

East Anglia Rail Franchise Consultation

- ❖ corporate response from Burnham Town Council (BTC)
- ❖ prepared with the assistance of commuters and other regular rail users recruited and debriefed as part of the ongoing work of the BTC Neighbourhood Plan Physical Infrastructure Group.
- ❖ submitted to BTC March 2015 by its Transport Representative, Paul Haworth.

Q1) Please select three of the Passenger Focus recommendations which you believe require particular attention in order to improve your end to end journey?

If relevant, please identify the rail line to which your answer relates.

Crouch Valley Line

- Providing a punctual and reliable service;
- Effective management of disruption, especially through information to passengers;
- Delivering value for money.

Q2) Are there any examples of outstanding customer service experiences, related or unrelated to passenger rail services, which you believe the new East Anglia rail franchise should aspire to?

London 2012 Olympics.

Q3) Are there any changes to the current passenger rail service (i.e. number or trains per hour/day) ... which you feel should be considered? If so, please explain your rationale. For example, please identify specific local factors which might influence the future level of passenger demand which you consider should be reflected in the specification.

There is widespread dis-satisfaction with the current frequency and capacity of trains running along the Crouch Valley Line. During peak periods we experience no increase in frequency, and although there is some additional peak capacity it cannot be made fully available to those boarding or alighting at Burnham-on-Crouch due to limited platform length.

The branch line will require an upgraded service if additional housing development takes place as per emerging Maldon District Local Development Plan.

In the meantime, we would certainly benefit from additional train services running later into the evening: currently our last weekday departure time from London Liverpool Street is 2213 (As compared with Braintree 2318, Clacton 2318, Manningtree 2330, Wickford & Southend 0050). This is not just to facilitate leisure travel - many of our London commuters may be called upon to work late into the evening.

It is at Wickford on the return home to Burnham that the shortcomings of a 40 minute frequency along the branch are most keenly felt, along with Sunday mornings which can be particularly difficult for those unable to sprint across the footbridge to make a connection that is set at less than the national minimum of five minutes. (The only level route from one side of the station to the other is to take a very long walk via the roadway beneath the railway lines.). Because Crouch Valley residents fear becoming

marooned at Wickford in the evening with no station staff, a closed waiting room and no lavatories, they are persuaded to use a car for the journey between home and the station car park at Wickford – when we really should be encouraging them to travel the whole way by rail.

Given the enormous cost of providing additional passing loops to facilitate an increase in frequency, there is a pressing need to explore other possible ways to address current levels of dis-satisfaction. One idea might be to extend the branch line service beyond Wickford to the major junction at Shenfield. This has been done in the past (using platform 1 in/out with a brief layover) and still occurs from time to time in response to engineering possessions. Such an arrangement would eliminate Wickford footbridge manoeuvres, provide access to 24/24 waiting rooms and lavatories at Shenfield, and offer direct connections with Crossrail.

Q4) What improvements do you believe should be made to the rail service in order to make this your first choice of travel [to Stansted Airport]?

Increased reliability and lower cost (especially for solo travellers, who cannot benefit from group savings) - but we must also take account of the needs of those travelling through Southend Airport, which also has a dedicated railway station.

Q5) [not relevant to Burnham – relates to Norwich – Peterborough corridor]

Q6) Do you have any proposals to improve Community Rail Partnerships so as to deliver more of the beneficial outcomes for passengers achieved so far? Please provide any evidence in support of your proposal.

No – we are highly appreciative of the voluntary work undertaken by station adopters and others who offer their time and talents to the Community Rail Partnership.

Q7) Do you wish to submit a proposal for a future third party promoted scheme that would involve a change to the current rail service in the franchise? If so, please include any supporting business case or value for money analysis together with your proposal.

Not at this stage. At a later date we may wish to bring forward (in conjunction with other stakeholders) a set of proposals for a link between railway services to Burnham-on-Crouch and the ferry between Burnham and Wallasea Island, where the RSPB is preparing a major visitor attraction and from which there could be public transport provided to and from Southend, including Southend Airport.

Q8) How can the franchise operator help you better during a) planned disruption, such as engineering works and forecasted bad weather, and b) unplanned on-the-day disruption? Please provide separate answers for both cases.

a)

- warn of planned disruptions at the point when the ticket is purchased;
- recognise that planned disruptions invariably preclude anything like a 'normal service' and it is highly misleading to claim otherwise in public announcements;
- offer reduced charges when a rail journey is largely or completely made by a substitute form of transport;
- ensure that engineering possessions are monitored hourly so that anticipatory action can be taken to ensure the strategic pre-positioning of such substitute forms of transport as might be needed in the event of over-runs;

- deploy Revenue Protection Officers (via replacement bus services) to advise customers and check/issue tickets at stations along the Crouch Valley Line.

b)

