



The East Coast Mainline - Key issues and strategic messages

Overarching Strategic Messages

One of the key strengths of the North East is that it is the only area of the country with a positive balance of trade, with a wealth of innovative industries and advanced technologies, which means it is well placed to make an enormous contribution to the national economy. As business and local authority partners consistently highlight – the capacity exists for this area of the country to play a much greater role in UK growth.

Efficient transport connections and investment and improvements in the East Coast Main Line have a crucial role to play in the economic growth and prosperity of this area and in helping re-balance the national economy. As highlighted in both the North East LEP and Tees Valley LEP economic strategies, there is compelling evidence that transport investment will make the maximum impact on productivity, job creation and GVA where it improves the North East’s strategic connectivity.

Improved links between the North East and Edinburgh and improved connectivity to the Leeds City Region and to the Midlands and to London will bring major economic conurbations closer together and stimulate further economic growth.

High quality, reliable and punctual ECML services are vital to our connectivity and for the future competitiveness and prosperity of the North East.

We have aspirations for early improvements on the ECML route and consider that the franchise period can provide real scope for the successful operator to invest in better service quality, punctuality, performance and passenger experience. **Increasing capacity, higher speeds and shorter end to end journey times are priorities for the North East.**

We also highlight the importance of the ECML as a key economic driver, not just in relation to passenger rail services, but with an important role to play in **supporting the development of freight to and from the region, including links with major ports** in the North East. Connections to the East Coast ports are important for international trade to support a variety of manufacturing and production sectors.

Capacity is a key issue for the North East, given that on much of the rail network, freight and passenger services share the same infrastructure. Projected growth in both passenger numbers and in freight tonnage means that investment in capacity is required to support growth of the economy of the North East.

ECMA Strategic Business Case for Investment: Initial Findings

We would wish to draw attention to the research undertaken by the **ECMA Consortium, which believes that the ECML is a key piece of infrastructure connecting the economies along the line of route with each other, to the national economy and to Europe – and is, therefore, of considerable strategic economic importance.** ECMA highlights, however, that its ability to fully realise this economic value is currently constrained which has been the rationale for the Consortium's work, which is to make the economic case for influencing investment to enable the delivery of solutions by the rail industry that release these constraints.

A key evidence asset that the Consortium is developing is a Strategic Business Case for the ECML that sets out the economic context of the route, the benefits of continuing to invest in the line, any constraints that prevent the full realisation of their economic visions and also show the illustrative investments that could mitigate these constraints in full or in part.

ECMA will be submitting to the ICEC franchise bidders the draft findings of its research. Drawing from the draft executive summary, important headlines include:

- The local economies served by the ECML corridor rail services are valuable to the UK. The GVA of local economies in the East Coast corridor, including London, represents just short of a half of UK economic output.
- The economic geographies within the ECML rail corridor is diverse and many sectors of the economy benefit from strong connectivity to enable, for example, the transport of goods to markets and for cities to benefit from business connections to synergistic places.
- In this context, connections to London as a world city and global and financial centre remain hugely important. Edinburgh is also a strong attractor and links between the North East and Scotland are important, given our geographic proximity to the Border. The growing renewable energy and oil/gas sectors along the North East coast are increasing the need for collaboration and connectivity from the Humber to the Tees and the Tyne and from the Tees and the Tyne to the Tay and northern Scotland. A growing biotech and life sciences sector in the North East is also creating demand for a new business to business connection from the region to the Cambridge R&D cluster. Important finance and business service sectors require good business-to-business connections; these include London, Edinburgh and the Leeds City Region. Such improvements in connectivity are welcomed as enhancements to service provision and not at the expense of existing linkages.

- The East Coast Mainline has suffered from a lack of investment over many years. This is certainly the case in comparison, for example, to the West Coast Main Line which has inevitably led to significant disparities in the capacity that such investment has delivered. The West Coast has 9 paths per hour from Euston for Long Distance High Speed (LDHS) contracting with the East Coast which has only 6 LDHS paths per hour out of Kings Cross.
- Along the length of the route there are a range of capacity constraints. Some are long standing issues and others are as a result of the growth in services operating on the EMCL. The combined effect of these is that they make the planning of timetables for long distance services in particular extremely complex. As franchise bidders will be aware, there has been a programme of works to increase capacity on the route through CP4 (2009-2014). This has delivered a railway that operates 6 LDHS paths per hour between King's Cross and Doncaster. Entering CP5 (2014 -19) there is a desire to deliver 7 long distance paths per hour between King's Cross and Doncaster, providing a further increase in capacity.
- An initial assessment of conditional outputs undertaken by EMCA suggests that 8 LDHS train paths per hour would be required between London and Peterborough, rising to a peak of 9 between Peterborough and Newark. Investment to realise up to 9 LDHS train paths out of London would generate over £0.3bn of GDP per year.
- The level of passenger traffic using the ECML is such that there are relatively few paths available for freight traffic particularly south of Doncaster. In this context, the NE LEP emphasises the need for a continuous 75mph route for rail freight between Newcastle and Northallerton, allowing the growth of freight traffic without impeding faster and more punctual passenger services on the ECML. Inevitably these capacity constraints mean that choices have had to be made on the level of service provided.
- In the North of England and in Scotland, journey times remain a priority for improvement. Better connectivity is sought not only for journeys to London, but between important key nodes along the corridor, even for places directly served. In northern England and Scotland, improved journey times are also important for many journeys to other key nodes and intermediate stations.
- For places not currently served by direct ECML services, improved connectivity is also a priority, particularly to London. As highlighted in the ICEC Franchise Invitation to Tender, there are some opportunities to provide a new direct link to London from Middlesbrough and to enhance connectivity between Sunderland and the capital. These would generate significant economic benefits for those areas so it is important that such opportunities are fully explored without detriment to existing services on the mainline.

