

# TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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Northern TPE Consultation Co-ordinator  
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14<sup>th</sup> August 2014

Dear Co-ordinator,

## **Response from TravelWatch NorthWest to Department for Transport/Rail North Consultation: TransPennine Express Rail Franchise and Northern Rail Franchise**

### **1. Introduction.**

TravelWatch NorthWest is an independent Community Interest Company representing public transport users in NW England. We welcome this opportunity to comment on the TPE/Northern franchises stakeholder consultation document.

Over much of Northern England passengers demand a step change in the quality of service on offer. Northern's trains are some of the oldest on the network with many of them - the Pacers in particular – far removed from the expectations of passengers in the current decade. Passenger numbers have grown considerably and there is evidence of suppressed demand from overflowing car parks and passengers left behind at stations because of overcrowding. Yet rolling stock quality and provision has potentially failed to keep pace.

TPE has been a victim of its own success and despite new trains, both Diesel and Electric, still struggles at times to carry passengers in comfort.

This process comes at a time when at last the tide in railway infrastructure investment in the North is changing. To add to electrification and the Northern Hub we have had announcements about a cross Pennine HS3 and more recently the announcement of a £15 billion transport investment plan (One North) to deliver benefits for the North of England with a big emphasis on rail connections between the major centres. Interestingly the report prioritises new rolling stock as a matter of urgency for the North in terms of quality and provision.

There is evident government support for a transformation of the North's railways. This franchising process cannot ignore that. In this light the caveats in the document about affordability of new trains start to look penny - pinching though this is not to say that we are not mindful of the need for an efficiently run railway. But the bottom line is that the step change that is envisaged must bring with it new trains both electric and diesel worthy of the modern network that they will run on.

## 2. Answers to Consultation Questions.

### **TO1: What are your views on increasing below-average fares over time to levels typical on the rest of the network in order to improve the frequency, capacity and quality of local services? Do you have any evidence to support your views?**

Paragraph 2.32 of the document states that many fares in the North are comparable with those elsewhere on the network. Fares below the norm are mostly those enjoyed by passengers travelling within the PTE areas where travel, particularly season tickets is subsidised to a greater extent. In general we are concerned about *any* further excessive fares increases in a scenario where over the past decade there has been a swingeing shift towards loading more of the cost of rail travel from the taxpayer to the passenger.

This is a complex subject but there are many examples where fares in the North are not cheaper and indeed can be more expensive than other parts of the country. A recent analysis in the publication "Today's Railways" (Issue 153 September 2014) shows that fares in the Birmingham area, which has far superior rolling stock, are cheaper than in Manchester. Some rural fares in the North are quite expensive – e.g. Day return Skipton - Wennington 28 miles probably on a Pacer £13.30 (Anytime ticket, no off peak or advance fares offered on the route).

If there have to be fares increases to help pay for better quality e.g. new rolling stock this *must* come after such improvements have taken place. Increased revenue from such fares increases should be transparent in its application to provide improved quality of passenger services to include modern, reliable, comfortable, and efficient rolling stock and station services to bring the quality of train services into line with the rest of the network and to move towards Rail North's stated aspiration to provide a "World Class Railway."

Passengers would perhaps be willing to pay more for a train journey if the quality of the rolling stock was much superior to what it is now. The example of the Leeds North West Triangle services operated by Class 333s is a case in point. We understand that Skipton and Ilkley passengers are amongst the most satisfied in the North despite the fact that they do pay slightly more for their season tickets than commuters in Greater Manchester, for example.

Any plans to phase in fare increases must take account of this and the distinction between PTE areas and the rest of the rail network in the North so that those passengers who are paying comparable fares with other parts of the network, are not unfairly penalised by any increases. It should be borne in mind also that average incomes in the North West are significantly lower than in the South East.

We have just commented on the recent decision by Northern Rail to ban the use of off-peak tickets at peak times during weekday evenings on all local rail services in Greater Manchester (and other cities in the North). This is a blunt instrument which will particularly hit those passengers travelling against the peak flow for an evening out in Manchester, when trains are not generally crowded. Lines where service frequencies are low will be especially adversely affected. This crude approach must not be maintained in the new franchise

**TO2: What are your views on giving priority to improving the quality of the Northern rolling stock at the expense of some reduction in lightly used services (e.g. fewer calls at low-use stations)? Do you have any evidence to support your views?**

The overriding concern in the north is quality of the rail journey. The age of Northern's current rolling stock, some of which will reach 40 years during the franchise period, cannot be ignored. Its reliability is failing in line with its age and so it can be claimed that this is the "elephant in the room" and must be addressed in any case, notwithstanding talk of reducing services. Passengers on Northern deserve better than this. This poor quality is a major factor in Northern's low NRPS satisfaction score.

