track Access Agreement.

Thank you for your email of 8 March 2007, inviting comments on the application by WSMR for a track access agreement under Section 17 of the Railways Act 1993.

Further to my letter of 12 January in relation to WSMR's earlier application for a track access agreement, the Department would like to make the following comments on this new application.

The Department is currently still in the process of letting three new franchises (East Midlands, West Midlands and New Cross Country). These franchises will commence in November 2007.

The West Midlands and New Cross Country franchises will be affected by the revised West Coast Main Line timetable which will be implemented in December 2008. This timetable is designed to take advantage of the improvements in line speed and capacity on the West Coast Main Line.

The Department notes that WSMR has revised its proposals and would like to commence operations at the Passenger Change Date in December 2007. The Department is still of the view that these services (if they were to be introduced) should commence no earlier than the PCD in December 2008, so as to align the other changes being introduced to services operating over the WCML.

The Department notes that WSMR has addressed some of the operational issues in their previous submission by re-routing some of their trains away from the Wolverhampton-Birmingham corridor, and from Birmingham New Street itself, which is likely to reduce the impact on the performance of passenger services. However, the new routing via the Grand Junction and Stechford raises new concerns about path availability and performance for freight services.

Given that work on the 2008 West Coast timetable is still on-going, the Department is still of the belief that if a track access agreement were to be approved, it should include appropriate mechanisms to allow the full benefits of the 2008 timetable to be delivered to all users of the West Coast Main Line.

Our own analysis of the revised timetables submitted by WSMR suggests that there are still a number of timetabling conflicts with existing operators at a number of locations over WSMR's proposed route.

I would be grateful if you would confirm whether Network Rail has been asked to conduct an assessment of the likely performance impact of these additional services on other users of the network?

We are happy for this letter to be published on the ORR web site.

Yours sincerely

Peter Painter
Team Leader Access & Operations.