

A note on obfuscation regarding promises in franchise announcements

Jonathan Tyler

When the Department for Transport [DfT] announced the award of the Anglia franchise to Abellio on 10 August 2016 the press release included the statement that "By 2021, there will be more than 32,000 more seats on services arriving at London Liverpool Street in the morning peak". This figure is being used by organisations involved in housing developments to help to justify their schemes. Having a small consultancy role with a group opposing a particular plan in north Essex I made enquiries about the basis of this figure since it seemed optimistic, together with questions on certain related matters.

I first approached Greater Anglia.

04 January 2018

>> Greater Anglia

As a railway consultant I have been asked by a client to seek some greater detail on the franchise commitment to increase the number of seats on morning peak trains into Liverpool Street by 32,000 (55% above the current number) by 2020. I would therefore be most grateful if you could clarify the following points for me.

1. Does the figure relate to the standard peak definition of trains arriving at Liverpool Street between 07:00 and 09:59?
2. Am I correct in thinking that the present total of 22 trains in the high-peak-hour will increase to 24 ?
3. By my count in the Working Timetable 54 trains presently arrive in the three peak hours from the GEML and Southend lines - what will this increase to in the expanded timetable ?
4. How much of the increase will be achieved by increasing the number of vehicles/train ?
5. How much of the increase will be achieved by increasing the number of seats/coach ?
6. How many of the total of 32,000 extra seats are expected to be taken up by passengers who currently stand ?
7. Will the new trains provide for the same number of standing passengers as in the current fleet ?
8. What will be the total capacity into London (seated + 'within-PIXC' standing) of the 2020 peak timetable ?

Can you also please tell me if either of the two stipulated 'Norwich in 90' services will arrive in London during the morning peak ?

I look forward to your response.

Jonathan Tyler

Passenger Transport Networks, York

After several reminders I received this reply:

02 February

Dear Mr Tyler,

Thank you for your recent email.

Please accept my sincere apologies that you have not received any response from our Press Team. Unfortunately your enquiry was directed to the wrong team. I have spoken with our train planning team and they were able to answer a few of your questions as a lot of the information you are requesting is still being worked on.

Here are responses to the few questions I can answer at the current time:

- 1) Yes our definition of Peak is arrivals in London between 07.00-09.59 and departures between 16.00-18.59.
- 2) 24 trains an hour is a long term aspiration but at present the current infrastructure only supports a maximum of 22 trains an hour.

We don't currently have a plan to increase to 24 trains per hour - If we attempted to do so with the current infrastructure the route would be so congested it would seriously affect our timekeeping and performance.

3) Don't know at present - Peak timetable not fully developed yet.

4) & 5) We expect a large proportion of the increase in seat availability to be through providing higher seating capacity trains.

6) Unknown at present.

7) I don't know about standing capacity - All I know is there will be a lot more seats.

8) Unknown at present

It has not been decided exactly what time Norwich in 90 services will run yet but I expect one each way to be at peak time (most likely 07.40 ex Norwich and 17.00 ex Liverpool St).

I expect the other service to be during the off peak but not decided yet.

Once again, please accept my apologies and I am sorry that we are unable to fully answer your questions at this time.

Yours sincerely,

Sandra Woods / Customer Relations Advisor / Greater Anglia

02 February

Dear Sandra Woods

Thank you for both your apology and for the information you have provided.

I (and my clients) will await further material with great interest, but I would like to make two points now.

1. You have explained some sources of increased capacity but are unable to quantify them. Yet the figure of 32,000 extra peak seats was widely publicised at the time of the franchise award ["By 2021, there will be more than 32,000 more seats on services arriving at London Liverpool Street in the morning peak"]. So either the sums were done then and it seems odd that you cannot report them now (maybe with qualifications) - or they were public-relations puffery from DfT, which would be very concerning. This matters because, as you well know, there is acute pressure on capacity from developments in Anglia and if less capacity is going to be available than was expected then that could affect those developments.

2. Are you able to give any indication yet of how the time-savings to achieve 'Norwich in 90' will be made? Surely if there are to be infrastructure works and/or if the new trains can accelerate, run and brake faster then that would permit many more 90-minute schedules throughout the day. Otherwise I fear it is going to be very disappointing tokenism with a negligible impact on demand, let alone on the Anglian economy.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Jonathan Tyler

06 February

Dear Mr Tyler,

Thank you for your e-mail response. In response to your further questions please see responses below;

1: All I can say is that there will definitely be a significant amount of extra seats (especially on West Anglia) but I can't quote exact figures.

2: There won't be any infrastructure enhancements on the route to achieve Norwich in 90. It will be achieved by better train performance (acceleration and braking) as well limiting to just one stop en route (Ipswich).

Once again, thank you for contacting us.

Yours sincerely, / Sandra Woods

Following this I redirected enquiries to DfT and, after a long delay, received this response:

06 March

Dear Mr Tyler,

Thank you for your email of 6 February 2018 about additional seats on East Anglia franchise services. Your correspondence has been forwarded on to the Passenger Services team in the Department for reply.