In many cases railways with "lightly used services" perform an important social lifeline and often provide the only means of public transport for communities that have seen bus services disappear or be severely cut back. Equally the cost of maintaining a line's infrastructure will vary only slightly where marginal service changes take place and so any supposed cost savings must be sensibly measured.

The introduction of more request stops could help to reduce journey times but in general terms we feel there would be insignificant savings to be made from taking out stops – certainly in the context of the cost of new trains.

On many routes service levels are already at a minimum e.g. the Leeds - Morecambe service is an example of a line with some lightly used rural stations but there are only 5 trains a day at irregular long intervals. To reduce this service would lead to further loss of passengers, not savings and eventually the loss of a valuable cross country route for longer distance main station passengers. Indeed the service should be increased as at the moment it deters usage.

Northern has a high subsidy as set out in paragraphs 2.35 – 2.38 but questions have to be asked about why this is the case -

- The PTEG group has recently published a report - <http://pteg.net/resources/types/reports/heavy-load-bear-towards-fairer-allocation-rail-industry-costs-regional-rail> intimating that lightweight regional trains are allocated track maintenance and renewal costs as if they caused equivalent damage as intercity trains. The group says that a typical intercity train causes twenty times the infrastructure damage per mile as the most basic regional train. Clearly a fairer allocation of costs would put Northern's subsidy in a better light.
- Some years ago DfT- led changes to the Virgin West Coast timetable, in particular the addition of a third Euston - Manchester per hour, had an adverse impact on Northern Rail's operations in the North West. The new Virgin timetable caused a loss of efficiency in the Northern fleet by breaking pathing and balanced workings. DfT recognised that to retain capacity meant adding more trains into the Northern fleet - a number of class 142s were obtained as well as three class 180s on a temporary basis until more 150s became available. More recently, the addition of a fifth TPE service per hour has made Northern train crew duties for the new timetable less efficient than the old, leading to staff shortages and more recruitment. In both these cases, extra costs have been imposed on Northern for no increase in revenue.
- Rail networks in other rural areas such as Lincolnshire, East Anglia and the West Country are part of larger franchises which include profitable Inter-City services, so that there must be an element of cross-subsidy. Northern, on the other hand, does not include more profitable long distance services - the best performing services in the region were taken out and allocated to TPE, at DfT's insistence. Northern and TPE are of course the only English franchises which do not include any services to/from London.
- Combining the 2012/13 franchise subsidies per passenger mile of 23.9p for Northern and 4.1p for TPE gives an average of 15.4p per passenger mile, which is not excessive when compared with other non-London based franchises, e.g. Scotrail 17.3p and Arriva Trains Wales 19.6p. All services in rural areas have higher costs - e.g. postal deliveries, health and education. It is well established in these other sectors that rural services should be cross-subsidised.

Better ways of financing new trains could be found particularly taking into account that the life of any investment in new trains should be way beyond the span of the franchise. We believe this is being examined by Rail North (see paragraph 7.10). Our perception is that the leasing payments for Pacers are way in excess of their life expired value. Direct purchase rather than conventional leasing from ROSCOs should be explored – in a report in October 2013 PTEG demonstrated that this can save money - <http://pteg.net/resources/types/reports/options-regional-rail-review-ways-improve-britains-regional-rail-services>.

***Basically there should be a national strategy for rolling stock provision!***

**TO3: What are your views on allowing some reduction in the hours ticket offices are open and staffed if this is accompanied by the ability for passengers to have widespread access to ticket buying opportunities (e.g. through new and improved approaches such as smart ticketing, increased advance purchase ticketing or via mobile phones), adequate measures to ensure vulnerable passengers are not disadvantaged and more effective customer service by both station and on-train staff? Do you have any evidence to support your views?**

Customer interface is vital and a “World Class Railway” should recognise this. The purpose of a Ticket office should not be perceived as just selling tickets. It is at this point that many passengers, particularly those unfamiliar with the railway and the vulnerable, engage with the railway, and so everything must be done to preserve a service. The opportunity to extend retail services at ticket offices needs exploration. The M2Go model of retail found at Merseyrail stations appears to be a very successful format and it also creates a less intimidating experience for the casual traveller. There is something about the Spar Shop or Grocery style retail environment that seems to put people more at ease compared with a retail environment that is as rigid in function and form as the traditional ticket office or booking hall.

