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**Meeting:** Rail North Committee Consultation Call

**Subject:** East Coast Main Line December 2024 Timetable

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**1. Purpose of the Report:**

1.1 This report describes the proposed timetable to be introduced on the East Coast Main Line and connecting routes in December 2024 and discusses the implications for Transport for the North.

**2. Recommendations:**

2.1 The Rail North Committee is recommended to:

1. Advise the Rail North Partnership Board that the ESG timetable does not meet Transport for the North's minimum requirements
2. Consider further advice on the next steps required to enable the required level of regional connectivity.

**3. Main Issues:**

3.1 The East Coast Main Line (ECML) is the main rail route between London and Edinburgh, serving Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, the Tees Valley and North East England.

3.2 The ECML carries a range of long distance inter city services provided by the contracted operator, LNER, and by three open access operators, Grand Central, Hull Trains and Lumo. In addition, the route is used by other services, particularly TransPennine Express between York and Newcastle and Cross Country between Sheffield, Newcastle and Scotland. Further south, the East Midlands Railway Liverpool to Norwich services run on the ECML between Grantham and Peterborough. As well as being a key north/south route, the ECML is therefore also an important east/west and north east to south west link. The ECML is also an important freight artery.

3.3 The ECML has benefitted from £4bn investment over the past decade in infrastructure to reduce conflicts on the route and to increase its resilience, and in new fleets of trains introduced by several operators. The ECML has shown the strongest post-Covid demand recovery of any long-distance route nationally and crowding is occurring, particularly at weekends driven by leisure demand with business demand also recovering albeit at a slower rate. This reflects the continued strong growth seen in the North, particularly in leisure markets.

3.4 To better meet these demands and to accommodate growth, a new timetable is planned to be introduced in December 2024. This being led by an industry "Event Steering Group" (ESG), led by Network Rail, and involving relevant rail industry partners. The industry work follows on from a previous attempt by the industry to introduce a new timetable in May 2022. That process involved a public consultation led by individual operators, to which Transport for the North submitted a response in August 2021 raising significant concerns and suggesting that the then proposed timetable should not be introduced. The Transport for the North 2021 response is attached as Appendix 1.

3.5 Having considered feedback and also the circumstances facing the industry at the time, the Secretary of State decided not to introduce the proposed timetable and instructed the industry to develop new proposals based on a train service specification agreed in July 2023. One of the reasons for the deferment of the timetable at the time was lack of clarity about how demand would recover post-covid and it is now much clearer that demand has recovered strongly in the North, hence the need for a further proposition.

3.6 Through the recent work, the rail industry has jointly sought to achieve key objectives:

- to create a timetable based on sound principles
- to balance the competing needs and expectations of Funders, passengers, freight-end users, and Train Companies
- to maintain service levels and capacity for as many passenger and freight end-users as possible
- to improve performance and reliability.

The revised timetable attempts to balance what can be achieved to meet demand within the funding envelope that is set by Government. Importantly, the proposed timetable should be seen as a starting point to continue to build a case for future investment to further improve resilience, reliability, connectivity, and journey times along the ECML and across the north of England.

3.7 This paper sets out how the timetable has developed from that consulted on in 2021 and the extent to which Transport for the North's views have been addressed. In summary, the proposed timetable provides a number of benefits including:

- More London to the North services than currently, with three LNER services per hour to Newcastle compared with the current two addressing the capacity challenge
- Additional open access services, and some improved journey times
- The new timetable structure facilitates two important uplifts to Northern services (by creating the space/paths needed) for:
  - An additional Leeds-Sheffield hourly fast service
  - A regular hourly fast service on the Durham Coast between Middlesbrough and Newcastle.

3.8 The main weaknesses of the revised proposal from Transport for the North's point of view are:

- The current 1.5 trains per hour (i.e. one train in one hour then two trains in the next hour) between Manchester and Newcastle is reduced to hourly, this service having been already reduced from two per hour in 2019. Its path is effectively used to accommodate the additional London service with connections at York to other services pending the provision of additional infrastructure
- Cross Country services would be hourly between Sheffield/Leeds/York/Newcastle and Scotland, as now, with the Sheffield/Doncaster/York/Newcastle service operating every other hour.

3.9 From the industry's perspective, the increase in capacity on long distance services that have shown strong growth enables revenue to be generated that could be used to support the re-instatement of 2 trains per hour between Newcastle and Manchester. They have also pointed out that over the next few years the implementation of the Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) will lead to significant disruption of the core route between York and Manchester between 2024 and 2027, meaning that train services will be disrupted. This is part of the rationale

for reducing the Manchester to Newcastle service. LNER services on the ECML will be far less disrupted in this period meaning that connections could be provided at York. An additional LNER service is also likely to generate more revenue than a Transpennine Service. It has been suggested that the Transpennine Manchester to Newcastle service could be reinstated from 2027 when the main TRU works are complete subject to the industry planning and delivering infrastructure improvements.

