



The County Economic
Development Partnership

Response to the Department for Transport Greater Anglia Franchise consultation

From

Shaping Norfolk's Future
(representing the Norwich in Ninety campaign)

1 Introduction

The Department for Transport is consulting on its proposals for a base specification for the new Greater Anglia rail franchise. This document sets out key priorities which Shaping Norfolk's Future (representing the Norwich in Ninety campaign) would like to see built into the new franchise specification.

We recognise that the service level improvements we wish to see delivered cannot be delivered by the franchisee alone, but will be achieved by a partnership involving the DfT, Network Rail, the selected train operating company and local and regional stakeholders.

We are determined to create this partnership and we believe that this re-franchising process offers a unique opportunity to put in place the building blocks towards creating a modern, reliable and high-speed rail network for the East of England.

The new franchise must deliver improved levels of service, for we do not believe it would be acceptable for one of the fastest growing parts of the country to be left with a sub-standard rail network for another decade.

An improved rail network would also play a significant part in the region's moves to a low carbon economy and help reduce car dependence.

2 Shaping Norfolk's Future

Shaping Norfolk's Future is the economic development partnership for Norfolk.

The partnership, which is chaired by Mark Hodges, chief executive of Aviva UK, is supported by all the local authorities in Norfolk, the East of England Development Agency, Norfolk Chamber of Commerce, leading businesses and other key public sector partners.

The partnership's role is to improve the economic performance of the county.

One of the partnership's strategic goals is to develop an infrastructure that supports sustainable economic growth whilst maintaining the quality of the county's environment and heritage.

Developing a modern rail network for Norfolk is a key priority under this strategic goal.

Following a positive meeting last year between Norfolk stakeholders and Transport Secretary Lord Adonis it was clear that we needed to build a consensus within the region and develop a focused case to bring about significant improvements to the East Anglia rail network.

3 Norwich in Ninety

The Norwich in Ninety campaign draws together a wide range of stakeholders from Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex who together have a common objective of seeing improvements to the region's rail services.

The partnership has developed a vision for the Great Eastern mainline which would see:

Faster journey times – ninety minutes from Norwich to London

More reliable services

Investment in infrastructure

New spacious Inter-City style trains with wi-fi and a good standard of catering

More capacity to overcome peak overcrowding, but without downgrading to commuter-style carriages

Norwich in Ninety partners include:

Shaping Norfolk's Future

Norfolk County Council

Norwich City Council

Norfolk Chamber of Commerce

The Federation of Small Businesses (Norfolk)

The Institute of Directors (Norfolk)

Visit Norwich

Norfolk Tourism

The campaign is being supported by a number of partners from across the region including Regional Cities East, the East of England Development Agency, Choose Suffolk and the Haven Gateway Partnership.

It enjoys the support of a huge number of businesses large and small, including the UK's biggest insurance company Aviva, international insurance broker Marsh, business advisers PriceWaterhouseCoopers and infrastructure firm May Gurney.

More than 2,500 residents have signed a petition backing the aims of the Norwich in Ninety campaign. Just over 2,000 have signed the online petition: <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/norwich-in-ninety>
Another 500 have signed a paper petition.

Norwich in Ninety has also received the backing of local newspapers the Eastern Evening News and the Eastern Daily Press as well as all the Norfolk MPs.

We have enjoyed a good working relationship with National Express East Anglia who helped developed the vision for the line. We would anticipate developing a similar relationship with the new operator.

4 Evidence for improvement

The East of England Development Agency's Transport Economic Evidence Study found the Norwich to London services as the region's public transport corridor with the highest Wider Economic Benefit uplift potential.

EEDA, Norwich in Ninety and Regional Cities East commissioned Atkins to examine in detail the wider economic case for reductions in journey time between Norwich and London.
Initial findings show the implementation of the vision for the line would deliver benefits of £3.4bn.
We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this ongoing work in more detail.

Network Rail is engaged with this process and they have agreed to detail the cost implications of a range of upgrade possibilities to enable improved journey times as we appreciate the cost benefits of any investment must be thoroughly tested.

5 Norwich to London Inter City service

This is the main priority route for the Norwich in Ninety campaign

(i) Ninety minute journey time

Faster journey times. We recognise that the East Anglia franchise is a complicated rail network and must serve a mix of passengers from commuters to InterCity travellers.

However we believe the current franchise specification does not place enough emphasis on competitive long-distance journey times.

This means destinations such as Norwich, Diss and Ipswich are at a competitive disadvantage compared with other locations at a similar distance from London.

