

## PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

**Subject:** Cross Country Passenger Rail Franchise Public Consultation

**Committee:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 14<sup>th</sup> August 2018  
**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Tudor Evans OBE, Leader  
**CMT Member:** Anthony Payne (Strategic Director for Place)  
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**Ref:** XCT001  
**Key Decision:** ?  
**Part:** 1

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### **Purpose of the report:**

At Full Council on the 25<sup>th</sup> June 2018, a Motion on Notice was passed unanimously agreeing that the Council responds to the Cross Country Passenger Rail Franchise public consultation making clear that the proposals as they stand affect Plymouth and should be rejected. This paper not only sets out the rejection of the proposals that affect Plymouth but also sets out how train services can be improved and to inform the minimum specification issued in the Department for Transport's Invitation to Tender to bidders for the next franchise.

Stretching from Cornwall to Scotland, the Cross Country franchise links Plymouth with seven out of the ten major cities in Great Britain, supporting our economy by linking markets and people in the city across the country. The consultation document suggests that direct trains from Penzance to the Midlands and the north should end at Plymouth. The document describes this part of the world as an extremity of the country. Ending direct rail services at Plymouth can only re-enforce misconceptions about the size and scale of our region and give the impression that Plymouth is now at "the end of the line". The document also suggests that Plymouth passengers be served by the GWR service 'picking up the slack but does not describe how the gap will be filled other than vague suggestion of changes to the GWR franchise. Access to the city for work, education and leisure from stations to the west will no longer be able to rely on services from Cross Country franchise at a time when the south west is

campaigning for an enhanced rail service through the Peninsula Rail Task Force 20 Year Plan.

Passenger numbers in the south west has been outstripping the nation trend by about 100% for more than a decade, but with a train fleet that has stayed largely the same over that period, overcrowding is now a major issue on cross country trains and therefore there is a pressing need for extra capacity and more reliable services if future demand is to be accommodated.

The cross country train fleet that serves the south west, most of which is now approaching 20 years of age and the rest approaching 40 years of age is in need of replacement as part of the franchise renewal. There is a need for improved reliability with increased capacity offering passengers improved levels of comfort for long distance journeys, improved on board facilities and continuous access to reliable high speed internet and mobile connectivity. An ongoing issue that must be resolved by DfT through the franchise process is the disruption to cross country services caused by the existing “Voyager” trains having to be terminated short of their final destination at Exeter or even as far away as Bristol at times when there is even just a threat of waves over-topping the sea wall at Dawlish. The specification should require that a fleet of bi-mode trains is introduced during the franchise on services to the south west. The emphasis must be on increasing seating capacity to meet forecast passenger growth, deliver faster journeys taking advantage of any line speed improvements and the ability to use electric traction on any part of the network where electrification is available.

Our request of Government through the franchise process is we have:

1. Retention of the existing number of Cross Country services and the number places served with current service levels to Penzance and Paignton as a minimum
2. Trains that are reliable and resilient to wave over-topping along the sea wall at Dawlish
3. Faster journey times with better national connectivity
4. A service which will have sufficient capacity to meet forecast growth in passenger demand
5. Trains that provide better comfort, on-board facilities including continuous access to the internet and mobile connectivity

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### **Corporate Plan:**

The passenger rail services provided through the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise will play an important role in helping to grow the city into one of Europe’s most vibrant waterfronts, where an outstanding quality of life is enjoyed by everyone. Our voice on strategic connectivity issues will be strongest by responding to the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise public consultation in partnership with members of the Peninsula Rail Task Force

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**Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:  
Including finance, human, IT and land:**  
**Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications arising from this report and the Council responding to the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise public consultation.

**Legal Implications:**

There are no legal implications arising from this report and the Council responding to the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise public consultation.

**HR Implications:**

There are no HR implications arising from this report and the Council responding to the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise public consultation.

**Risk Implications:**

The risk is that the Council's voice is not heard should it choose not to respond to the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise public consultation, thereby removing its ability to reject proposals that can only re-enforce the misconceptions about the size and scale of our region and the size and scale of our growth ambition.

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**Other Implications: e.g. Child Poverty, Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management:**

**Equalities Implications**

The Council, in responding to the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise public consultation is campaigning for improvements through specifying minimum standards that:

1. Enable faster journey times with better national connectivity
2. Provide service which will have sufficient capacity to meet forecast growth in passenger demand
3. Introduce trains that provide better comfort, on-board facilities including continuous access to the internet and mobile connectivity

**Access**

The Council's response to the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise public consultation will be to campaign for trains that provide better comfort and on-board facilities which may include improved provisions for pedestrians and cyclists as well as wheelchair users and people with mobility issues.

