

Borough Council Response to the Proposed 2018 Great Northern Timetable Consultation

The Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk wishes to make the following response to the Proposed 2018 Great Northern Timetable consultation:

The Council has considerable concerns regarding the general lengthening of journey times proposed in the 2018 timetable for the King's Lynn to King's Cross rail route.

Despite the very welcome recent introduction of faster trains (capable of 110 mph south of Hitchin) on our line the proposals are for King's Lynn - King's Cross Fen Line services to become slower.

The proposals mean average peak journeys of 113 minutes out and 110 minutes back between King's Lynn and King's Cross, an increase of up to 8 minutes, although most users will experience a greater increase.

An alternative timetable, based on existing journey times and prepared by Fen Line Users Association (FLUA) member Ben Colson MBE, FCILT shows the sort of timetable we would like to see. It can be found at:

<http://flua.org.uk/documents/2017%20July%20alt%20TT%20proposal%20Dec%202018.pdf>

The Council wishes to see existing journey times maintained and improved between King's Lynn and King's Cross (allowing for the additional, welcome, stops at the employment hub around the new Cambridge North station).

From 2018 the new cross-London Thameslink upgrade, including new routes such as Cambridge to Gatwick Airport, envisages up to 24 trains through central London per hour in each direction. It is clear that the operation will have to run with split second accuracy to achieve this high level of throughput.

Although King's Lynn trains will continue to run to/from King's Cross, we recognise that precision timing will be required to avoid causing the new Thameslink system severe delays (cross-London Thameslink trains will branch off about a mile north of King's Cross). The proposed emphasis on longer station stops (such as at Cambridge) and on increased journey times would allow some 'catch up' time. Currently, trains pass at Downham Market, where a late northbound train running on the single track necessarily causes delay to the waiting southbound train.

We also understand that given the need for precision timing on the approaches to King's Cross, the proposals are for trains to pass at Littleport instead. A late running northbound train here would not prevent a southbound train carrying straight on to the double-track south of Littleport and reaching King's Cross on time. But exact timings at Littleport are also determined by other trains elsewhere and the only northbound train 'slots' available would force on-time trains to spend several minutes at Littleport waiting for the single line to be free.

We welcome the proposed half-hourly departures leaving King's Lynn for King's Cross between 0540 and 0944, but we also call for the Phase 1 Consultation proposal for

King's Lynn trains to arrive at King's Cross "every 30 minutes" between 0700 and 0959 to be honoured¹. Specifically, this means an additional King's Cross arrival about 0705.

We also call for the Phase 1 Consultation proposal¹ for King's Lynn trains to leave King's Cross "every 30 minutes" during the 1600-1859 peak to be delivered i.e. specifically reinstating the now 'missing' 1612 and 1712 departures.

The Council wants to see the introduction of trains "every 30 minutes" between King's Lynn and Cambridge/Cambridge North during peak times (i.e. arriving 0700-0959 at Cambridge and departing there 1600-1859).

Cambridge is a major employment, business and education location and, even with the capacity uplift proposed by introducing longer 8-car trains, there is a clear need for a minimum half-hourly frequency at peak times for journeys to work and education.

The second track between King's Lynn and Watlington and between Downham Market and Littleport was removed as an economy measure in 1984/5. The Council believes that the anachronistic single line bottlenecks impose severe limits on the scheduling of trains, leading to the longer overall journey times now being proposed.

The Council is therefore further calling on the Government to:

- Adopt a minimum two-track railway between King's Lynn and King's Cross, equipped to accommodate 12-car trains, as a clear long-term strategic aim. Ensure that short-term plans are fully assessed to ensure they do not conflict with this ultimate goal; and
- Instruct the West Anglia Task Force to develop early proposals for full doubling of the single line sections to remove the root cause of delays and timetabling constraints north of Ely.

The concerns and request for changes and Government action expressed here are shared with FLUA and the King's Lynn Business Improvement District (BID).

¹ The earlier Phase 1 consultation document http://flua.org.uk/documents/Timetable_consultation.pdf reads [page 69 of 71]: "Proposed frequency (trains per hour) Kings Lynn to and from London Kings Cross: Mon to Fri Peak 2 trains per hour Every 30 minutes. Mon to Fri High Peak 2 trains per hour Every 30 minutes."