

Date: 30 July 2021

Please ask for: Gareth Davies

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May 2022 Timetable Consultation

On behalf of Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council I am writing to you to express our concern at the unsatisfactory nature of the current consultations on changes to train services to and from Berwick-upon-Tweed and to voice the council's objections to all the proposed changes, which will undoubtedly have a negative impact upon the town, on the basis that there is insufficient evidence for the proposals to be properly evaluated.

I appreciate that each train operating company serving Berwick-upon-Tweed is seeking, wherever possible, to deliver the best possible outcomes for itself, but as a Town Council we must seek to deliver the best possible outcomes for the town.

Perhaps it will help if I set out Berwick's perceptions of itself, as those perceptions are at the root of Berwick's ambitions for itself as a place. The town has a three-fold role; as

- A tourism and cultural hub for North Northumberland and the Scottish Borders, including the emerging Destination Tweed project, attracting regional, national and international visitors,
- As a retail and employment hub for the sub region, and
- As a transport hub connecting North Northumberland and the Borders to the employment centres in Newcastle / Tyneside and Edinburgh

Berwick needs road and rail connections that enable and support all three of these roles, and which enable growth that will deliver on the government's levelling up agenda, including raising local average wages by enabling access to more highly skilled and better paid employment in a wider travel to work area.

We therefore look to Berwick's rail connections to deliver strong and reliable national rail connections to London and other conurbations for tourists, leisure travellers and business travel, and sub regional and local services that link Berwick to employment centres, and which can bring in day visitors for our retail offer and cultural and heritage attractions.

Any reduction in services to the south of England (delivered by LNER) or the Midlands and West of England (delivered by Cross Country) is a reduction in transport capacity and therefore in the potential demand for travel. Simply put, tourists, travellers and business people won't come to Berwick if there aren't enough trains, and Berwick becomes less attractive as a base for businesses because its links to major markets elsewhere in the UK become worse.

Ordinarily, I would expect changes as far reaching as those proposed by LNER and Cross Country to be evidenced by comparing capacity and demand, both in total and across the individual time periods. The consultation documents do not offer that level of detail, nor do they explain why changes are proposed. It is impossible to escape the conclusion that some of the proposed changes are intended to deliver benefits to other places without fully appraising the negative impact of changes upon Berwick. Without comprehensive data, it is hard not to conclude that the main purpose of these changes is to reduce journey times on London to Edinburgh journeys by reducing the number of intermediate stops, without explaining why a small reduction in end to end journey time actually matters.

It would be wrong not to highlight, when discussing data, that the consultation, already fragmentary (because of the differing roles of individual train operating companies) is incomplete, and therefore unfair, because it alludes (in some documents but not all) to a possible shuttle service to be provided by Trans Pennine Express, but does not provide any detail on which the merits of that change can be assessed.

The Town Clerk's role is to advise council; in that role I cannot advise council to accept changes which are not to Berwick's advantage in the hope that a non-specific promise of a future service is in the offing. If the intention is to improve services between Newcastle and Edinburgh, serving intermediate stations, and utilizing fast trains on a regular timetable, then the Town Council would have to weigh all the proposals in the balance, including a reduction in capacity to London (for instance) if there is evidence of an excess of capacity over demand on that route and no realistic prospect of growth to fill the gap.

Without the data to understand why national connections are to be withdrawn, and no details of the mooted local / regional offer, and no certainty that it will be made, the Town Council is backed into a corner and has to resist any and all piecemeal changes to services that do not address the needs of the town and the sub-region, and which do not demonstrate a vision that is congruent with the town's vision for itself. This is a position that could have been avoided if all the information and details referred to in this letter had been provided within an overall vision for Berwick's rail services.

Regards



Gareth Davies LI.B MIPM MAC
Town Clerk

CC

Chris Heaton-Harris MP, Minister of State (Department for Transport)
The Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan, MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed
Cty Cllr Georgina Hill, Member for Berwick East, Northumberland County Council
Cty Cllr Isabel Hunter, Member for Berwick West with Ord, Northumberland County Council
Cty Cllr Catherine Seymour, Member for Berwick North, Northumberland County Council