

East Midlands Rail Franchise consultation – Ten Key Issues for Sheffield City Region

The East Midlands (EM) franchise plays a significant role within the Sheffield City Region, incorporating the Midland Mainline (MML) inter-city services to London, together with a number of key inter-regional and local routes serving the City Region. As a result, Sheffield Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Sheffield City Council, Sheffield City Region Combined Authority and Local Enterprise Partnership and South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive have joined forces to agree a common statement of our ten key issues for the new franchise. We believe it is important to speak with one voice for the City Region and we therefore all include these top ten issues as part of our individual consultation submissions.

1) Midland Mainline Services

- We welcome the proposal to speed up peak hour services between Sheffield and London by removing stops south of Leicester as Sheffield currently has no fast train into London in the morning peaks until the 09.33 arrival at London St Pancras.
- We want to see both peak and off-peak journey times between Sheffield and London brought down to below 2 hours. The economic benefits of a sub 2-hour journey for Sheffield would be a significant boost for the City Region.
- We want to see the conversion of the existing semi-fast Sheffield - London service to fast with a similar journey time and stopping pattern as the existing fast train at evenly spaced 30-minute intervals throughout the day and week.
- We do not support fast Sheffield trains stopping at Luton Airport Parkway.
- We would like to see consideration given to extending some London – Sheffield services north to places such as Barnsley, Rotherham and possibly Leeds so long as this does not have a negative impact on journey time and reliability between Sheffield and London.

2) Bi-mode trains

- We believe that a lack of operating experience in the UK with bi-mode trains should lead to caution in replacing the entire inter-city fleet immediately, particularly as the northern part of the Midland Mainline will not now be electrified in the short term. We think a phased approach may be advisable, retaining the high-performing and relatively modern Meridian trains for Sheffield services in the short term.
- In any case, we would expect the new bi-mode trains to have performance characteristics equal to or better than the current Meridians and HSTs to ensure that they can meet our aspirations for improved journey times and quality, as well as delivering environmental benefits. It is also important that the new bi-mode trains provide adequate standard class capacity in relation to first class, and have adequate luggage space and toilet facilities.

3) Liverpool - Norwich Service

- This service provides important connections between Sheffield and other key regional cities including Liverpool, Manchester and Nottingham, as well as East Anglia. As this is one of the few long-distance east-west services in the UK, the opportunity should be taken to promote it to inter-city status with better quality and higher performing rolling stock with first class space and improved catering and business facilities.
- We do not have a strong view about splitting the service at Nottingham, or whether it is partly transferred to another franchise. However, if a decision is made to split the service we would want to see the existing connections and destinations from Sheffield continue to be served by direct services, with improved journey times.
- Therefore, if the service was split at Nottingham, we would want to see it replaced by two over-lapping services – one from Liverpool to Nottingham and one from Sheffield to Norwich, possibly dividing at Ely to also serve Cambridge/Stansted Airport.

4) Hope Valley Line

- We are concerned at the delay in delivering the Hope Valley Northern Hub upgrade scheme. We hope this scheme can be approved and implemented as soon as possible to provide a 3rd fast train path from Sheffield to Manchester, which is vital to improve the frequency of trains between these two major Northern cities.
- We consider that the 3rd fast Hope Valley train path should link Sheffield and Manchester. We recognise the need to better connect the North West and East Midlands but we think that demand would be better served through using the under-utilised North Staffordshire Line via Stoke rather than the Dore South Curve missing out Sheffield.

5) Sheffield Station

- Sheffield station is the flagship station in SCR and the northern terminus of the MML London services. It is in need of significant investment to improve the customer experience and ensure it is fit for purpose as a major city centre station.
- We believe that there should be an obligation on the franchisee to actively consult relevant bodies (local authorities, Chambers of Commerce, LEPs) on issues concerning access, pollution, travel plans, investment, community hub.
- Longer term plans are currently being developed for Sheffield station and its surrounding area to ensure that it can accommodate future HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail services. We would expect the new franchisee to fully engage in this master-planning process.

6) Local services

- We consider that the Lincoln to Doncaster service should be increased to a regular hourly service as the current 5 trains per day service is inadequate. This improved service could serve a potential new station at Finningley, providing rail access to Doncaster Sheffield Airport, and should be extended to Leeds (via the Knottingley Line) to provide a new direct Lincoln to Leeds service.
- We would like to see two trains per hour to Worksop on the Robin Hood Line by extending the hourly train that currently terminates at Mansfield Woodhouse. This would improve connections between North Nottinghamshire / Derbyshire and Sheffield.
- Both Dronfield and Dore and Topley stations serve important commuter belts for Sheffield, and indeed Manchester, and have seen significant growth in patronage over recent years. We would like to see additional services stopping at these stations.

7) Customer Service Delivery

- We consider that the franchise should contain an active requirement on enforcement of by-laws relating to anti-social behaviour to improve the passenger experience, both on the train and at stations.
- Adequate customer facing staffing is important, both in terms of passenger safety and security, and in terms of improved information and revenue protection.
- It is vital that timely and accurate train information is provided to passengers of all TOCs at Sheffield and Chesterfield stations.

8) Weekend and Public Holiday Services

- We firmly believe that we need a 7-day railway with a weekend service on a par with weekday and Saturday services to meet growing travel demand and passenger expectations at weekends.
- Amongst the key improvements we would like to see are faster journey times between London and Sheffield on Sundays, earlier start of services on Sunday mornings and later finish times for London to Sheffield services on Saturday evenings, and earlier start of services from Liverpool to Norwich.
- We believe there should be some EM services on Boxing Day. As Sheffield and Chesterfield stations are operated by EM franchisees, it means that Northern and TPE cannot operate services into Sheffield on Boxing Day if EM are not also doing so.

9) Servicing/Staffing of EM services

- Running empty trains over long distances because almost all servicing/staffing is based in Nottingham and Derby is inefficient. For example, an empty 8 coach train travels from Nottingham to Liverpool early every morning and it means that the first train to Norwich does not leave Manchester until 07.42 and from Sheffield at 08.37. A number of trains also run empty between Sheffield and Derby to avoid basing trains in Sheffield.
- It is important to base trains and crew across the network, creating employment and giving the ability of earlier start and later finish for services. This could include a depot in Sheffield City Region. We hope that a contractual commitment to develop a more efficient fleet stabling strategy can be included in the franchise agreement.

10) Fares and Ticketing

- Steps should be taken by the new operator, in conjunction with other operators such as Cross Country, to remove fare anomalies which make split ticketing a cheaper option e.g. Sheffield to Leicester or Birmingham is cheaper splitting at Derby, while Chesterfield to York is considerably cheaper splitting tickets at Sheffield. This distorts rail industry data.
- Better value advance purchase fares between Sheffield and London should be offered on MML services as many passengers from Sheffield currently travel to London via Doncaster. Advance purchase fares should be available as close as possible to the time of departure.
- We would expect the new franchisee to use the latest technology for ticket retailing and embrace smart ticketing, including co-operating with Transport for the North's Smart Ticketing project to ensure consistency across the TfN boundary into the East Midlands.