Station development involving surrounding rail land and air space could produce rental income reducing rail subsidies. With our present way of handling station ownership this is impractical. A short franchise station holder has no incentive to commence long term development, e.g Victoria and Wakefield Kirkgate until recently. Station ownership needs to be reviewed to encourage redevelopment potential and integrate the station actively in the community.

Off station sales also need to be considered. Tourist Information centres and local post offices are worth considering. However there currently appear to be dis-incentives for retailers wishing to sell tickets due to the high cost of computer hardware, its continual updating costs and low commission rates. Tameside District Council embarked upon this path but abandoned it due to the high costs imposed by ATOC.

Smart ticketing is an obvious step but it appears to be taking an inordinate amount of time to arrive, given the example of Oyster in London which has been around for almost a decade. Solutions need to be found urgently but these need to be consistent with systems used elsewhere on the network so that passengers can become familiar with one system.

The availability of ticket machines on stations needs to expand much more but they should exhibit some consistency of operations and provision to make life simpler for the passenger. More sales through such provision can take pressure off ticket offices as well as on train sales for hard pressed conductors, who could spend released time to help and advise passengers. However there are limitations in the range of tickets that ticket machines can sell and for example one particular problem is the inability to purchase tickets valid after 09.30 before that time.

**COM1: How can local communities, local businesses and other organisations be further stimulated to play an active part in the running of Northern and TPE rail services, including at stations?**

Community Rail Partnerships carry out much good work to promote their lines. Their role needs to be strengthened and better resourced. Currently they struggle to attract sufficient funding to be fully effective, often relying on voluntary contributions from caring retirees. They represent a major stakeholder marketing tool for train operators and provide an outreach to potential new rail users that is untapped.

Station buildings contain many redundant office spaces that could be used by communities or small businesses and their opening up would also help to develop stations as community hubs and, by increased human presence, provide a degree of security as well as opportunities for a perception of staffed presence. Such activity would also contribute to bringing the railway to the Community.

**COM2: What opportunities are there for Community Rail Partnerships to expand their role and range of activities?**

CRPs are hindered in their efforts by the pattern of services they have to work with. They carry the ability to provide the conduit between the railway and the Community living close to it. They are under resourced and need support to market and promote their presence and ability. TOCs should be required by statute to actively engage with CRP's.

**TPF1: Are you aware of any proposals for third-party funded changes not already indicated? Please provide details.**

No comment

**FID1: What factors may impact on demand for travel on the new Northern and TPE franchises? Please provide evidence.**

In general terms it is evident that there is already suppressed demand for rail travel in the North for a variety of reasons. Lack of available car parking at many stations after 08.00 and overcrowding of many Northern and TPE services are conspicuous examples of this.

The predicted additional 5 million passengers using Manchester Airport will bring increased demand to transport arteries providing access to it. This will call for greater capacity on train services to and from MIA and an expansion of services to a virtual 24 hour operation from all areas of the North. Current direct services to MIA must be retained and enhanced where possible.

Employment developments taking place in the North need to consider train services but the rail industry must be prepared to meet their needs and work with them to ensure that a good alternative to road transport is offered. Liaison with LEPs will be vital and their views on best transport practice will need to be encompassed.

**DTD1: What are your proposals for providing passengers better and safer access to different modes of transport at stations (including bus, tram, cycling and walking?)**

We are a long way behind continental Europe when it comes to integration. In our response to the Governments Door to Door strategy (which we welcomed) we recognised the difficulties of compelling train and bus operators to work together to co-ordinate timetables and fares. Rail services, through the franchising mechanism of Passenger Service Requirements, have a greater degree of permanence than registered local bus services (which can be changed at relatively short notice). In the deregulated existing environment outside London there are few statutory means (other than Quality Contracts and Statutory Quality Partnerships) of ensuring that proper integration can be planned. Even where tendered services operate under contract to a LTA, who set the timetable, there is often a poor record of rail connection.

To give a specific example involving train/ tram integration there are a number of inadequacies with through ticketing between Manchester Metrolink and rail. The hindrance to solving these is essentially down to the structure of the industry and a perception that this work is of low priority.

**DTD2: How do you suggest your proposals to improve the door-to-door journey experience might be funded?**

Better co-ordination between operators and more strategic thinking. Improved website links e.g. link to PlusBus from NRES.