### **Equality and Diversity**

Impacts on people with protected characteristics have been considered and the following benefits identified in the Council's response to the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise public consultation:

1. Enable faster journey times with better national connectivity
2. Provide service which will have sufficient capacity to meet forecast growth in passenger demand
3. Introduce trains that provide better comfort, on-board facilities including continuous access to the internet and mobile connectivity

### **Human Rights**

Human rights issues have been considered and none have been identified.

### **Community Safety Implications**

Community safety issues have been considered and the Council's response to the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise public consultation may see investment in better train services which have community safety benefits

### **Sustainability Implications**

Sustainability issues have been considered and the Council's response to the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise public consultation that will encourage use of more sustainable public transport by:

1. Enabling faster journey times with better national connectivity
2. Provide service which will have sufficient capacity to meet forecast growth in passenger demand

### **Health and Safety Implications**

Council's response to the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise public consultation may result in the next franchise creating additional capacity with greater passenger comfort resulting in improved health and safety for those travelling and encouraging greater use of a mode of transport much safer than using a private car.

### **Privacy Implications**

Privacy issues have been considered and none have been identified.

## **Health and Wellbeing Implications**

Council's response to the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise public consultation may result in the next franchise creating additional capacity with greater passenger comfort resulting in improved health and safety for those travelling and encouraging greater use of a mode of transport much safer than using a private car.

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## **Equality and Diversity:**

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken?

Yes

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## **Recommendations and Reasons for recommended action:**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Supports the response to the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise public consultation as set out in the report.  
Reason: To ensure Plymouth retains the existing number of Cross Country services and the number of places served with current service levels to Penzance and Paignton as a minimum; that trains are reliable and resilient to wave over-topping along the sea wall at Dawlish; that better national connectivity is achieved through faster journey times with sufficient capacity to meet forecast growth in passenger demand; and that trains provide better comfort, on-board facilities including continuous access to the internet and mobile connectivity.
  2. Instructs officers to respond to the consultation objecting to the ending of direct rail services at Plymouth.  
Reason: Access to the city for work, education and leisure from stations to the west will no longer be able to rely on services from the Cross Country franchise at a time when the South West is campaigning for an enhanced rail service through the Peninsula Rail Task Force 20 Year Plan.
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## **Alternative options considered and rejected:**

Not responding to the Cross Country Rail Passenger franchise public consultation was considered and rejected for the reason that if the Council's voice is not heard it is not able to reject proposals that can only re-enforce the misconceptions about the size and scale of our region and the size and scale of our growth ambition.

**Published work / information:**

Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016  
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/1/contents/enacted>

**Background papers:**

Title	Part I	Part II	Exemption Paragraph Number							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

**Sign off:**

Fin		Leg		Mon Off		HR		Assets		IT		Strat Proc	
Originating SMT Member: Anthony Payne													
Has the Cabinet Member(s) agreed the content of the report? Yes													

## I. Background

Plymouth City Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Department's Cross Country franchise consultation document. We believe that improvements in service levels and the customer experience are long overdue and urge the Department for Transport (DfT) to be ambitious in setting the outcomes of future extensions to the existing franchise or new franchisees to ensure that the South West benefits from rail and customer enhancements that have been seen elsewhere across the country and meet the economic needs of the region.

Over the last 5 years severe weather has caused considerable disruption to travel across the South West, cutting off Somerset, Devon and Cornwall from the rest of the UK. In 2014 the line was severed for 9 weeks following the collapse of both the sea wall and a section of cliff between Dawlish and Teignmouth, whilst floods and landslips affected other services from time to time across the region for weeks. Businesses lost confidence in rail services and their

operational costs escalated, with estimated losses of £1.2bn<sup>1</sup> to the economy in Devon and Cornwall for the period of closure.

We encourage the DfT to recognise the aims of the Peninsula Rail Task Force (PRTF) and to set the new franchise requirements within this context and as part of a longer-term plan.

