

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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West Midlands Consultation
 Department for Transport
 4/15 Great Minster House
 33 Horseferry Road
 London SW1P 4DR

22nd March 2016

Dear Sir/Madam

West Midlands Rail Franchise Consultation

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

Our comments (with particular acknowledgement to Geoff Kerr and Chris Dale) are given below.

a) The Euston - Stoke-on-Trent - Crewe service. (Paragraphs 5.17 to 5.24 & Question 9).

On balance we would prefer the service to continue to operate via Stoke. The issue of train lengths should be addressed by lengthening the platforms at Stone, Kidsgrove and Alsager or introducing the ability for selective door control to enable longer trains to call at those stations. In addition the service should be extended to Preston to give a local service between Crewe and Preston calling at all stations. In conjunction with this the Liverpool - Birmingham service should be enhanced to Inter City status with rolling stock appropriate to that standard and calling only at Liverpool South Parkway, Runcorn, Winsford and Crewe in our region (with additional peak calls at Hartford and Acton Bridge). The half hourly frequency should remain.

If the platform issues cannot be resolved and the option of operating the service direct from Stafford and providing an alternative service on the Stoke route is taken up this alternative service should **not** be the Liverpool – Birmingham service (referred to above) diverted via Stoke as this would detract from its attractiveness. The alternative service might call at Barlaston and/or Wedgwood stations, which have had no train service since 2004 yet have not been formally closed. Some through links would be lost, e.g. Stone to Euston, but others might be offered, e.g. a through service to Birmingham

which would give better commuting and other opportunities. If this option is proceeded with, connections should be maximised. There is also a case for extending such a service beyond Crewe to Manchester Airport, providing a direct service from the Potteries.

We would also point out that Norton Bridge station can no longer be served as removal of the footbridge has left the platform isolated. A formal closure procedure should therefore be initiated.

b) Remapping of the Wales and Borders franchise

This possibility is not mentioned in the consultation document. The reason for remapping is the desire of the Welsh Government to assume responsibility for the next Welsh & Borders franchise. As part of the devolution process, it may be postulated that certain train services running from Wales into England are transferred to an "English" franchise, so that rail services in England are not controlled solely by the administration in Wales.

There is an alternative suggestion that some of these services might be split at Chester or Shrewsbury into separate English and Welsh operations. This would result in many Welsh rail users losing through services to Birmingham and/or Manchester. Our view is that splitting these services for political reasons would make no sense in transport terms and would be highly unpopular with the many cross-border rail users. There would also be an adverse effect on the viability of a Welsh franchise if profitable parts were to be removed. Furthermore, splitting a through service brings added complications/costs - more resources required, missed connections etc.

While the question of remapping services is one for the DfT and Welsh Government, it is relevant to this consultation to note that two Arriva Trains Wales (AW) services run wholly in England - the hourly Crewe - Chester shuttle and the two-hourly Crewe - Shrewsbury stopping service

Both of these could transfer to London Midland in 2018, along with the management of stations from Nantwich to Yorton inclusive. AW would still provide longer-distance trains on both these routes until the future of cross-border services has been resolved.

We look forward to the opportunity to respond to the Wales and Borders franchise formal consultation in due course.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond

Yours faithfully

John A Moorhouse

John Moorhouse
Company Secretary