**TPE1: What are your views on the degree of flexibility proposed for the train service specification for the new TPE franchise? Do you have any evidence to support your views?**

The TPE franchise covers a number of distinct markets where the social mix can be difficult. At its inception the franchise was designed to deliver a fast and reliable train service between towns and cities in the North of England. The markets that emerged were commuters into and out of the large cities as well as an increasing leisure traffic that now dominates the franchise on a ratio of 70:30.

As the Scottish services between Manchester Airport and Scotland were added, the scope of the franchise was further changed to become an Inter-City operator, albeit utilising trains designed for the original inter urban franchise. Access to more suitable inter-city trains for its long distance services will be desirable if the predicted growth level during the franchise period is to be attained. The Manchester – Scotland services do not really fit with TPE but, whoever is the operator, the quality of rolling stock even with new Class 350 electrics does not befit what is essentially an inter-city journey. These new electric trains do not compare with Pendolinos which run between Preston and Scotland and we are sure that if they had the choice passengers would opt for the Pendolino type environment when travelling between Manchester and Scotland. Indeed, consideration should be given to the transfer of the Manchester Airport – Scotland services to the West Coast franchise.

**TPE2: Where, if anywhere, would you like to see any changes to first and last trains on the TPE network and why? Do you have any evidence to support this?**

Individual local user groups and CRPs will no doubt give specific examples here. Manchester is regarded as the capital of the North West and Manchester Airport is the 3<sup>rd</sup> busiest port of entry/exit to the UK. Both operate on a 24 hour economy so an optimum transport network will be required to service them as they continue to grow.

Last trains from Manchester to many destinations depart too early to be of any use to passengers travelling into the City for entertainment and sport events. Consideration needs to be given to timings to cater for city centre theatre close times (22.30) and sports events conclusions at the outlying venues, again requiring city centre departures after 22.30.

As the Airport's predictions of 5 million extra passengers and its global reach increases, plane landing times now stretch over the full 24 hours, disgorging passengers with ongoing travel requirements at all times of the day and night. This now calls for serious consideration of a 24 hour operation of trains to all parts of the North to cater for this growth. Again, if the North is to have a "World Class Railway" this aspiration will have to be considered and the challenge mounted during the period of the franchise

**TPE3: Where, if anywhere, would you like to see any changes to weekend trains on the TPE network and why? Do you have any evidence to support this?**

Weekend traffic, especially on Sundays is sorely underprovided on rail. The weekend changes the dynamic of TPE services to almost 100% leisure. Visitor destinations need earlier first and later last trains than at present, particularly on Sundays, at all times of the year.

**NTP1: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of the North TransPennine route options, in particular in the balance of crowding, frequency, journey time and connectivity benefits? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?**

We are concerned at the detrimental effect that 6 trains an hour on the core section would have on local services, particularly connectivity between pairs of intermediate stations (Mossley, Greenfield, Marsden and Slaithwaite).

**NTP2: Are there other options for any additional North TransPennine services that you would put forward for consideration? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?**

Another option could be longer trains on the core with splitting at key stations e.g. Leeds/ York to continue to maximise through journey opportunities.

**NTP3: Do you consider that the ITT should specify which services should terminate at Liverpool or Manchester Airport on the North TransPennine route, or should the choice of destination be left to bidders' commercial decisions, and what are your reasons? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?**

We have no fixed views on this.

**NTP4: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of the options for Hull, Middlesbrough and Scarborough services? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?**

See below

**NTP5: Are there other options for Hull, Middlesbrough or Scarborough services that you would put forward for consideration? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?**

We are interested in the options put forward for the Hull services which include a service through to Chester. We would be in favour of this as it opens up better connections between East Yorkshire and Wales – Hull to Swansea can be a tortuous journey by road or rail at present. For Hull services, assuming that electrification does progress, we would propose and support the following:

- Hourly Electric TPE service Hull to Manchester Airport
- Hourly Electric TPE service Hull to Liverpool

- 2 hourly diesel TPE service Hull to Chester via Sheffield.

That would give Hull a half-hourly service to Leeds and Manchester with the Airport and Liverpool services operating alternately. The Chester service would strengthen the core express route between Hull and Sheffield, open up Hull to the WCML at Warrington Bank Quay and also provide a “back door” route into Liverpool via Merseyrail.

**NTP6: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of whether or not to reduce calls at Stalybridge and Garforth? What evidence do you have in relation to this?**

We believe that Stalybridge, an important railhead for Tameside, should maintain its present level of TPE services.

