

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

CABINET

21 JULY 2011

REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR

RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO LEADER – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING

CHASE LINE RAIL SERVICE – PROPOSED CHANGE TO SERVICE LEVEL COMMITMENT

KEY DECISION – YES

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To give consideration to timetable changes proposed by London Midland (LM) to Birmingham-Walsall-Cannock-Hednesford-Rugeley, Chase Line rail services, through a variation to the franchise Service Level Commitment (SLC) and to make a response by 12 August 2011.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That London Midland be informed that Cannock Chase District Council having considered the proposed changes to the franchise Service Level Commitment:-
- i). Objects to the proposed withdrawal of the 06.21 Rugeley - Birmingham and 07.39 Hednesford - Birmingham services.
 - ii). Supports the provision of new services from Rugeley to Birmingham 05.55 and 08.06
- 2.2 That London Midland be asked to restore capacity on the 16.39 Birmingham-Rugeley service from a 2 to 3 coach unit to ease overcrowding.
- 2.3 That the Council's response to London Midland in Annex 2 be approved and copies forwarded to Centro, Staffordshire County Council, the Department for Transport, Aidan Burley, M.P., Cannock Chase Rail Promotion Group, Walsall Council, Passenger Focus and other stakeholders as considered appropriate.

3. Summary (inc. brief overview of relevant background history)

- 3.1 The SLC is a part of a service contract specified by the Department for Transport (DfT), where the level of service is formally defined for the life of the franchise, awarded in 2007, until September 2015. London Midland, the Chase Line service operator, are now seeking to make changes to the service provision as originally specified in the franchise by the DfT and have therefore invited the Council's comments on their proposed changes to services specified in the SLC. As London Midland are seeking to make these changes, they are required to carry out the consultation but any decision on the changes sought will ultimately be made by the DfT.

- 3.2 LM have developed a proposal which they state would introduce additional capacity on the Chase Line between Birmingham and Rugeley, and also across the wider West Midlands network. To enable this to happen, London Midland propose to amend the current SLC service specification.
- 3.3 London Midland have identified the following changes (Annex 1), which they identify as “benefits”:-
- To provide 660 additional seats into Birmingham in the 3 hour am peak and 250 extra in high peak.
 - Three diesel vehicles to be made available for strengthening **elsewhere** in West Midlands plus increase from 2 to 3 car on 0639 and 3 to 4 car on 0740 Rugeley-Birmingham.
 - Reduce diesel mileage under the wires with the aim of improving performance robustness
 - Include a new arrival at Rugeley at 0801 (formerly terminated Hednesford).
 - Include a new departure at 0806 from Rugeley (formerly started Hednesford).
 - Start the current 0607 from Hednesford from Rugeley.
 - Potentially reduce journey times between Walsall and Birmingham by using electric instead of diesel units.
- 3.4 However, in order to achieve the “benefits” listed above, London Midland propose to **withdraw** the 0621 Rugeley-Birmingham and the 0739 Hednesford-Birmingham. These two services are both well used, peak time services.

4. Key issues and Implications

- 4.1 On closer inspection of the proposed changes, while the proposed “benefits” will bring some capacity improvements, these are largely confined to the electrified section of the route south of Walsall to Birmingham or other parts of the network and are achieved through the use of 4 car electric trains instead of 2 or 3 car diesel units.
- 4.2 Of particular concern are the proposals to withdraw the peak time 06.21 Rugeley-Birmingham and 07.39 Hednesford to Birmingham. At the present time, there are eight morning departures from Hednesford and Cannock to Birmingham up to 09.00, which would be reduced to six. Loss of the 07.39 from Hednesford to Birmingham service, would leave a 36 minute gap at a peak time, with trains at 07.18 or 07.54. Passengers using the existing 0739 ex Hednesford and traveling to intermediate stations such as Perry Barr for Birmingham City University, will have to change at Walsall, and would arrive half an hour later than at present, i.e. 0814 at present becomes 0844.
- 4.3 While LM are proposing to increase the capacity of the following train from Rugeley, using a 4 coach instead of a 3 coach train, standing passengers on the two peak trains on arrival at Birmingham, would increase by about 30 passengers, compared to the existing 3 peak services over the same period.
- 4.4 The existing 06.21 ex-Rugeley, the first departure of the day, is to be withdrawn but a new earlier train will be provided at 05.55, 26 minutes before the existing service.

- 4.5 In reality, the only discernable benefit would be the provision of a new service from Rugeley at 08.06, filling the existing 1 hour gap between 07.39 and 08.42. Rugeley would also gain 6 rather than 5 morning departures up to 09.00.
- 4.6 The Council have been informed of increasing problems of overcrowding on the Chase Line, mainly through its increasing popularity, the loss of 50% of off-peak services in December 2010, but also because of reductions in some services from 3 to 2 coach units. In particular the 16.39 Birmingham to Rugeley has now become very overcrowded with recent headcounts showing this train departing Birmingham with 180 passengers on a 122 seat train, i.e. 58 standing passengers. A local resident who complained to LM, was informed that the additional coach was now being used to relieve overcrowding on another route out of Birmingham. However, it is understood that outside London, there are no overcrowding standards and London Midland appear to be free to reduce the number of coaches on Chase Line services.
- 4.7 Improving rail services on the Chase Line is the Council's transport priority and at Cabinet on 23 June, it was agreed in principle to provide funding under the current franchise to maintain evening services to Rugeley. The Council's short term priority is therefore to identify a package that would allow retention of existing service levels, preferably for the remainder of the West Midlands franchise to September 2015 and to secure their inclusion in a future franchise funded by the DfT. It is also important that the Council objects to further cuts to the rail service of the type now being proposed by the operator, as well as on increasing levels of overcrowding.

