

GRAND NORTHERN – BRADFORD – EUSTON SERVICES LONDON TRAVELWATCH RESPONSE

I would be grateful if you would accept this late submission in relation to this application. The delay is because of limited staff availability for matters of this nature and a coincidence of leave with an upsurge in matters of urgent importance.

We have a general concern where open access operations reach a level on any route that franchise operators' financial commitments to the Department of Transport are placed at significant risk. We have explained this in detail in our responses to the open access applications currently before you for the East Coast Main Line. We do not believe that this is a significant issue with this specific West Coast application, but we place the matter on record because it could become a problem if West Coast applications reach the levels now being seen on the East Coast.

However we do have a specific concern with this application, particularly as it seeks access rights for as long as ten years.

The issue arises from the forthcoming December 2008 Virgin West Coast timetable. London TravelWatch has a major concern with this, namely its withdrawal of long-standing daylong Watford Junction calls on all routes except to the West Midlands. We did not raise this matter with ORR when Virgin applied for their access rights, because it did not seem to be one over which ORR would have any jurisdiction. However we have been discussing it with DfT – as the service specifier – and Virgin for some two years.

The DfT / Virgin response has included the points that the December 2008 timetable makes intensive use of the available fast line paths between Euston and Ledburn or Hanslope Jcts., that any 125 mph train which calls at Watford uses up two paths, and that two 100 mph London Midland trains per hour which necessarily use the fast lines also each use two paths.

DfT has been keen to assuage our concern by holding out the prospect that – within around five years – Watford Jct. station might be rebuilt with two fast line platforms in each direction (in like manner to current works at Milton Keynes), which would make it possible for consecutive trains to stop. This would enable more inter-city trains to call at Watford.

Whilst we obviously have concerns that such a scheme would be expensive and that so far there is no assurance of funding, nevertheless we would be concerned if the granting of additional track access rights for as long as ten years could vitiate the benefits of such a project.

DfT has also offered us a second line of hope, namely the inclusion in the 125 mph Inter-City Express tender specification of a commuter electric version to take over the duties currently worked by London Midland's 100 mph trains. Paths freed up by such a substitution could be made available to allow more

inter-city trains to call at Watford. Again, whilst there is a long way to go before these ideas actually materialise, we would not wish to see them strangled at birth because additional long term track access rights have been granted.

Our public response to the shortcomings of the December 2008 West Coast timetable has been measured and modest, because we have accepted in good faith that DfT – as the government body responsible for ensuring the adequacy of passenger services - has accepted the validity of our concerns and is constructively seeking solutions. It would be most unsatisfactory if another part of the railway industry took decisions which made it impossible for DfT to deliver.

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London TravelWatch is the operating name for the London Transport Users Committee