- ensure that adequate numbers of staff are in place to advise customers of alternative travel provisions at the earliest opportunity (e.g. branch line disruptions need to be flagged up more clearly at Liverpool Street and at Stratford);
- deploy a crisis management team to assume control of major disruption to any part of the network, with authority to empower local staff to use their initiative (e.g. by putting branch line evening passengers straight into taxis when the rail service is disrupted);
- make better use of personalised 'push' messaging and offer open data feeds to third party 'apps' that can anticipate and advise on potential difficulties;
- ensure contracts in place to facilitate the speedy supply of bus & coach substitutions and that their estimated time of arrival is clearly announced at each affected station;
- the frequency and capacity of bus/coach substitutions should be set at levels that are adequately matched to the volume of displaced train passengers;
- offer free parking for those who respond to rail disruption by driving to the nearest unaffected station;
- much clearer (visible and audible) information from staff, delivered in person rather than a pre-recorded "We thank passengers on platform N for their patience in awaiting the cancelled 1800 hours to ___";
- ensure that the particular needs of branch line passengers are recognised when services are cancelled or curtailed (e.g. Crouch Valley Line versus Southend Line: the branch service should not be neglected in favour of the main service, since passengers heading for a rural area are likely to find themselves much more adversely affected by delayed arrival times than those whose destination lies within an urban area).

Q9) When travelling on a service where capacity is stretched, what opportunities do you see which would improve your on board experience?

More information should be made available in real-time regarding the loading not just of the train as a whole but also of individual sections (see also our answers to Q8b and Q10). There is scope for greater use of folding seats.

Q10) What are your views on removing first class seating in order to provide more overall seating and reduce standing?

We would support the removal of first class seating either permanently or on an ad hoc basis, although we recognise that the overall reduction in standing would be minimal.

Q11) Are there any specific stations or services that you feel could improve on reliability or punctuality? Where possible, please explain your reasoning when responding to this question.

- All services to and from London are affected by significant weaknesses in reliability/punctuality between Romford and Liverpool Street.

- Although Crossrail will offer relief beyond Bow Junction, we fear it may restrict flexibility if operated as a separate railway between Brentwood and the tunnel portals at Bow.
- Late-running freight services are a continuing cause for concern especially in view of their complex fouling movements around Stratford.
- Bidders should be asked to say what strategies they would propose to adopt in response to regular delays arising from railway suicides.
- There is a need on the Crouch Valley Line for further work on land drainage (to combat track circuit failures), removing lineside vegetation (to combat leaf-fall and obstructions on the line), and improved fencing (to restrict access by stray livestock).

Q12) What sort of improvements would you like to see prioritised at the station(s) you use? Please provide details and reasoning for these as well as the name of the station(s).

Burnham-on-Crouch

We recognise and applaud the work of local volunteers who keep our station looking welcoming and free of litter.

There is a need for:

- Better signage – visitors need more help in finding their way around;
- More shelter – the canopied area is insufficient for the number of passengers on the platform for main commuter services;
- Secure cycle storage – to encourage less dependence upon motor vehicles;
- Free car parking – Burnham Town Council is willing to underwrite this but is finding it difficult to negotiate, given the block contract between the present rail operator and NCP;
- Waiting room – needs to be upgraded and available at all reasonable hours;
- Lavatory facilities (including baby changing) – should be provided, regularly serviced and sanitized, and made available at all operational times;
- More information to assist arriving passengers to plan the next stage of their journey, e.g. real-time display of bus and ferry services.

Q13) Do you have any proposals to improve security and safety at stations or on trains that you would like us to consider? Please provide any supporting evidence and details of any specific stations and/or rail services which you feel merit consideration for future improvement under these schemes.

In recent years we appear to have lost the security patrols and additional revenue protection checks that were once a regular feature especially in the evenings: this is regretted. There is a need for CCTV to be actively monitored in real time and not simply stored off-line. We would value greater input from British Transport Police (with occasional sniffer dogs) to tackle anti-social behaviour, loitering, and fare evasion. Litter can be a safety hazard and we find it unacceptable that some trains appear to start the day without being cleaned and tidied overnight.

Q14) Are there areas of improvement in customer information and engagement you would like to see before, during and after your journey?

- We would welcome a simple LED display at the approach to the station, showing Green (good service), Amber (some delays), or Red (severe

disruption) so that decisions could be made e.g. in advance of purchasing a parking ticket.

- More staff visible to assist customers and more accurate/audible/visible announcements to replace the currently inadequate public address systems on board trains and at stations (e.g. poor quality VDUs with 1/2 rollover screens that don't allow sufficient time to read the second screen).
- Appropriate visual cues should be offered to draw attention to audio announcements at stations and on-board trains.
- Development of "push" technology to stream on-board announcements directly to customers' personal communications devices
- It should be much easier to obtain refunds and adequate levels of compensation for disrupted journeys.

