
Secretariat memorandum

Author : Jerry Gold

Agenda item 7
LTW 69
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Virgin Trains 2009 timetable

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To advise the Board members of the issues relevant to London TravelWatch arising from Virgin's 2009 timetable.

A briefing document provided by Virgin Trains is attached for information.

2 Information

- 2.1 The Virgin 2009 timetable gives effect to a strategy outlined by the Department for Transport (DfT)'s May 2006 progress report on the West Coast main line (see <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/rail/pi/wcml/westcoastmainlineprogressrep3458>).
- 2.1.1 This report raises two particular issues for London TravelWatch. One relates to passenger handling capacity at Euston, the other concerns calls by Virgin trains at Watford Junction.
- 2.2 Euston
- 2.2.1 Although modern in railway terms, as it is only 40 years old, Euston becomes very congested at peak inter-city travel times, and at any time when the service is disrupted. A particular problem is the lack of space and seats on the main concourse. This has been exacerbated over the last ten years or so by what can only be described as an explosion in the number of retail outlets erected on the concourse.
- 2.2.2 The DfT strategy presages a rapid and substantial increase in traffic on the West Coast main line, and most of this will be to and from Euston. Network Rail recognises the need for improvements and is developing plans for major redevelopment. However, this project is only in its early stages and it is unlikely to be completed before 2015. This therefore poses two questions:

- (a) How does the rail industry propose to improve conditions for passengers meantime – and soon?
- (b) How will it cope when the station becomes a building site?

2.3 Watford Junction

- 2.3.1 Watford is both a significant origin/destination in its own right and an important interchange node for other rail services (including the Southern Gatwick–Croydon–Clapham Junction–West London line–Watford service), for a rail-air Heathrow coach connection, and for park/kiss and ride facilities close to the M25. At present Virgin provide a good range of calls at Watford, serving all its destinations and spread throughout the day and week.
- 2.3.2 The planned 2009 service makes major cuts in Virgin calls at Watford. The Birmingham route would be served all day. All other routes (Manchester, Preston/north-west/Glasgow, Liverpool, Chester/north Wales) would be reduced to one or two calls northbound in the morning business peak and returning southbound in the evening.
- 2.3.3 This strategy reverses a policy started by British Rail over 40 years ago, and which has been successfully developed and sustained ever since. London TravelWatch has objected strongly to this change and raised it with the Minister (Tom Harris MP) in March 2007. The full issues are set out in a paper prepared at the Minister's request (see http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/get_document.php?id=2756).
- 2.3.4 This paper did not result in the new strategy being changed. However, it did lead to a meeting in May 2007 with DfT and Virgin officials, at which we were invited (inter alia) to await more details of the planned timetable and the availability of connections with Virgin services at Milton Keynes. In addition, DfT offered to consider extending Southern's West London line service to run to Milton Keynes. London TravelWatch went along with this proposed means of taking the matter forward – not because we thought it would provide a proper solution, but simply because there seemed to be no other realistic option.
- 2.3.5 Since the DfT/Virgin meeting in May we (as London TravelWatch) have heard no more. However, we did attend a Passenger Focus Board meeting in June at which the same DfT and Virgin officials gave a presentation about the overall West Coast plans. Both DfT and Virgin strongly resisted a request by Passenger Focus to provide any details of the planned timetable, citing the need to ensure that Virgin's proposals were properly integrated with those of the then undecided winner of the West Midlands franchise competition.
- 2.3.6 The West Midlands winner was announced on 21 June – over two months ago – but we have still not received the information promised to us in May. The “2009 Timetable Commentary” paper supplied by Virgin for the current London TravelWatch Board meeting does not provide anything to help us take this matter forward.

3 Equalities and inclusion implications

3.1 Not applicable – report is for information only.

4 Financial implications

4.1 Not applicable – report is for information only.

5 Legal powers

5.1 Section 252A of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 (as amended by Schedule 6 of the Railways Act 2005) places upon London TravelWatch (as the London Transport Users Committee) a duty to keep under review matters affecting the interests of the public in relation to railway passenger and station services provided wholly or partly within the London railway area, and to make representations about them to such persons as it thinks appropriate.

6 Recommendation

6.1 That the report is received for information.