

## East Anglia Rail Franchise Consultation

### *Personal response from the Revd 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?

We need a service that delivers the product excellence we are accustomed to receiving from other sectors such as retailing. This calls for much greater investment (not exclusively financial) in product development, staff training, and customer relations. I believe this is unlikely to be delivered by an operator whose target is simply to meet a set of 'hygiene factors' in order to deliver a fixed rate of return to a foreign State backer.

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.

a) The current operational pattern for working the Crouch Valley Line (Southminster to Wickford and London Liverpool Street) is unsatisfactory. During off-peak periods our trains are more frequent than during the peaks! Our 12 car services have 4 cars permanently locked out of use – not very helpful.

b) We need later trains: our last weekday departure time from London Liverpool Street is 2213, much too early for those who work extended hours and also useless for visits to West End evening entertainments.

c) At Wickford on return journeys from London the connection facilities are abysmal. Because the 'down' branch line departure cannot be delayed (it has to pass the 'up' service at the mid-point loop) we find ourselves liable to spend 30 to 40 minutes on a station that has no staff, no waiting room, and no toilets accessible after 2000 hours. This is nothing short of disgraceful, and clearly does not encourage use of the railway.

d) The Sunday timetable offers a 3 minute connection at Wickford, i.e. less than the nationally prescribed minimum. The station layout frequently calls for a long walk along the platform followed by a footbridge with no lifts. It is a nightmare for those with heavy luggage or children in push chairs. The only step-free access is to take a long detour outside the station – very difficult with a wheelchair.

e) To address the issues at Wickford, it would be good to see the branch line service extended up to Shenfield, where there are lifts to the subway, waiting rooms and toilets available throughout the evening.

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]?

I think it is always going to be simpler for me to take the coach from Chelmsford to Stansted.

Q5) Not relevant to me.

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.

Operator should be more willing to accept fair criticism when voiced by CRPs.

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.

No.

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)

- stop telling me there is a 'normal service' at times when there is planned disruption: it is disingenuous to pretend that a disrupted service is 'normal' on the grounds that the disruption was planned rather than unplanned;
- reduce fares whenever delays of over 15 minutes are incurred on account of bus substitutions;
- monitor engineering works much more closely to ensure that replacement buses are strategically deployed in advance of problems, rather than hoping for the best;
- get staff out and about at all affected stations to assist customers.

b)

- improve disruption management by training and deploying special teams to anticipate customers' needs and advise them of alternative travel scenarios at an early stage;
- publicise draft emergency timetables agreed in advance with bus operators on standby contracts;
- give free car parking to all passengers who respond to rail disruption by driving to the nearest unaffected station;
- get staff to talk to passengers over the public address system – on the Crouch Valley Line this is always a synthetic voice with standard messages, never a real person talking to you from Control – if TfL can do it, why not the East Anglian rail operator?

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

Conductors, Guards, Stewards and Revenue Protection Officers should have power (as in days gone by) to admit standing Standard Class passengers to First Class accommodation (especially those who are clearly less able to stand).

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

Yes.

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.

- There still seem to be a lot of delays around Stratford and Forest Gate Junction caused by late-running freight services.
- Will Crossrail service place any limit on the current operational flexibility between Shenfield and London? No-one seems able to provide an answer.
- On the Crouch Valley Line there is a need to chase Network Rail for better drainage (still too many track circuit failures) and more regular pruning along the lineside (still too many obstructions and leaves on the line).

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).

Wickford – see comments at 3 c above.

Burnham-on-Crouch - more shelter is needed since the station canopy is insufficient for the number of passengers on the platform during busy periods.

Almost all stations have waiting rooms that could well double up as detention centres – please may we have some decent customer lounges instead? Even the First Class lounge at Liverpool Street is like a rabbit hutch – facilities at other mainline termini such as Kings Cross or Paddington appear vastly superior (why?).

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.

No.

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

- Complete overhaul of audible/visible announcement systems on trains and at stations, to ensure clarity.
- Train drivers to make audio announcements and ensure these are audible.
- Explore possibilities for streaming on-board announcements (visual and audible) directly to customers' personal communications devices

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 7 – we need more baggage areas since our trains serve Southend Airport

Cycle storage 1

Audio Passenger Information 9

Visual Passenger Information 9

Provision of different classes of service 1

Catering 1 (on our local service, but 9 on Great Eastern Main Line)

Tables 4

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

Baby changing facilities 1

Plug sockets 1 - will probably become less important thanks to technological improvements in battery power during the period of the next franchise.

**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?**

Before anyone starts monitoring the new franchise, please could they chase up the franchise-specific targets that were set for the current operator - and learn from the ways in which these have sometimes failed to materialise. For example, there are lamentable failures in First Class service delivery along the Great Eastern Mainline, whilst on the Crouch Valley Line we struggle with hand-me-down Ticket Vending Machines that fall some way short of the specified criteria. How about introducing penalties for an operator who fails to deliver what was in the franchise agreements?

**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?**

No.

**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) I would like to be treated like a valued customer and not as a mere passenger. The new operator could well learn from the "Friendly Telephone Policy" introduced in 1959 by the GPO, which decreed that "subscribers" were henceforward to be known as "customers", and declared that "The aim and purpose of the telephone service is not only to serve, but to please the customer... We must study their wishes all the time; we must then satisfy them by a service which is courteous, pleasing and speedy."

2) I would like to feel that wherever I travel on the railway, the operator is aware of my presence and is anticipating my requirements. 'Big data' systems should be used to offer greater customisation of my relationship with the operator. As well as traditional sales platforms selling tickets on an individual basis, I would welcome the opportunity to purchase of blocks of rail credit that could be dynamically expended in the consumption of railway products (as per Oyster).

3) I would appreciate a service that is specified in terms of quality, reliability and service rather than as a bald "2 trains per hour" or whatever. We are not dealing here with cattle loaded into trucks, but rather with a whole range of personal interactions that should enable an outstanding travel experience to be delivered in such a way as to exceed the expectations of each and every customer. The unique selling point of a railway is its ability to shrink time by offering an office, a restaurant, a bar, a conference room, a classroom, a snooze room, and so on, each of which may be enjoyed whilst on the move. Truly a magic carpet experience – one that calls for enthusiasm and vision as well as administrative and technical competence.

**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.**

1) An end to AGA (and any successor operator) fulfilling railway ticket purchases via Luxembourg: sub-contracts relating to ticket issue should be treated as 'key contracts', that is to say they ought to form part of the 'primary franchise assets' that are inalienable and subject to Ministerial approval. It is deplorable that any UK franchised rail operating company be permitted to outsource the provision of ancillary services to a third party whose tax liabilities appear to have been partly or wholly transferred to jurisdictions beyond the UK.

2) An assurance that AGA (and any successor operator) has in place a firewall to ensure that their funded obligation to market the franchised services does not become entangled with other un-related commercial ventures. All customers registered to receive communications regarding franchised services should in future have the opportunity to opt out of mailings relating to non-railway offers.

3) An appraisal of national performance statistics to make it possible to benchmark reliability in terms of passenger journeys rather than rolling stock trips – at present it appears that delay to a lightly loaded four-car rake is deemed to be equivalent to a similarly late-running 12-car arrival with 1500 people on board.

[END]