## **1.1. Plymouth**

Plymouth is the largest port city on the South Coast of England with a resident population of 262,712 and another 100,000 within its travel to work area. It is the most significant urban area on the South West peninsula with an economic output of £5.2bn<sup>2</sup> and the provision of over 130,000 jobs<sup>3</sup>. Through the policies contained within the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan (JLP) and other initiatives, Plymouth has an ambition to grow the population to over 300,000, including over 19,000 new homes. Plymouth has great potential to grow its engineering and manufacturing base but connectivity hampers this growth, with the nearest motorway connection 40 miles away and access to international air services 48 miles away at Exeter and rail services that take on average 3 hours 20 minutes to reach London.

The city of Plymouth and the South West peninsula is served by a single vulnerable railway mainline spine from Taunton where the line from Bristol, the Midlands and the North converges with the direct route from London Paddington. Along this mainline spine there are a number of local lines which connect at key nodes which permit between long distance and local services.

Historically the level of services has required mainline trains to serve both a long distance and local market. The South West is served by direct services from the Midlands, North East and Scotland on the Cross Country network that complement the services operated under the Great Western franchise.

Plymouth has six national rail stations, with the station at North Road East in the city centre acting as the primary gateway for long distance rail travel. The remaining five stations are clustered in the south and west of the authority's area being served by local Great Western services to the Tamar Valley and the Cornish mainline to destinations including Liskeard, Truro and Penzance.

The growth in the region's tourism, business and general rail travel creates a number of seasonal peaks that stretch capacity, including student travel to and from a large number of educational establishments in the region with Universities at Plymouth, Exeter, Bristol, Falmouth and Penryn, and holiday traffic, which often leading to overcrowded train services.

## **1.2. Current performance**

Services on the Cross Country network are currently operated by a mixture of High Speed Trains, 'Voyager' and 'Turbostar' diesel multiple units<sup>4</sup>. The network has not benefitted from any

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<sup>1</sup> PRTF – The South West extreme weather resilience 2011/13 & Impact study of flooding in Devon and Somerset 2013 & PRTF Economic study 2014

<sup>2</sup> ONS income based, 2015

<sup>3</sup> ONS 2015

<sup>4</sup> Turbostars operate services between Cardiff and the East Midlands while HSTs and Voyagers operate the long distance services to and from the South West

investment in new rolling stock since the introduction of the fleet of four and five car 'Voyager' multiple units under a previous franchise holder between 2001 and 2002. This has resulted in the Cross Country fleet being the 8<sup>th</sup> oldest in the UK, a position which will only worsen as other operators benefit from new rolling stock and the current fleet continues to age.

Due to the nature of the Cross Country services and the distances covered punctuality and reliability are an issue for the franchise. Services are regularly impacted by delays caused by other operators, Network Rail engineering work and by the reliability of its train fleet, especially the Voyager multiple units which are unable to run along the sea wall section between Teignmouth and Dawlish when there is adverse weather.

In 2017/18 the operator's Moving Annual Average (MAA) for Cancelled and Significantly Late<sup>5</sup> services was 4.9%, an increase of 1% on 2016/17, and is worse than the average for all long distance operators of 4.2%. In the same period the operators MAA Public Performance Measure<sup>6</sup> was 87.7%, a decrease of 2% on 2016/17. The average for all long distance operators was 85.3%.<sup>7</sup>

The current operator achieves a National Rail Passenger Survey (NPRS) score of 86% in overall satisfaction in delivering services for the customer, compared with other long distance operators that achieve between 87%.<sup>8</sup> Although it is encouraging that the overall level of satisfaction has remained relatively stable since 2012, it is disappointing that there has been no improvement over that time period.

### **1.3. The future**

We welcome and support the improvements and benefits that will be delivered through 2018 and 2019.

Rail passenger growth in the South West peninsula, has reached 133% in the South West over the last 21 years<sup>9</sup>, with local services growing at 5.7% pa, compared with rail industry growth forecasting predictions of between 2% and 3.2%. The annual growth in the number of people using the trains in the South West is double the national rate and demand is outstripping supply. Growth in demand has meant that trains have become cramped, and overcrowded, whilst lack of investment and successive timetable changes has meant that services have also become more unreliable and slow. This will prevent further market growth, and it also limits our potential to attract inward investment.

We now believe it is time to look at the level of rail service provision to ensure that it meets the needs of the city of Plymouth and the wider peninsula for the future. The 20 Year Plan submitted to government in November 2016 by the PRTF provides what we believe is a strategic blueprint for improvements and we also welcome the recent additional incremental improvements identified through the work undertaken by GWR and Network Rail (NR) as part of the 'Speed to the West' study.