For example the 115 mile journey time from London to Norwich takes around 1hr 50mins.

Birmingham (118 miles) can be reached in 1hr 23mins and York (180 miles) can be reached in 1hr 59 mins.

We understand that journey time reductions between London and Peterborough and London and York are likely to be included in the specification for the East Coast mainline franchise.

We also note that the most recent survey of long-distance passengers by Passenger Focus saw improved journey times between Norwich and London as a top priority.

We believe **a ninety minute journey time between Norwich and London** should be included in the Greater Anglia franchise specification.

(ii) More reliable service

Reliability of services between Norwich and London have been poor and a cause of real concern for passengers. The consultation document (p21) notes: "The data shows that relative to London and South East average, NXEA has performed at or near this mark over the past four years. By contrast the long-distance services from Norwich have been much less reliable than the national long distance average, a gap that does not appear to have closed in the past couple of years."

According to published data just 86.2pc of services arrived within 10 minutes of their scheduled time in 2009, compared with a national average of just over 90pc.

Not surprisingly passenger satisfaction rates on the long distance services have been significantly below those of other TOCs.

We note that the most recent survey of long distance passengers by Passenger Focus cited reliability as a key concern.

We would like the franchise specification to set **meeting the TOC national PPM average as a minimum, with penalties for both the TOC and Network Rail for failure to reach the target on an annual basis.**

There must also be separate targets for commuter routes and the long distance routes, otherwise better performance on commuter routes could mask poorer performance on long distance routes – as has happened under the current franchise.

(iii) New Inter-City style trains

The Norwich to London service has traditionally been supplied with "cascaded stock". This means that the locomotives and coaches serving the route were built between 1975 and 1988 and are clearly not fit for purpose on a modern railway.

The consultation document states (p25): "The locomotives used were built in the late 1980s for British Rail's InterCity and Freight sectors and also were extensively refurbished prior to their transfer to this route in the mid 2000s.

However even after this refurbishment their reliability remains mediocre, though this is not helped by the stop-start nature of many of the Norwich mainline calling patterns, which are not optimal for a mainline locomotive.” It also says: “New rolling stock could result in better performance and reliability, greater capacity and would be more accessible.”

We believe the franchise specification should require **the introduction of new Inter-city style trains within the first five years of the new franchise.**

These new trains must maintain the InterCity standard of seating – two abreast and with tables for working.

We would also expect to see plug sockets and wi-fi available as standard – providing an office on the move for passengers.

We would strongly resist the introduction of commuter-style carriages to the Norwich – London long distance route.

Before the new rolling stock is introduced we believe the franchise specification must require a **complete refurbishment and rebuild of the existing rolling stock** and the **provision of the wi-fi service** which is currently being built into the fleet **free of charge for all passengers**, not just First Class customers.

We were disappointed when National Express chose to withdraw its dining car, which was a very popular service, particularly amongst business travellers.

We would request that the **dining car is reinstated as a franchise obligation** albeit on a limited number of trains, as well as a **comprehensive buffet service on every train**. This would include a hot and cold buffet with kitchen and at-seat service in First Class on trains without a dining car.

To ensure the interests of InterCity passengers, we would like the franchise to specify that the franchisee must appoint **a senior member of its management team to have specific responsibility for longer distance operations.**

6 Norwich to Cambridge services

One of the success stories of recent years was the introduction of the direct service between Norwich and Cambridge – the two largest economic centres in the East of England.

This service has proved very popular and suffers from over-crowding. National Express East Anglia’s proposed Dec 2010 timetable will see lengthening of carriages on this service.

We see this as an important initial step. However given the significant growth planned in both the Cambridge and Norwich sub-regions at locations along the corridor eg Wymondham, Attleborough, Thetford, Chesterton, we believe there is a significant opportunity to grow passenger numbers and revenues on this route.

However to achieve this we believe the franchise specification must include a **commitment to increase the capacity along the route to three cars and frequency of services to two services per hour.**

7 Rural services

The Bittern Line – between Norwich, Cromer and Sheringham and the Wherry line between Norwich, Gt Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

These routes have benefited from strong local partnerships, with the train operator working with partners including Norfolk County Council and EEDA. We believe these partnerships should be strengthened and enhanced to maximise the potential of these lines.

A study conducted by Mott McDonald on behalf of Norfolk County Council showed there was a very strong business case for an increase in services on the Bittern line – particularly between North Walsham and Norwich.

We believe an **increased service frequency between North Walsham and Norwich** should be included in the franchise specification.