3.10 As with major timetable changes, there are many more detailed points that need to be considered. An initial summary of these impacts is set out in the table below:

Outcome	Impact on the North of England
Services to London	<p>Addresses demand and will alleviate crowding that is already occurring. Better connects the North to London and supports further service extensions. There is however some flighting, for example in both directions two of the London to Newcastle services per hour leave 3 minutes apart.</p> <p>The daily LNER service to Sunderland is withdrawn however is replaced with an additional Grand Central service.</p> <p>Services to and from West Yorkshire remain largely as now, with two hourly LNER services to Bradford subject to completion of planned infrastructure works. The timing of services to/from Harrogate change.</p>
Stopping patterns	<p>Two London trains per hour stop at Darlington, as now, with hourly stops at Durham. Durham's service to Scotland is provided by Cross Country. It would have three services per hour to both Newcastle and Darlington, with four in the hour when the Cross Country service via Doncaster operates.</p>
Cross Country service pattern	<p>Prior to the pandemic, Cross Country operated two services per hour between Sheffield and Newcastle on the ECML, one via Leeds and the other via Doncaster. The Doncaster service was curtailed to five trains per day although will increase to a two hourly frequency in December 2023. The ESG timetable retains this frequency, leading to an overall reduction of connectivity for Sheffield and Doncaster, particularly as this is the faster route to York and the North East. There is however a proposed open access operator seeking to operate in this corridor that may increase connectivity.</p>
Transpennine connectivity	<p>The ESG timetable further reduces direct Newcastle to Manchester connectivity to one train per hour. Pre-pandemic this link was two services per hour, since reduced to 1.5. It will be reduced in December 2023 to hourly under the Transpennine Trains recovery plan. Passengers could still make the journey by connecting at York using one of the London or Cross Country services, although this involves a six minute connection. It is not possible to extend a second Transpennine service to Newcastle in the hour not used by the Cross Country</p>

	<p>service (see above). Reintroduction of a second hourly Transpennine service to Newcastle would need infrastructure enhancement that has been designed but is not currently funded. Given the significant disruption due to TRU, the industry suggests that a second service could not be introduced until 2027. York to Manchester would have three trains per hour, starting at Saltburn, Newcastle and Scarborough. Between Leeds and Manchester, these are complemented by a service from Hull.</p> <p>A number of Transpennine trains will have longer dwell times at York (Northbound).</p>
Weekend services	<p>To date no details have been provided of any Saturday or Sunday timetables. What services are proposed is important given that weekends are peak leisure travel days which is driving demand growth on the ECML and other routes.</p>
Overall timetable structure	<p>The timetable does not always have a regular clockface pattern, for example departure times vary which will be confusing for users.</p> <p>The timetable is not asymmetric (the same in both directions) as evidenced by the Transpennine dwell times at York above.</p>

- 3.11 The current infrastructure assumptions on which the ESG timetable is based include a number of Integrated Rail Plan proposals that are either in development or are being delivered. For the North of England, the most significant of these is the Northallerton to Newcastle section, which includes upgrading the parallel route via Stillington to provide an alternative route for freight traffic. Other previously developed proposals such as addressing the constraints at the north of York station and in the Bensham area in Gateshead are not assumed to be in place, and this has impacts on the ESG timetable meaning that choices have to be made. Network Rail has previously developed business cases for both.
- 3.12 The 2021 Transport for the North response said that “for Transport for the North and the Department for Transport to work in collaboration to work towards producing a roadmap of investment that will increase capacity on the ECML working to an NPR and HS2 end state.” This is because the infrastructure needs to develop as demand on the route grows, so that the infrastructure is planned to accommodate the train service required rather than constraining it. The work done by Transport for the North to develop a Blueprint for the ECML earlier in the process attempts to move this roadmap forwards. Until recently, it has been assumed that Yorkshire, North East England and Scotland would be served by HS2 services. These flows are now likely to remain on the ECML throughout, placing further pressures on the route and meaning that opportunities to use capacity released by HS2 in other ways are lost.
- 3.13 Transport for the North, through the Rail North Partnership, manages the Northern Trains and TransPennine Trains contracts with the Department for Transport. Transport for the North therefore has the right to be consulted on the implications of the ESG timetable on these operators. Because the ESG work is building on the public consultation held in 2021, further public consultation has not been held. A process of engagement with key stakeholders that expressed views in 2021 has however been held, principally with Transport for the North and its members.

3.14 If the ESG timetable is to be introduced, a decision needs to be made by the industry in January 2024. Whilst a substantial amount of work has been done by the rail industry to develop the ESG timetable and to address concerns raised by Transport for the North in 2021, some fundamental issues remain, namely that connectivity to non-London destinations is being reduced to accommodate London services. For Transport for the North to influence the industry decision, a decision will need to be made by the Rail North Partnership Board in December 2023. If the industry decides not to proceed with the ESG timetable, the timetable in place in June 2024 would “roll over”, i.e., remain in place and the benefits of the ESG timetable would not be realised.

#### **4. Corporate Considerations:**

##### ***Financial Implications***

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

##### ***Resource Implications***

4.2 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

##### ***Legal Implications***

4.3 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

##### ***Risk Management and Key Issues***

4.4 Corporate risk 311 refers to reduction in rail connectivity due to future timetable changes. The ESG Timetable may lead to some reductions in direct connectivity whilst creating additional connectivity at other locations.

##### ***Environmental Implications***

4.5 This report does not constitute or influence a plan or programme which sets the framework for future development consents of projects listed in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive and therefore does stimulate the need for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or EIA.

4.6 Passenger rail and rail freight plays an essential part in achieving our decarbonisation objectives within Transport for the North’s Decarbonisation Strategy, particularly around reducing road vehicle mileage.

##### ***Equality and Diversity***

4.7 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

##### ***Consultations***

4.8 Network Rail and rail operators have briefed Transport for the North member authority officers on the ESG Timetable. This report reflects that briefing and the views of member authorities.

#### **5. Background Papers:**

5.1 There are no background papers.

#### **6. Appendices:**

6.1 Appendix 1 – 2021 Transport for the North East Coast Main Line response.

#### **Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used**

a) ECML	East Coast Main Line
b) ESG	Event Steering Group
c) TRU	Transpennine Route Upgrade