



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Minister for Transport
Tavish Scott MSP

Victoria Quay
Edinburgh EH6 6QQ

Rt Hon Douglas Alexander MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Great Minister House
76 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 4DR

Telephone: 0845 774 1741
scottish.ministers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk>

Our ref:

February 2007

Dear Douglas

As you will be aware, Scottish Ministers are able to provide non-binding advice in respect of cross-border passenger railway services. Scottish Ministers have previously provided non binding advice, to the Strategic Rail Authority, in June 2004, in respect of the current East Coast Main Line Franchise. My advice on the specification of the services on which your Department has been consulting is at Annex A to this letter.

My strategic aims underpinning this advice are to :

- Maintain the important links within Scotland at a similar level to those in place at the time of rail devolution – including the continuation of uninterrupted services to and from Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness, and the provision of regular services between Dunbar and Edinburgh;
- enhance connections between the main centres of business on each side of the Border;
- effect a modal shift towards rail from less sustainable modes of transport; and
- meet the reasonable demand of intermediate communities served by the cross border services.

Overall I am keen to see the improvement of journeys between Scotland and England, where business and leisure connections are strong. I believe rail can make an impact on modal shift by offering a real alternative to air travel between Edinburgh and London's airports. From a passenger perspective, we have considered the impacts of total journey times and arrival and departure times, frequency and quality of services, and, where necessary, connections to onward services.

I hope that this advice is helpful, and I look forward to seeing you incorporate these suggestions in the final franchise specification.

Yours sincerely

TAVISH SCOTT

EAST COAST MAIN: LINE FRANCHISE REPLACEMENT (THE INTERCITY EAST COAST FRANCHISE)

ADVICE TO THE DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT FROM SCOTTISH MINISTERS

INTRODUCTION

Background

1. Scottish Ministers are able to provide advice to the Department for Transport in relation to cross border passenger railway services. The following is our advice in relation to the proposed cross border services included within the franchise for the East Coast Main Line services intended to take effect from late autumn 2007.

Strategic Aims

2. The strategic aims underlying this advice are:
- to enhance connectivity between the main centres of business on each side of the Border served by this route for the mutual benefit of English and Scottish economies;
 - to effect a modal shift towards rail from less sustainable modes of transport by making rail more competitive with these other modes, in particular by increasing the frequency of service and reducing end-to-end travel times; and
 - to meet the reasonable needs of intermediate communities served by cross border services

The Advice

3. Scottish Ministers previously provided non binding advice in June 2004 to the Strategic Rail Authority with respect to the previous East Coast Main Line franchise and more recently with respect to the Cross Country franchise in October 2006.

4. Scottish Ministers recognise the circumstances leading to the re-letting of the franchise and note the intention to secure the new franchise for a maximum of 7 years and 5 months to 31 March 2015, the last 17 months subject to the franchise achieving contracted performance thresholds.

OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Service Level Specification

5. Scottish Ministers do not support any diminution of cross border passenger service levels and seek a categoric assurance that the new East Coast Main Line franchise will not terminate in Edinburgh, but will continue as it does currently to Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness. Existing service levels between London and all Scottish destinations including Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness must be incorporated within the base case specification, especially those that provide peak hour services within Scotland such as the morning Glasgow Central to Edinburgh and the evening Edinburgh to Glasgow Central services. We would also expect the specification to pay due regard to connections for onward journeys within Scotland.

6. The East Coast Main Line franchise provides key peak hour services between Edinburgh and Dunbar in East Lothian. The new franchise must incorporate the existing service levels within base case specification.

7. Any additional improvements offered by the new East Coast Main Line franchise must be underpinned by continuous improvements in safety, reliability, punctuality and quality of service. Performance under each of these measures must be reinforced by the Department for Transport through the appropriate performance regimes

Operational Developments

8. Whilst importance must be placed on improving the reliability and punctuality of the existing service levels this must be undertaken in parallel with introducing additional service developments over the lifetime of the franchise.

9. Immediate short term development proposals, for the East Coast Main Line franchise should include the maintenance of a regular clock-faced timetable for Edinburgh Waverley and a regular timetable pattern across Scotland. Service patterns should be clear and easily communicated to rail passengers. Additionally, Scottish Ministers would wish to see increased service frequency introduced by the new East Coast Main Line franchise in the medium to long term.

10. Any additional improvements offered by the new East Coast Main Line franchise should not jeopardise the opportunity to develop other service enhancements, including Scottish regional and national transport aspirations. We would expect the new East Coast Main Line franchise to work with Scottish Ministers, First ScotRail and Network Rail in the development of these aspirations.

11. We ask that the Department for Transport bear in mind that aspirations for future developments of the rail network in Scotland are contained in our recently published document 'Scotland's Railways'. The Department for Transport should also be aware that the Scottish Planning Assessment does not constitute Scottish transport policy or aspirations and should not be read as such.

12. The Edinburgh to London journey time has increased in recent years. Scottish Ministers would wish the new East Coast Main Line franchise to reverse this and achieve significant journey time reductions throughout the length of its Anglo Scottish routes, including those serving Inverness and Aberdeen. On routes north of Edinburgh, inter-city railway services are still outperformed by the private car as a swifter way to travel to destinations in the North East of Scotland.

13. 'Scotland's Railways' sets out Scottish Ministers' aspirations for faster journeys times between Scottish cities and London. Scottish Ministers see the main priority of the franchise as reducing journey times. In the medium to long term we would want to see reduction below four hours for Edinburgh to London. We understand the pressure on the network for more capacity close to London, but we believe it is important that this is not provided at the expense of regular fast, long distance services.

14. Scottish Ministers welcome industry efforts to improve engineering access. For the East Coast Main Line engineering access proposals should facilitate the maintenance and renewals programme necessary to support the service level provisions and should be planned in conjunction with the West Coast Main Line i.e. one line should remain open at all times. However the provision of clear, readily understandable passenger information is important. This would be facilitated by the maintenance of regular service patterns along the route of the East Coast Main Line.

Related Wider Transport Infrastructure Issues

15. Scottish Ministers welcome all value for money upgrades which deliver and maximise passenger benefits on the East Coast Main Line – particularly where journey times are reduced and additional capacity created. However due to the mixed traffic nature of the network, any such upgrades must take account of all operators sharing the use of the line. Scottish Ministers would also expect to be kept informed by DfT and Network Rail of such upgrades and their progress.