- As highlighted in the North East LEP draft Strategic Economic Plan, there is a need for faster journey times of 2h30 from Newcastle to London to be delivered in the next East Coast franchise.
- Irrespective of location, businesses and customers all along the corridor see reliability as a critical issue.

Complementarity of ECML with HS2

ANEC has adopted a clear position in relation to high speed and conventional rail, through strongly making the case for a complementary approach as part of a coherent strategy for the wider rail network. We are engaging with HS2, DfT and Network Rail to highlight the importance of **inter-operability of HS2 and conventional rail, the benefits to the North East of released capacity to the classic network arising from the proposed line of route for HS2 as far as Leeds, and the timescales for this area of the country to see real and tangible improvements both to the East Coast Main Line and arising from HS2.**

As highlighted by ECMA's draft report, for the purposes of analysis, it is assumed that HS2 will be constructed and that investment prior to HS2 will bring benefits to Leeds and Newcastle services, but that not all additional London services from associated routes will be able to operate prior to HS2. After HS2 is completed some existing services will be diverted and further services from associated routes could be introduced. More fundamentally this implies that investment in the ECML, both in advance of HS2 and then subsequently to enable the benefits of HS2 to be realised north of Leeds, is essential.

We are consistently emphasising the point that it is not a choice between investing in ECML *or* investing in HS2. They are complementary investments and are essential if HS2 is to deliver to its full potential. A key issue for us is commitment from HS2, DfT and Network Rail to work towards closer integration between the HS2 specification and the conventional rail network.

Importance of capacity and station improvements

Darlington Station is the main interchange hub in the Tees Valley for national and inter-regional rail connections provided by East Coast (as well as CrossCountry and Trans-Pennine). It is vitally important to continue to improve services, increase capacity and tackle bottlenecks on the ECML. Acting as a critical rail 'gateway' into and out of Tees Valley, with over 360,000 annual trips to London stations, Darlington station provides regular and fast direct routes to London and Edinburgh. It is the main access point to regional and long distance passenger services, particularly on the ECML for people living in the Tees Valley sub-region and in the surrounding areas of County Durham or North Yorkshire. Darlington is also a key part of the Tees Valley rail network which serves residents, commuters, businesses and visitors. Current rail services bring around 600,000 visitors to the Tees Valley per year, who spend around £72m supporting 1,400 jobs.

The Tees Valley LEP Strategic Economic Plan emphasises that the 'East Coast Main Line is vital for the Tees Valley economy, with our direct route to London providing journey time benefits of £413m, supporting £3.4m in GVA benefits and facilitating visitor revenue of £5.4m in the local community per year. ECML is also essential for UK PLC as it is estimated that up to 49% of total UK GVA is supported via the ECML'.

However, access to Darlington station, which is vital for national connections from elsewhere in the Tees Valley can be restricted and slow (as local passenger trains have to cross the mainline). This severely restricts the opportunity for timetable enhancements and means local rail services struggle to compete with car travel in terms of journey times, reliability, comfort and frequency. As highlighted in the Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan, this is why improvements at Darlington station which will increase capacity and operational flexibility for mainline and local services as well as for freight are a high priority and will continue to be a key focus for future rail investment. It would improve the sustainable transport offer and economic connectivity. Recent research (SDG TVU Rail Benefits Oct 2013) has found that such a scheme could help to facilitate local rail enhancements which could provide potential journey time benefits of up to £891 million, support GVA benefits of up to £4.8m per year and facilitate additional visitor revenue of up to £1.3m for the local economy.

With regard to **Newcastle Central Station**, Newcastle City Council's position has been to seek agreement on long term management of the station (either through Network Rail or on a long lease) to enable investment to take place. This has effectively been addressed following the release of the Invitation to Tender whereby it is proposed that Newcastle Central Station, along with York, will be transferred to Network Rail (most stations will be subject to 99 year lease arrangements). There is a desire that current and future phases of work ensure Central Station acts as a high quality gateway to the area and enables economic development in the vicinity by improving access links (including a physical link to the south of the station in addition to better journey times to other stations and areas on the line). This ambition for investment in the station interchanges (including Newcastle) is currently reflected in the draft NELEP Strategic Economic Plan.