Q15) On a scale of 1 to 9, how would you rate the following on board passenger facilities (1 = not important; 9 = very important):

Luggage holds 6 – our trains serve Southend Airport and there is a need for appropriate luggage storage as on the Stansted Express

Cycle storage 3 – can be troublesome if cycles are blocking doors/seats

Audio Passenger Information 8 – essential: currently too many faults and shortcomings

Visual Passenger Information 8 – essential: currently too many faults and shortcomings

Provision of different classes of service 1 – the first class area offers more chance of a seat but little other benefit: however, we do see a role for specialised sections such as business car, standee car, quiet car, etc., (see below)

Catering 2 - perhaps achievable through onboard vending machines

Tables 4 – important for some, but unfortunately lead to loss of seating

Staff presence 6 – more important during disruptions and in the evenings

Baby changing facilities 4 – more important for some than for others

Plug sockets 6 – currently desirable by many, though battery technology may change significantly during the period of the next franchise

Other – anything that transforms otherwise 'dead' time into productive or personally rewarding time is to be welcomed, especially free and robust high-capacity wi-fi. Although decisions concerning future rolling stock appear to be a 'done deal', we offer the following observations:

- Experience of the 'demonstrator train' leads us to believe that refreshment of the existing stock will prove to be inadequate: a full replacement is undoubtedly required along the lines of what we see in operation with the C2C franchise.
- New trains should be one class only, climate controlled (air conditioned plus effective heating), and wi-fi enabled throughout.

- There is a need for greater simplicity and flexibility in coupling and uncoupling of car sets to facilitate more even loadings at the point of recovery from cancellation or curtailment of services.
- Creative approaches are needed to ensure access to all cars in a 12-car rake even when operating through a set of stations with varying platform capacity (as on the Crouch Valley Line).
- We see scope for different zones of the train, furnished in different ways, for example: standee zone (some people actually prefer to stand, especially if this facilitates a speedy exit), business zone (tables, power sockets, robust wi-fi), tranquil zone (no sounds or hot food), airzone (baggage stowage), cinema zone, gaming zone and so on.

Q16) What areas of customer service within your end-to-end journey would you expect to see monitored and reported on in the new franchise, in order to improve the service quality for passengers?

We would expect to see our Crouch Valley Line statistics published as a separate set, with individual performance figures for each train of the day, so that we can (a) compare the reliability of specific journeys throughout the week/month/quarter and (b) make more detailed comparisons between our branch and the Southend line. Additional statistics to be collected could usefully include range of ambient temperatures on-board trains and at waiting rooms whilst in use. We would also welcome closer monitoring of franchise-specific requirements, given that some of those set for the current operator have yet to be delivered.

Q17) Based on your experience or knowledge of rail passenger services, do you have any observations that may assist us in our commitment to have due regard to the Environment, Equality, Social Value and the Family in the development of the specification of passenger services for East Anglia?

- A quantum change in the provision of lavatory facilities at stations and (especially) on board trains, where they should be regularly monitored and cleaned/sanitized, and not be locked out of use without good cause.
- All station lavatories to be free of charge to ticket holders.
- Adequate and hygienic baby changing facilities on trains and at stations.
- Step-free access at all interchanges (notable failure in this respect is Wickford).

Q18) In summary, what three aspects of your current East Anglia rail journey would you like to see improved to enhance your overall travel experience?

1) We want to see a step change from running trains to conveying customers. For example: in the event of cancellations, the current emphasis is simply on recovering the overall booked service as quickly as possible, apparently without thought for the individual needs of the disrupted customers. We propose that whenever a journey is lost, an impact assessment should be made to ensure that the most affected customers are not unduly penalised (as regularly happens whenever a Liverpool Street to Southminster service is cancelled and branch line customers are delayed for a further 40 minutes despite regular despatch of trains to Southend being continued at 10 minute intervals).

2) We need to feel that wherever we go on the railway, our movements are always on the radar. We want to be assured that our rail operator will be constantly pro-active in anticipating our needs, keeping us well informed, and offering solutions to help us deal

with possible problems ahead. The use of smart cards or RFID tags would facilitate greater customisation of our relationship with the rail operator, enabling automatic refunds, customised offers, flexible ticketing, opportunity for pay-as-you-go trade-ups such as business lounges and other facilities, free or discounted access to taxis/hotels during periods of major disruption, discounts on advance purchase of blocks of 'rail units' that can be dynamically assigned across groups such as families or affinities, plus other 'big data' dividends. In the meantime we see scope to explore greater transferability/add-ons linked to season tickets, plus new ticketing products such as carnets.

3) We need a service that matches our lifestyle and delivers the product excellence we are accustomed to receiving from other suppliers of services on which we spend a significant proportion of our income. We therefore look for:

- more trains at the times we need them, especially during peak hours and later into the evening (when we work as well as play), with greater capacity (more usable seating and accessible baggage stowage) and modern capability (air conditioning and effective heating, wi-fi);
- appropriate facilities to enable us to use our time profitably (for work or leisure) both while we are waiting at the station and when we are on board the train;
- an end to branch line connections at Wickford, where there is no certainty of step-free interchange and during the evenings the spartan waiting room and toilets are closed and no staff are in evidence to assist customers.

Q19) Please indicate if there are any additional areas that you think it is important for us to consider and that have not already been addressed in this consultation.

We think it is important for you to consider the potential ability of other service providers, including SMEs and social enterprises, to engage with the new operator to provide services which would enrich the passenger experience, such as parcel collection facilities at stations, on-board training courses, health/job consultation/training/education services on-board, etc.,

[END]