5. Conclusions and Reason(s) for the Recommendation(s)

- 5.1 The Council in partnership with Centro and Staffordshire County Council have been actively working to secure the retention of the weekday evening and the Saturday incremented service between Birmingham and Rugeley in the current franchise to 2015 and their inclusion on a long term, secure basis in a future franchise beyond 2015.
- 5.2 Having examined the proposed changes to the Service Level Commitment, it is considered that very few benefits would be delivered to the Chase Line serving the District and major disbenefits through the withdrawal of two peak time services including the 06.21 Rugeley-Birmingham and 07.39 Hednesford to Birmingham services. A less frequent service would be offered at peak times from Hednesford and Cannock and overcrowding would in fact increase rather than decrease on that section of the Chase Line. The proposed changes are considered to be against the Council's priorities to support expansion of Chase Line services.

6. Other Options Considered

- 6.1 This report deals with the proposed changes to existing peak time service levels on the Chase Line. There are no other options/alternatives but to object unless the Council wished to support the proposed changes.

7. **Report Author Details**

7.1 Mr R. Phillips, Head of Planning & Regeneration, 01543 462621

SCHEDULE OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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Section 1

Contribution to Council Priorities (i.e. Corporate Plan)

Securing improvements to the regional and local rail service, will accord with the priority outcomes with respect to promoting People - Active and Healthy Lifestyles; Place – Improved Living Environment through promoting a sustainable form of transport and Prosperity – Economic Resilience.

Section 2

Contribution to Promoting Community Engagement

The Council has encouraged wider community involvement in the rail issues affecting the District.

Section 3

Financial Implications

This report has not yet been cleared by the Head of Financial Management; the following financial implications should therefore be considered as draft.

There are no direct financial implications for the Council as a result of this report.

Section 4

Legal Implications

The Council has power under Section 106 (2) and (3) of the Transport Act 1985 to contribute towards the cost of facilitating or improving the operation of public passenger transport services in their area. Staffordshire County Council has similar powers. The Council may only use contributions which have been received under planning obligations entered into under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) if the covenants in the planning obligation permit the contribution to be used for this purpose.

Section 5

Human Resource Implications

There are no human resource implications in the report.

Section 6

Section 17 (Crime Prevention)

The provision of enhanced rail services to and from Rugeley, Hednesford and Cannock would allow the younger population, to access a wider range of evening leisure, recreational and cultural facilities in Cannock, Walsall or Birmingham, as well as connecting into long distance services at Birmingham and Rugeley Trent Valley to London.

Section 7

Human Rights Act Implications

There are no identified implications in respect of the Human Rights Act 1998 arising from this report.

Section 8

Data Protection Act Implications

There are no identified implications in respect of the Data Protection Act arising from this report.

Section 9

Risk Management Implications

In the event that the Council decided not to object to the proposed changes to the SLC, the District's population would be faced by a reduced and inferior rail service and increased overcrowding. The District would also be less attractive for inward investment.

Section 10

Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no implications in the report.

Section 11

List of Background Papers

None

Section 12

Report History

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet – Chase Line Rail Service, Revenue Support	23 June 2011
Cabinet – Chase Line rail service – Proposed Service Reductions	2 September 2010
Cabinet – Chase Line Rail service – Proposed Enhancements	19 June 2008

Annex 1

Letter from London Midland dated 20 May 2011 on proposed amendments to SLC.

Annex 2

Draft reply to London Midland detailing the Council's response to the proposed SLC changes.

John Morgan
Cannock Chase District Council
PO Box 28
Beecroft Road
Cannock
Staffordshire
WS11 1BG

Nicola Moss
London Midland
102 New Street
Birmingham
B2 4JB

nicola.moss@londonmidland.com
07876 195250

20th May 2011

Dear John

Service Level Commitment – Consultation on Proposed Changes to Chase Line

I write to ask your views on our proposed changes to our Service Level Commitment on Route J. Our Service Level Commitment sets out specific features which must be incorporated into our timetable as part of our franchise agreement with the Department for Transport.

We have seen patronage growth across the franchise since its commencement in November 2007. Recognising the need to provide additional capacity on our network, we have been working with the Department for Transport on the HLOS (High Level Output Specification) process to identify a case for additional capacity.

We have a proposal as part of the HLOS process to introduce additional capacity on the Chase Line between Birmingham and Rugeley, and also across the wider West Midlands network. To enable this to happen, we propose to amend some of the aspects in our Service Level Commitment.