The development of the eco-town at Rackheath could enable two new rail halts to be constructed. We would like the franchise specification to consider how this might be provided. Tram-trains are also a consideration from Rackheath to Norwich and we would like the franchise to be flexible enough to enable the scheme's promoters to engage with the new franchise operator.

8 Dealing with disruption

Engineering works and general disruption caused by faulty signalling or other systems failures is a huge problem, particularly on the Great Eastern Mainline.

(i) Engineering works are crucial to enable the rail network to improve its reliability and to enhance services.

However we are concerned at the extent of engineering works at weekends and bank holidays.

Norfolk is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the UK, with tourism spend worth around £2.5bn a year. Norwich is a major tourism destination in its own right, particularly for city breaks. It has also been shortlisted as UK City of Culture 2013.

Weekend engineering works and replacement bus services have over the past couple of years in particular, hit tourism businesses hard.

Visit Norwich and Norfolk Tourism have both had representations from leading hoteliers whose business has been hit by weekend and bank holiday engineering works.

There is no simple solution, however we would like to see the new franchise specification include:

Routing of some Norwich to London trains via Cambridge when engineering works are taking place at weekends, particularly on Sundays and bank holidays when train paths are light.

Keeping open two of the four tracks where possible when engineering work is taking place thus reducing the number of bus journeys.

Ensuring the public is kept informed of disruptions as early as possible. This requires combined actions of the TOC and Network Rail.

On service levels at weekends and bank holidays, we would agree with the suggestion in the consultation document that the franchise specification that bank holidays should be classified as Saturday service patterns.

(ii) Unplanned disruption

Problems caused by unplanned disruption are a particular issue for travellers from Norwich and Diss to London. Stakeholders have expressed huge concern about service performance, covered in more detail in the earlier section on reliability.

A lack of up to date information is a particular concern and the franchise specification must require the train operating company to outline how it will **significantly improve communication between rail staff and the travelling public** about length of delays and reasons for delays. Too often passengers have complained to us about being left without adequate explanation for delays. A performance monitoring regime needs to be put into place to ensure this is monitored.

9 Special events

Norwich has been shortlisted to become UK Capital of Culture. If the city were to win the bid, service patterns during 2013 would need to be reviewed to ensure appropriate service levels on all routes into Norwich. The winning city will be named later this summer.

10 Olympics

The period of the Olympic games will introduce a huge number of additional passengers to the Norwich to London mainline. We are aware of significant plans to improve Stratford station and to introduce additional services from Stratford to London.

We are keen for the franchise specification to **recognise the gateway role that Norwich with its international airport also plays to the games.**

In addition a number of Olympics teams are expected to be based within Norfolk and Suffolk in the lead up to the games.

At the same time regular passengers and holiday passengers will still need to be able to travel between London and Norwich during the games period.

Therefore we would like SLC2a to take notice of the requirements of passengers travelling from Norwich, Diss, Ipswich and Colchester to Stratford and London as well as flows from central London to Stratford.

11 Stations

Many stations within the Greater Anglia franchise area have been starved of investment and the franchise specification needs to task potential operators with outlining how they intend to enhance stations across the network.

Of particular concern is **Great Yarmouth** station and the franchise specification should include **a requirement for the train operating company to carry out improvements to the station.**

Car parking is a huge issue at many stations in Norfolk and we would expect the franchise specification to oblige the train operating company to come up with a plan to increase parking capacity at stations, particularly at stations on the Norwich to Cambridge line, including Thetford.

On the Norwich to London mainline **parking capacity at Diss must be expanded** under the new franchise.

10 Freight

The previous franchise was designed in our view with an in-built bias towards freight, giving freight paths a higher priority than passenger trains.

The development of the Felixstowe to Nuneaton freight corridor will reduce the need for freight to travel south around London and will therefore give a fresh opportunity for **a reduction in the number of freight paths** – particularly during peak periods.

There is also the opportunity to look at running more freight paths at night.

11 Franchise length

We agree with the consultation document that longer franchises provide the opportunity to deliver greater investment and passenger benefits.

We would therefore be keen for the **DfT to look beyond the 10 year period** set out in the consultation document.

This is particularly important given the need for significant investment in new rolling stock for the InterCity services.

For more information about this report contact:
Chris Starkie, chief executive, Shaping Norfolk's Future
Charles House
Prince of Wales
Norwich
NR1 1DJ
(01603) 224483

Chris.starkie@shapingnorfolksfuture.org
www.shapingnorfolksfuture.org.uk