In October 2016, Abellio East Anglia took control of the East Anglia franchise after a robust and open competition. As part of the franchise agreement, Abellio will invest £1.4 billion to boost rail services and improve the customer experience. This will include:

- * Replacing the entire fleet with new trains within 4 years of the start of the franchise.
- * Increasing operational performance levels from 89.2% to 92.9% Public Performance Measure.

* 1,144 additional weekday services.

* £9,795,000 of stations enhancements.

There is also, as you have highlighted, a commitment to provide 32,000 more seats on services arriving at London Liverpool Street in the morning peak, as was stated by the Secretary of State in August 2016.

I note that you have asked for a breakdown of how the 32,000 extra seats will be allocated. The information you require is available on Department's website and includes an interactive map. The functionality of the map allows you to view a breakdown of the individual line benefits that the new franchise will bring.

Finally, I would like to assure you that the Department is working hard with the industry to provide the service rail customers expect.

Thank you again for your email. I hope you find this reply helpful.

Yours sincerely

S Young / Correspondence Manager – Passenger Services

07 March

Dear S Young

Thank you for your reply. I am afraid that I did not find it helpful since it did not answer my question. *[The interactive map does not give any relevant detail.]*

I require a breakdown of how the figure of 32,000 extra seats was calculated.

Can you therefore please give me the following information, separately for each of the Inter-City, Great Eastern and West Anglia service-groups:

1. how many extra morning-peak seats will be provided by virtue of the higher capacity of the trains; and
2. how many extra morning-peak seats will be provided by virtue of additional services, distinguishing between the several routes.

Can you also please clarify whether any of the 32,000 extra seats will be taken up by passengers who currently stand - in other words, is there expected to be a net increase of less than 32,000 ?

In order to help me understand the proposals - which matter greatly in terms of land-use planning in Essex - I would also like to know:

- * what 'more frequent in peak times' means in respect of Southend services;
- * where the two 'fast peak journeys' from Southend will call;
- * whether any of the through Lowestoft services will run during the peaks; and
- * whether at least one of the 'Norwich in 90' trains will arrive at Liverpool Street before 09:00 and where it will call.

I look forward to receiving your reply, which, since these are simple matters of fact, I hope I can receive in rather less than 20 working days.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Tyler

03 April

Dear Mr Tyler

Thank you for your further email of 7 March 2018, about extra seats on the East Anglia franchise. Your correspondence has been forwarded to the Passenger Services team for reply.

I was concerned to read that you were unsatisfied with our previous response.

In regard to the additional details you have requested, I should explain that the Department does not currently hold that information. Delivery of the timetable and capacity benefits which we outlined in our previous response and which can be found in more detail on the DfT's interactive East Anglia franchise map, are dependent on Greater Anglia gaining the appropriate track access rights from Network Rail. Network Rail and Greater Anglia are working to finalise the May 2019 timetable early this year.

Should you require further information on the benefits of the 2019 timetable, including a breakdown of seating capacity, I would recommend that you contact Greater Anglia directly following the finalisation of the 2019 timetable.

Thank you again for your email. I hope you find this reply helpful.

Yours sincerely / M Killiner / Correspondence Manager – Passenger Services

03 April

Dear Mr Killiner

Once again you have taken nearly the maximum time established in government policy to answer a simple enquiry. I suspect that this is done deliberately to discourage people from bothering to engage with you.

Your response is wholly inadequate.

First, I was referred to you by Anglia, so passing the responsibility for answers back to them is unacceptable.

Second, you say that the Department does not hold the information I requested in regard to the 32,000 extra seats. That figure was stated in the Department's press release published on 10 August 2016 in the name of the Secretary of State. I conclude either that the figure was plucked out of the air for cosmetic reasons and never had any substance - or that there were detailed calculations which have subsequently proved to be unrealistic and therefore embarrassing. This matters profoundly since expectations have been raised. In particular, various players involved with planning policy in Essex are relying on that number and could be being seriously misled. **I therefore insist on being told how the figure was calculated and will refer the matter to my MP (the Shadow Minister for Railways) if you continue to obfuscate.**

As for the second part of your main paragraph, this of course illustrates the nonsense in the current system that DfT can issue a glowing prospectus at the start of a franchise but has limited control of what is actually deliverable in real life.

I expect an answer by the time I return from holiday on 12 April.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Tyler

10 April 2018

Dear Mr Tyler,

Thank you for your further email of 3 April 2018 to the Department, about additional seating for services on the East Anglia franchise.

In regard to your request for further details on additional seats, as we outlined in our previous response, a complete breakdown of seating capacity on services on the East Anglia franchise is not currently held by the Department. Capacity benefits and timetable delivery are wholly dependent on Network Rail granting Greater Anglia the appropriate track access rights.

As we advised, Network Rail and Greater Anglia are currently working hard to finalise the May 2019 timetable, and the operator will be in a better position to provide specific details on improved capacity once that process is complete.

Thank you again for your letter.

Yours sincerely,

M Killiner / Correspondence Manager — Passenger Services

16 April

Dear M Killiner

I appreciate that detailed planning is the responsibility of Network Rail and the franchisee. However, my enquiry refers to a Department for Transport press release. You have now effectively admitted that the 32,000 figure it contained never had any substance. That is unacceptable behaviour and undermines faith in good governance.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Tyler

texts assembled 17 April 2018

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