**STP1: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of the option to specify one additional train per hour on the South TransPennine route, in particular in the balance of crowding, frequency, journey time and connectivity benefits? Please provide any evidence you may have.**

We welcome an additional train which will increase capacity on this busy route. It is important, though, that there are no detrimental effects on local services.

**STP2: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of the remapping and South Humberside connectivity options? Please provide any evidence you may have.**

We have real concerns about transferring the Liverpool – Nottingham section of the East Midlands Trains Liverpool – Norwich service to TPE. A 2006 study that we undertook in conjunction with TravelWatch East Midlands showed that 23% of passengers east of Nottingham stayed on the train beyond Nottingham.

**STP3: In particular, what factors do you think should be taken into account in considering the case for replacing TPE services between Doncaster and Cleethorpes with a service operated by Northern? Please provide any evidence you may have.**

Again we would have concerns about the loss of through services, reducing their attractiveness. See below.

**STP4: Are there other options that you would put forward for consideration? Please provide any evidence you may have.**

We have already mentioned the concept of a through Hull – Chester service via Sheffield, serving Warrington Bank Quay. The pattern of 3 services between Manchester and Sheffield could be –

- EMT Liverpool – Norwich
- TPE M/C Airport – Cleethorpes
- TPE Chester – Hull.

Other ramifications could incorporate train splitting at Doncaster to retain through services to Grimsby and Cleethorpes.

**STP5: If the ITT were to specify a third South TransPennine service via Stockport, or remapping of the EMT service to TPE, do you consider that it should specify which of these services should terminate at Manchester Airport or Liverpool or should this be left to bidders' commercial decisions, and what are your reasons? Please provide any evidence you may have.**

See options above.

**NW1: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of the North West remapping options for Blackpool North, Windermere and Barrow-in-Furness services? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?**

We are not convinced that remapping will send the right message to passengers on all of these routes. Any re-mapping needs to be considered amongst a range of requirements that commences with a commitment to provide no detriment to services currently operated and with no loss of any further through services to Manchester Airport. Service quality in terms of rolling stock provision must be maintained.

Re-mapping of Blackpool services is not challenged given that a robust direct service between the resort and Manchester Airport will still exist. However we again emphasise that replacement train units should offer at least an equivalent quality of accommodation to that offered currently by TPE as well as a similar or improved frequency.

Many of the direct services provided in previous timetables from Barrow and Windermere have been progressively withdrawn leaving passengers to connect to the Scottish services. However these are more often than not heavily loaded to the point of sometimes intolerable overcrowding at connecting stations (Oxenholme, Lancaster and Preston) so the provision is not fit for purpose. Consequently passengers are dis-incentivised from using the railway and it is believed, many revert to the car. More capacity is particularly needed between Manchester and Lancaster. Attention must be made in any re-mapping to a problem that belies all the good news being disseminated by government about investment in the railways.

It is also of concern that any re-mapping between the franchisees could well witness 30 year old trains replace 10 year old trains with the obvious loss of journey quality. Talk of cascades of replacement newer rolling stock displaced from other regions needs to offer more tangibility if the re-mapping is not to be perceived as a downgrade. We again emphasise that any future train speed and quality are not compromised.

TravelWatch NorthWest is party to the major survey being carried out on the Furness Line and fully supports the evidence contained within it.

**NW2: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of the Barrow and Windermere connectivity options? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?**

Passengers prefer through trains and passenger counts and surveys on both lines indicate a large proportion of passengers travelling through to Manchester and these will be submitted by the relevant Rail User Groups and CRP's. TWNW supports these pieces of evidence and questions the wisdom of downgrading the current services by re-mapping. We would also draw attention to previous statements regarding connectivity. The longer term answer is electrification to Barrow as well as to Windermere.

**NW3: What factors do you consider should be taken into account in the assessment of the options for Anglo-Scottish services? What evidence do you have in relation to any of these options?**

The new class 350 electric services and expanded timetable have provided more seats on this route but overcrowding **over long distances** still occurs. We have already commented on the suitability of this type of rolling stock for what are intercity length journeys in TPE 1 above.

An equal split of trains between Glasgow and Edinburgh services is desirable. The lack of through services between Liverpool and Scotland is a long running sore. It is therefore of prime importance that an hourly Liverpool service is stipulated in the new franchise. To achieve this, joining and splitting train sets at Preston is easily achievable, as witnessed currently.