We propose to generate a total of 5 diesel vehicles internally by deploying a 4 car EMU in the morning peak on the Walsall line. The 4 car EMU will become available from December 2011 by making an improvement in fleet availability. By generating this additional 4-car electric train this enables us to convert the Birmingham-Walsall-Rugeley service to a standard pattern in the am and pm peaks.

Of the 5 diesel vehicles released by making this change, we propose to use two on the Walsall line, and three elsewhere in the West Midlands – on the Snow Hill routes, the Shrewsbury line and the Hereford route.

In summary, the benefits of this proposal are to:

- Provide 660 additional seats into Birmingham in the 3 hour am peak and 250 extra in high peak.
- Three diesel vehicles being available for strengthening elsewhere in West Midlands plus increase from 2 to 3 car on 0639 and 3 to 4 car on 0740 ex Rugeley.
- Reduce diesel mileage under the wires with the aim of improving performance robustness
- Include a new arrival at Rugeley at 0801 (formerly terminated Hednesford).

- Include a new departure at 0806 from Rugeley (formerly started Hednesford)
- Start the current 0607 from Hednesford from Rugeley
- Potentially reduce journey times between Walsall and Birmingham by using EMU instead of DMU

In order to achieve the benefits listed above, the proposal means that the 0621 service between Rugeley and Walsall, and the 0739 service between Hednesford and Walsall are removed from the timetable.

The proposed timetable and the capacity levels for the Chase Line are shown on the enclosed attachment for clarity. I also attach the proposed changes to the wording of our Service Level Commitment – the subject of this consultation.

I welcome your comments on the Service Level Commitment change, and the wider proposal, to arrive no later than 12th August 2011. I would be very happy to have informal conversations, or receive your comments earlier than this date.

Please email me on nicola.moss@londonmidland.com or send your comments by post to:

Nicola Moss
Head of Franchise Management
London Midland
102 New Street
Birmingham
B2 4JB

Yours sincerely

Nicola Moss

Head of Franchise Management

xx July 2011

Nicola Moss
Head of Franchise Management
London Midland
102 New Street
Birmingham
B2 4JB

Dear Nicola

Service Level Commitment – Consultation on Proposed Changes to Chase Line

Thank you for consulting the Council on 20 May on your proposed changes to the Service Level Commitment affecting services on the Chase Line between Birmingham-Walsall-Cannock-Rugeley. The proposed changes were considered at a Cabinet meeting on 21 July 2011, when the Council resolved:-

- “1. That London Midland be informed that Cannock Chase District Council having considered the proposed changes to the franchise Service Level Commitment:-
 - i). Objects to the proposed withdrawal of the 06.21 Rugeley-Birmingham, and 07.39 Hednesford-Birmingham services.
 - ii). Supports the provision of new services from Rugeley to Birmingham 05.55 and 08.06
2. That London Midland be asked to restore the 16.39 Birmingham-Rugeley service from a 2 to 3 coach unit to ease overcrowding.
3. That copies of the Council’s response to London Midland in Annex 1, be forwarded to Centro, Staffordshire County Council, Aidan Burley, M.P., Cannock Chase Rail Promotion Group, Walsall Council, the Department for Transport and Passenger Focus.”

Having examined the proposed changes to the Service Level Commitment, it is considered that very few benefits would be delivered to that section of the Chase Line serving Cannock, Hednesford and Rugeley and major disbenefits through the withdrawal of two peak time services including the 06.21 Rugeley-Birmingham and 07.39 Hednesford to Birmingham services. A less frequent service would be offered at peak times from Hednesford and Cannock to Birmingham by reducing the number of trains from 8 to 6 trains and overcrowding would in fact increase rather than decrease on that section of the Chase Line serving this District. Increased train capacity would largely be achieved through the use of use more electric services south of Walsall to Birmingham, which are clearly unable to operate north of Walsall. Even where one 4 coach unit is offered on a peak am service from Rugeley, the reduction in peak trains from Rugeley from 3 to 2, would result in increased and not reduced overcrowding.

The Council are already aware of overcrowding due to the reduction in train length from 3 to 2 coach units and particularly the 16.39 ex-Birmingham – Rugeley.

The SLC also shows a requirement in 1.2 Route Definition, of a requirement to provide, “Connectors not exceeding 15 minutes shall be provided at Rugeley Trent Valley to services to and from Stafford and other Trent Valley stations..”, while in 2.1, the provision of trains between Birmingham and Rugeley at half-hourly intervals. Clearly it is misleading for the SLC to include these sections unchanged, as since the service cutbacks in December 2010, no such commitments have been delivered.

The proposed changes are therefore largely considered to be against the Council’s priorities to support expansion of Chase Line services and would result in an inferior rather than an improved service. Accordingly, the Council object to the proposed changes to the SLC.

Yours sincerely,

John Morgan.

Principal Planning Officer, Planning Policy.

cc. Mr G. Inskip, Chief Executive, Centro,
Mr C Soutar Head of Integrated Transport & Planning, Staffordshire County Council,
Aidan Burley, M.P.,
Mr Keith Fitch, Chairman, Cannock Chase Rail Promotion Group,
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council,
Graeme Frizzell, Department for Transport
Passenger Focus.