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22 June 2018

Grand Central 7th Supplemental Agreement

Dear David

Thank you for your email dated 8th June 2018. We have had constructive discussions with Network Rail in relation to the 7th Supplemental Agreement and expect these to continue in the coming weeks to provide comfort to Network Rail and resolve the issues that continue to exist.

Grand Central has the following comments on Network Rail's representations.

1. General


The paths identified have been developed and assessed as part of the Thameslink ESG work. Grand Central has bid into the December 2018 timetable and all paths (SX) have been validated and offered as of 8 June 2018, with the following exceptions:

1A68 (SX) 18:24 Bradford Interchange – Doncaster & 1A69 (SX) 17:30 Sunderland – London Kings Cross

These paths have been validated however rejected pending sign off from LNE Timetable Change Risk Assessment Group (TCRAG) for the attaching move and permissive working at Doncaster. Grand Central is working internally and with Network Rail to achieve this approval, detailed later in this letter.

1A99 (MO) 05:04 Wakefield Kirkgate – London Kings Cross

This path has been rejected for Mondays (but offered for the remainder of the week) due to a conflict with 1M16 (Sun) between Grantham and Peterborough. 1M16 is the Caledonian Sleeper service which for a short period is to be diverted by the ECML. Grand Central would like to further understand the status of the rights of this service and has requested clarity from Network Rail. However, as the diversion is for a limited period of time we see no reason for this to impact the ORR's assessment of our application.

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2. Rights beyond May 2020

In its letter Network Rail has set out its position with regards to the sale of access rights beyond May 2020, stating it is unable to support access rights sought beyond this date. It first set out a similar position in September 2017 and it is disappointing that NR is still unable to provide a position on future capacity therefore preventing train operators from planning their businesses with a reasonable degree of assurance.

A number of capacity and performance studies were undertaken as part of the East Coast Mainline applications process in 2015/16 and these were relied upon to inform the ORR's decision made on 12 May 2016. Within these studies Network Rail confirmed that capacity for an hourly maximum of 8 LDHS services existed subject to a number of infrastructure enhancements being delivered.

On this basis the ORR granted new rights for VTEC and First East Coast Trains which, in addition to existing LDHS services, suggested 7.5 of the 8 hourly paths would therefore be in use. The current position from Network Rail suggests capacity for some of these additional services could be called into question.

The current situation on the ECML is that the East Coast Franchise utilises 5 paths out of Kings Cross an hour and Open Access (OA) currently operates 1 path per hour out of Kings Cross.

Currently the earliest OA arrival into London is 09:25 and the latest departure is 20:30 suggesting no reason to not sell capacity for additional ECML OA services arriving into London at 07:17 and departing at 21:52 effectively making use of the hourly open access path not currently being utilised.


The only additional capacity on the ECML being sought by Grand Central is therefore restricted to the additional Sunderland – London return service departing Sunderland at 10:07 and departing London at 14:27. This path was identified and developed alongside Network Rail as part of the Thameslink ESG development timetable. It has since been offered to GC for December 2018.

Grand Central is seeking a small proportion, around 1/6th of the additional 0.5 train paths identified in East Coast applications decision letter. We note the ORR's previous comments regarding the additional 0.5 paths and the risk to freight paths. However, Grand Central is seeking a very small proportion of this additional capacity and would note the recent decline in Freight traffic on the ECML. On a typical weekday there are no more than two freight trains in each direction south of Peterborough, between 0600 and 2000.

3. Section 5 Engineering Access requirements

Grand Central believes that a conflict with EAS Section 5 access is not relevant to the granting of access rights.

The principle of Section 5 access is that it is disruptive, but due to its cyclical nature i.e. 1 week in 4 or 6 or 8 etc., it does not lend itself to being incorporated into the permanent timetable in the same way as Section 4 access. Any alterations to the permanent plan to accommodate section 5 access are planned in line with the STP process set out in the Network Code Part D3.4 – Network Rail variations, with at least 12 weeks' notice. This is an integral part of the timetable planning process and common practice.

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GC currently makes changes to ECS working in the London area to accommodate Section 5 access and we would do the same for other services as required.

4. Coupling and De-coupling

Network Rail has validated the paths sought however as detailed above these paths have been rejected pending sign off from LNE TCRAAG.

Grand Central has engaged positively with Network Rail with regards to its proposals for coupling and de-coupling services at Doncaster. A joint site visit at Doncaster has been held and further detailed discussions undertaken.

Grand Central's Class 180 fleet is currently undergoing a significant refurbishment programme. As part of this each unit is receiving a coupler overhaul to improve reliability and to facilitate the proposed coupling and de-coupling moves at Doncaster. It is anticipated that the overhaul work will complete on the entire fleet in early 2019.

Grand Central is in the process of producing its method of operation and contingency arrangements (including the provision of additional customer service staff at Doncaster). We will continue to work with Network Rail with a view to operating a test service in order to ensure all parties are comfortable with the proposal.

5. Kings Cross Platforming

Grand Central currently operates 5 car units which can be accommodated in all platforms at London Kings Cross. Network Rail has raised concerns about Grand Central operating 10 car units and the constraint this introduces.

We have continued to engage with Network Rail on this issue and expect this to be resolved. In the first instance, Grand Central is proposing to operate a 10 car unit arriving into London at around 21:00 and departing again prior to 22:00. We do not believe operating a 10 car unit at this time in the evening will have any problem being accommodated in an appropriate platform. In any case, we are not aware of a restriction being imposed on any other operators currently operating in multiple into London Kings Cross.

6. Level Crossing down time

The statement provided by Network Rail and included in the Form P submission by Grand Central, identified some concerns over level crossing down time in the Peterborough area. Network Rail has provided no analysis to support this statement and we understand there is no specific policy in relation to this concern.

Recent discussions with Network Rail have shed no further light on this concern and as such we do not believe any additional risk exists and expect this issue to be resolved. Grand Central is proposing a very small increment to the number of services operated on the ECML and is not aware of this concern being raised with regards to any more significant access applications in the past.

7. Summary

We will continue to engage with Network Rail specifically in relation to the coupling and decoupling of services at Doncaster and are confident that a timely resolution will be achieved. The proposed paths were developed with Network Rail as part of the Thameslink ESG process and the timetable process has validated all train paths, except the clash with the diverted sleeper service on Mondays.

Whilst we appreciate Network Rail's position in relation to rights beyond May 2020, additional access rights have been granted based on the ECML capacity studies previously undertaken and the assumption that the necessary infrastructure enhancements will go ahead. Grand Central is seeking a very small proportion of the additional capacity identified and sees no reason why rights cannot be granted under the same assumptions.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Brandon.
Business Programmes Manager

