19 August 2015

To
John Larkinson
Director, Economic Regulation
Office of Rail and Road

Dear John,

Access to the East Coast Main Line in 2020 – further performance and capacity questions

Thank you for your letter of 12 August regarding the above. In your letter you ask Network Rail to consider two areas of work to support ORR decision making; further performance assessment and the provision of more information regarding infrastructure works and capacity. In relation to the latter, I can confirm that we will be able to provide a detailed response to the questions set out in your letter by Friday 2nd October.

In relation to further performance assessment, you asked that we consider developing and performance modelling standard two hourly repeating timetables for 7, 7.5 and 8 tph using VTEC’s indicative timetables as a starting point. You asked us how quickly we could do this work and its likely benefits and for a response by 19 August. This letter provides a response to these questions.

There are a number of ways in which the performance impact of the timetable can be developed. The industry’s recognized tool right now is RailSys so this letter sets out timeframes to undertake RailSys modelling to reach a conclusion. Using this approach can be time-consuming and it doesn’t provide a PPM indication, we know that in an environment where capacity is becoming a premium and high performance is required that we need better tools to support decision making and are starting to consider how we might address this gap.
We don’t want to be constrained by our current toolset and so we are also in the
process of investigating other methods of performance modelling that may provide a
helpful insight in a timelier manner. We are engaging directly with VTEC following
their feedback and exploring their suggestions and ideas for alternative methods of
analysis. We will contact you to discuss further if we are able to develop any of these
into something that may be a viable alternative.

In order to undertake performance analysis in RailSys and to obtain an output which
gives a meaningful insight into performance robustness of a timetable it is essential
that a de-conflicted timetable is used which includes all significant interactions
between all services. At present for the ECML in 2020 no such detailed timetable
exists including all service interactions with proposed Long Distance High Speed
(LDHS) services. In particular there are notable uncertainties associated with
interactions between LDHS services and those operated by GTR and by the Trans
Pennine and Northern franchises.

Based on our experience gained through previous pieces of complex timetable
development work and given that work has not yet begun to create a full timetable
containing valid and viable paths for all conflicting operators and that three separate
timetables are being requested for simulation we believe that there is a substantial
amount of work to undertake before detailed RailSys analysis can be undertaken as
described above.

Development of a suitably detailed timetable including de-confliction for other
services for a 7, 7.5 and 8 LDHS tph timetable would take around six-seven months
and would require an input Train Service Specification for all operators to be
included in the model area. Undertaking a comparison of these services in RailSys
would take a further five months. In short we believe that we are currently too early
in the process for RailSys analysis to be undertaken as described above.

Alternatively a piece of analysis could be undertaken in RailSys that assesses only
the LDHS services. This piece of work could use VTEC’s indicative timetables as the
only services in the model and would take around eight weeks, providing as an
output ‘comparative average minutes lateness for a subset of services that could
operate on the ECML in 2020’. In our view this piece of work would add little insight
to the expected performance of the ECML, given that the most significant risks to
performance are expected to be the interaction between LDHS services and other
operators on the route.

Our recommendation at this stage to provide a greater insight into the likely impact
on performance of a 7 7.5 and 8 tph service on the ECML is be to undertake a
workshop with experts from across the industry to provide an indicative PPM
estimate based on the building up of the PPM impact of the expected features of the
timetable. This approach would provide a greater level of detail / transparency
around the estimated PPM value than currently exists and we believe that this
approach is more appropriate given the current level of detail available about the
timetable.

I hope this letter is helpful in setting out the options that are available to undertake further analysis. We will proceed with our recommended option, whilst also pursuing alternative options and will keep you updated on progress.

Please do get in touch with me if you would like to discuss further.

Yours Sincerely,

Fiona Dolman  
Capacity Planning Director