As also intimated above serious consideration needs to be given as to whether the TPE franchise is the correct one for these services, which we believe, would be better served by West Coast using the Inter-City fleet. The compatibility between electric and diesel units should also be investigated as it is believed that they are capable of being successfully connectable with minor engineering tweaks, thus providing more flexible options.

**NTSR1: Please indicate, with evidence where available, where passengers would be better served, and revenue increased, by:**

- **Reducing the number of calls at low-use stations?**

Selective reducing of calls at low use stations might help to speed some journeys. An alternative would be the introduction of more request stops. In general terms we feel there would be insignificant savings to be made from taking out stops – certainly in the context of the cost of new trains.

- **Increasing frequencies on busier sections of routes or at busier times?**

Increasing frequencies is laudable and some stations warrant a more frequent service. To give one example there is a need to upgrade the Lancaster - Morecambe service to at least a regular clock face timetable (Lancaster is now the second most congested city for driving in the UK). In many instances, however, paths are scarce and the most pressing priority is to strengthen trains to provide more seating capacity.

- **Speeding-up the service for longer-distance passengers?**

Again laudable in some circumstances but the priority should be capacity.

- **Improving connections with other services where there is evident demand?**

This is a difficult area and local groups are in the best position to advise where there is potential for this. We would just give examples of Blackburn and the Furness line where an examination of connectional possibilities should be carried out.

- **Adjusting train services to meet seasonal changes in demand?**

Adjusting train services for limited periods is costly. However there are always reports of overcrowding whenever special events take place and in holiday periods. The use of loco hauled trains could help here e.g. on the Settle – Carlisle line. Again local groups will give examples.

- **Adjusting the time of the first/last train?**

There are many instances where last trains do not give the opportunity for an evening out by train. Of particular note is the last train on the Leeds - Morecambe line which leaves at 16.39 too early even to commute! Also the last train from Newcastle to Carlisle is at 21.18, far too early for an outing to the theatre or a concert.

**NTSR2: Please set out, with evidence where available, any other approaches that might improve route utilisation and make better use of existing resources on the Northern franchise.**

We have no comment on this question.

**NTSR3: Please indicate, with evidence where available, where services should be improved on weekends, resources permitting.**

Sunday services are generally poor and do not recognise the enormous potential for carrying people on a major leisure day. Even with all the obstacles to travel Sunday is, we understand, one of the busiest days for rail now. We would add here that It is quite ludicrous that another important day for travel – Boxing Day – is completely ignored by the North's (and most other) railways. The franchise should specify the provision of Boxing Day services.

**NTSR4: Please indicate, with evidence where available, where weekend services provide poor value for the subsidy required to operate them.**

We have no specific knowledge of this and do not wish to comment.

**NTSR5: What are your views on retaining the route from Cleethorpes and Grimsby to Barton-on-Humber within the Northern franchise? What evidence do you have to support your views?**

This route is outside our region and we offer no comment.

**OTH1: Do you have any other views on the future of the Northern and TPE franchises that you would like to set out?**

We are surprised that there is no consultation question referring to the proposal for Driver Only Operation on Northern services. We do not feel this is practical as there are too many unstaffed stations and there is a real requirement for train conductors to assist disabled passengers, etc. Mobility ramps are provided on most trains. There are also revenue implications and the cost of providing mirrors, etc at stations.

There is always likely to be a need for conductors to sell tickets on trains. We have carried out surveys recently which showed that out of 120 journeys made on Northern the train conductor did not check passengers' tickets and was not seen at all in the carriage travelled in on about a quarter of them. The franchise specification should include a reference to revenue protection measures with this aspect especially in mind.

We welcome the Halton curve initiative and support moves to restore the Burscough curves. Further electrification options should include the short Lancaster - Morecambe branch with the possibility of through running to/from Manchester.

Paragraph 7.21 of the consultation document refers to station facilities. Many of the present Northern Rail stations have no information systems whatever. Only the larger ones such as Hexham and Whitehaven have information screens. The provision of information at **all** stations should be specifically covered in the franchise specification. In rural areas reception for mobile phones is often poor, so the need for real time information is even more important. It is pleasing to see well cared for small stations, often by local voluntary groups, but the lack of basic timely information is lamentable and its provision should be a priority.

We welcome all the service quality requirements being developed in conjunction with Passenger Focus. We would add that we would expect to see proper stakeholder consultation on changes during the franchises on matters such as timetabling, fares alterations, rolling stock developments and other passenger interest issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond

Yours faithfully,

*John A Moorhouse*

John Moorhouse  
Company Secretary