

5b Rail Matters

o Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide information and updates for the Board in relation to railway matters.

o Background

Members will be aware that Nestrans' Regional Transport Strategy is supported by a number of Action Plans, one of which covers Rail. The Rail Action Plan was approved by the Board at its meeting in September 2011, a copy of which is available at:

http://www.nestrans.org.uk/db_docs/docs/RAP%20second%20draft%20sept%202010.pdf

This report seeks to update members on a number of matters relating to rail, many of which are actions identified within the Rail Action Plan.

o Rail franchises

In recent months, there has been significant progress in regards to the franchises which affect rail services to the north east of Scotland.

East Coast

The Department for Transport is responsible for letting the cross-boundary franchises, including the East Coast franchise between Aberdeen and London Kings Cross currently operated by Directly Operated Railways, an arms-length agency of DfT under the branding of East Coast. A consultation exercise was undertaken in summer 2012, to which Nestrans provided input. A report on the consultation is available from the DfT website:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/253305/consultation-summary-report.pdf

The prospectus for potential bidders was published on 25 October 2013, a copy of which is available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/252853/icec-prospectus.pdf

and an Invitation to Tender will be issued in February 2014 to companies short-listed following pre-qualification.

Under franchising rules, Directly Operated Railways will not be entitled to bid, so private sector will be invited to operate the service from February 2015, likely to for an 8 to 9 year franchise, with a 2-year call off option.

Caledonian Sleeper

The Final Invitation to Tender for the Caledonian Sleeper franchise was published on 28 October and three companies have been shortlisted to bid to operate the franchise – Arriva, First Group and Serco.

They will now set out their proposals in their response to the Final Invitation to Tender by 12 December. A decision is expected early next year with a ten-year franchise likely, to start on 15 April 2015.

ScotRail

Transport Scotland announced its Invitation to Tender on 19 November 2013. Five companies have been shortlisted:

- Abellio;
- Arriva,
- First Group,
- MTR and
- National Express.

The ITT seeks to ensure Value for Money, but places an increased weighting on Quality, with bids invited to demonstrate increasing patronage, particularly by improved efficiency through encouraging off-peak travel, improved Passenger Satisfaction, improving journey times and enhanced performance metrics. Performance will be measured to ensure no more than 1.6% cancellation rates and a minimum benchmark of 92.5% target trains arriving within accepted limits. These factors will all be subject to sanctions in the event of non-compliance.

Bidders are also asked to bring forward proposals regarding fares(although regulated fares will be capped at Retail Price Index for the peak and RPI -1% for off-peak), to develop smart and integrated ticketing, to promote integration, to promote cycling particularly to/from stations and for station enhancements.

Bidders are now contacting Nestrans to seek discussions in advance of submitting their bids, which are required by 17 April 2014 with an Award of Contract expected at the end of October and the new franchise coming into operation on 15 April 2015.

o Overcrowding

Further to discussion at the last Nestrans Board meeting, where members expressed concern at the levels of overcrowding on some local rail services, particularly north of Aberdeen, the Board requested that a letter be sent to the Transport Minister noting this issue.

A letter was prepared and a copy is attached as Appendix A to this report for members' interest and information.

Nestrans has also sought estimates from local consultants to ascertain the costs and value of undertaking surveys to quantify the extent of overcrowding on trains in the north east and a survey was undertaken on peak-time trains on Wednesday 27 November. Initial results will be provided to members of the Board if they are available in time for the meeting, or reported to the next meeting otherwise.

The other point raised at the last meeting referred to the lack of catering on Aberdeen-Inverness trains. A check of the timetable indicates which services should have catering and currently 7 of 11 weekday trains in each direction should have a trolley service. All five Sunday services both ways have catering.

The next ScotRail franchise from April 2015 will require catering on all long-distance services.

o **Rail Timetable changes**

ScotRail has announced that there are a number of changes introduced to the rail timetable from 8 December 2013. The only significant change for the Nestrans area is the extension of the 0625 Montrose-Aberdeen-Inverness weekday service to start from Dundee at 0539. This provides an additional opportunity for early travel from Dundee, Carnoustie and Arbroath to the north east, arriving into Aberdeen at 0715 and including a direct link to Dyce arriving at 0725, linking to the JET 727 shuttle bus for the airport and Kirkhill.

A number of more significant changes are proposed for enhancement of peak services in the north east from May 2014.

o **Dyce railway station and turning circle**

Members may be aware that the proposed new overbridge incorporating lifts and being fully Disability Discrimination Act compliant is well under construction at Dyce.

Nestrans has now received planning permission for the bus turning circle to the west of the existing station and Aberdeen City Council has progressed Traffic Regulation Orders restricting this section of road to buses and bicycles only. It is hoped that legal agreement can be progressed with the Airport for the long-term lease of the land to enable construction to take place this financial year.

o **East Coast Mainline Authorities**

Previous reports have made mention of the establishment of an East Coast mainline Authorities (ECMA) grouping, consisting of local authorities and Regional Transport partnerships along the route of the London Kings Cross-Aberdeen railway. The group hopes to highlight the economic importance of the line and the need for investment to ensure that the economies of the relevant regions continue to prosper.

ECMA have approached Regional Transport Partnerships seeking contributions to the Business Case and to help establish links with business organisations along the route. The RTP Lead Officers agreed in principle to the four relevant Partnerships (Nestrans, Hitrans, Tactran and Sestran) seeking their Boards approval to making a contribution of £1250 each towards this work. This, if approved, would ensure that the Scottish and northern Scottish voice was included in the assessments.

It is also proposed to hold a number of meetings with interested parties and it would be appropriate to have at least one of these meetings north of Edinburgh to hear the issues relating to through routes to the south and the importance of the route to communities served by the ECML. Preparations are underway towards a possible meeting in Aberdeen in January. It is anticipated that Nestrans would coordinate such a meeting.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board agree to the contribution to the ECMA and note the contents of this report.

RD/ 3 December 2013

Appendix A

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nestrans

11 November 2013

Our Ref
Your Ref

RD/N13/6

Keith Brown MSP
Minister for Transport and Veterans
Scottish Government
Holyrood
Edinburgh

Dear Mr Brown

Overcrowding on trains in north east Scotland

I have been asked to write to draw your attention to the continuing issue of overcrowding on trains in the north east. While this has been an increasing concern over recent years, additional services through to Inverurie have been added and trains strengthened by providing additional carriages at busy times. Nestrans has contributed by undertaking on-train surveys and by supporting financially the additional Sunday services which were introduced in May.

However, such enhancements have resulted in additional demand from passengers. While this is to be welcomed and demonstrates once more the latent demand for rail travel in the north east, overcrowding remains an issue. One of the franchise bidders identified to us in a recent meeting that they had noted standing between Inverurie and Aberdeen, a journey of nearly 40 minutes. This is not uncommon, particularly north of Aberdeen and is a matter that has been raised by members of the Nestrans Board.

I would urge you to consider means by which additional capacity could be made available to relieve some of the worst overcrowding in the area, by prioritising investment and enhancements in the north east. With the Invitation to Tender for the ScotRail franchise due to be published later this month, there is an opportunity to instruct bidders to provide proposals to alleviate this problem.

I would appreciate your views and comments, so that I can report back to the Nestrans Board at an early opportunity.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Peter Argyle
Chairman

Copy: Steve Montgomery, ScotRail