Specific Issues

- **All existing journeys should be retained as a minimum, with an additional 7 journeys originating at Edinburgh rather than Newcastle or Berwick.** The retention of existing calling patterns north of York is important along with the provision of new links to areas not currently served directly, and the franchisee should work with other operators to provide synergy between timetables providing both local connections to communities off the main route and freight access to the region's ports and industrial sites. The proposed remodelling of Darlington station is particularly important in facilitating the growth of local services along the Tees Valley line and to Bishop Auckland whilst improving capacity and reliability on the ECML route.

- **Faster journey times are desirable, with non-stop services reaching London in around 2hrs 30m from Newcastle, and slower services not exceeding 3hrs.** Journey time improvements should also be delivered from all mainline stations in the region. The franchisee should examine whether those services which currently call at 4 or 5 stations south of York, can be reduced to enhance journey times.
- The ease of reaching London early in the working day is still an issue, with only 2 services arriving into Kings Cross before 0900 – with these departing Newcastle at 0445 and 0525. No northbound services arrive in Newcastle from London earlier than 0900, and only 2 arrive before 1000.
- **The InterCity Express Programme provides a great opportunity to address the issue of ageing and unsatisfactory rolling stock and the investment by Agility/Hitachi Trains in the North East is a tremendous boost for the economy.** The introduction of new trains with concurrent benefits for customer experience, performance, timetable and journey time improvements are all key priorities for the North East. Given the quality of current rolling stock is reducing rapidly and given the levels of current patronage, it is critical that the new rolling stock due to come into service in 2019 is introduced onto the Newcastle – Kings Cross leg of the ECML at the earliest opportunity.
- **Capacity is a key constraint on the route and the North East will be pushing for improvements to the infrastructure to enable growth,** maximise the North East’s benefits from the proposed High Speed 2 project and improve the reliability of long-distance services, which is an issue of key importance to stakeholders. The franchisee should commit to improving PPM scores which address the recent downward trend in reliability.
- **Within the Invitation to Tender, there is an option to include Middlesbrough as a new destination that the bidders ‘may choose to serve’.** We would ask that the bidders give serious consideration to this option which would not only serve Middlesbrough but also provide improved access for businesses and residents in Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton. There is an existing train every 2 hours that terminates at York and this would be a feasible extension of this service to Middlesbrough to provide the opportunity to boost accessibility to this service (and thus increased revenues).
- **A further flexibility in the ITT that we would not support is a reduction in the number of stops at Darlington.** This serves as an important interchange for the Tees Valley not only to the south but equally important to Newcastle and Scotland and we would seek to retain the current half hourly frequency as a minimum baseline service.
- The investment in the route infrastructure to be delivered during CP5 should be well-managed between the TOCs and Network Rail, with a robust diversionary strategy reducing disruption to a minimum and using road replacement services only as a last resort. The

Stillington, Durham Coast and Tyne Valley lines all have potential for alternative routing. Information regarding engineering works should be advised to passengers and stakeholders well in advance.

- **The franchisee should manage and maximise the investment being made in the Intercity Express Programme and the North East** would expect transition to the new fleet to be managed seamlessly with no disruption to passengers or major amendments to services. On-board services, passengers expect fast, reliable wifi connectivity and a strong mobile phone signal, high levels of comfort and cleanliness and good quality catering. Sufficient luggage space should be provided, including space for cycles, and passengers should have access to real-time journey information, including connections. It is important that business travellers are able to translate their work from the office to the train.
- **The franchisee should maximise the investment being made at Newcastle station, and facilitate the planned developments at Darlington.** Continued investment to the waiting environment will be sought, as well as improving the links to other forms of transport through increasing car parking, developing walking and cycling routes, and facilitating integration with bus and Metro services. Stations should be seen as a gateway to the region, making the ambiance on arrival, and ease of onward travel vital.
- **Fares need to offer value for money, with initiatives used to encourage growth in patronage, particularly in off-peak times.** Revenue should be protected through the utilisation of gate-lines throughout the route, including at Newcastle, Durham and Darlington, throughout the operational day. The franchisee should work alongside the North East authorities as they develop and implement the NESTI initiative, simplifying multi-modal travel through the utilisation of smart technology.

In Summary:

- Improvements in connections and investment in the East Coast Main Line have a crucial role to play in the economic growth and prosperity of the North East and for the economies along the line of the route extending southwards to London and northwards to Edinburgh.
- Increasing capacity, higher speeds and shorter end to end journey times, improvements in passenger experience, rolling stock and stations are priorities along the whole of the ECML in the North East. There is a need for a faster journey time of 2h30 from Newcastle to London to be delivered in the next ICEC franchise.
- The role of the ECML in supporting the development of freight links to and from the region have a vital role to play in supporting international trade.
- The ECML is important to the UK plc. The GVA of local economies in the East Coast corridor, including London, represents just short of half of UK economic output.

- The ECML has suffered from a lack of investment over many years – and certainly by comparison to the West Coast – and consequent constraints in relation to delivery of Long Distance High Speed paths. We wish to see an increase from 6 to 7 LDHS paths in CP5 and beyond that 8 LDHS train paths per hour between London and Peterborough rising to a peak of 9 between Peterborough and Newark.