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<sup>5</sup> Cancelled and Significantly Late is a measure of reliability with a higher percentage reflecting poorer performance

<sup>6</sup> Public Performance Measure is a measure of punctuality and reflects the number of trains reaching their destination on time (within ten minutes of booked arrival time for long distance operators)

<sup>7</sup> ORR Passenger and Freight Rail Performance 2017-18 Q4 Statistical Release

<sup>8</sup> National Rail Passenger Survey Spring 2018 based on relevant service groups

<sup>9</sup> ORR statistical release 2017



**Plymouth City Council will respond to the 28 specific questions set out in the public consultation on-line questionnaire as follows:**

**Q1: What are the particular services, routes, and times of day where you think crowding on Cross Country services needs to be addressed more urgently?**

We consider that services from Bristol to Taunton and Exeter St David's are where the issue of crowding needs to be addressed more urgently. Services along this corridor are used in the morning and afternoon as commuter trains. Department for Transport data shows that for trains departing Bristol in the afternoon seeing Passengers in Excess of Capacity during the three hour peak of 1% with 3% of passengers standing.<sup>10</sup> These services are used as commuter trains service as they provide a direct link between these cities with limited station.

There is a need to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to meet demand as the trains between the South West and Bristol operated by Cross Country provide fast direct links which are preferred by commuters to alternative services which call at the numerous smaller stations between the major towns the route serves.

**Q2: Which of the following potential measures do you think could overcome crowding caused by short distance commuters using long distance Cross Country trains, assuming that suitable alternative services are available?**

- a – removing calls from towns closest to the conurbation centre either completely or just at peak times;**
- b – retaining calls at such stations but restricting them to pick up or set down only;**
- c – removing the validity of local multi-modal tickets on long distance trains;**
- d – other**

We believe that there is a requirement to provide increased capacity on services operated by Cross Country trains which could address overcrowding where this occurs when passengers use these services for short distance commuter journeys. The current fleet predominantly comprises fixed formation trains of four or five carriages. When passenger numbers were declining this train length was able to cope with the volume of passengers traveling either on long distance or shorter commuter journeys. Transport Focus identifies that 20%<sup>11</sup> of passengers were dissatisfied with the level of crowding on Cross Country services. Providing

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<sup>10</sup> Department for Transport July 2018 Table RAI014 – Peak Crowding on a typical autumn weekday by city and train operator: 2016

<sup>11</sup> NRPS Spring 2018

increased capacity would allow current calls to be retained, address issues around overcrowding and lack of luggage space improving the passengers overall journey experience.

The other options presented all have issues which would need to be addressed if any or all of these were to be implemented.

Removing stations stops reduces connectivity and increases journey times for passengers who currently benefit from a Cross Country service enabling them to make long distance journeys either without the need to change trains on route or, where this is unavoidable to reach their intended destination, by limiting the number of changes that are required. There would also be the need to ensure connections to and from the Cross Country network for passengers who are either starting or ending their journey at a station which would no longer be served either entirely or out of peak hours.

If services were limited to calls at those stations during the off peak period this would result in confusion for irregular passengers who may not be aware that a service does not call at the station at the time that they wish to travel. Restricting calls to pick up / set down only or limiting the trains on which a local multi-modal ticket may be valid present issues around how passengers would be prevented from joining a train service.

**Q3: Please rank the following in order of priority for improvement for your future Cross Country services:**

- a - more frequent weekday services;**
- b - more frequent weekend services;**
- c - more additional summer only services;**
- d - earlier times of first trains;**
- e - later times of last trains;**
- f - earlier Sunday morning services**

We believe that there is a requirement for the franchise to develop the Cross Country network to connect the region to the destinations that customers are travelling to.

The priority should be to build on the current frequency to deliver a two trains per hour frequency between Bristol and Exeter as detailed within the Peninsula Rail Task Force 'Closing the Gap' strategic rail blueprint which was published in November 2016.

The provision of a two trains per hour frequency would increase connectivity between the regions whilst also providing additional capacity, which could be further enhanced through the provision of new more resilient rolling stock, to address the issue of overcrowding on this corridor.

In order to improve the frequency of services at weekend we would recommend that there is an earlier first train on a Sunday morning. Currently the first north bound Cross Country departure is at 09.25 which provides an arrival into Bristol two hours later and Birmingham just before 1pm. An earlier departure before 8.30am would enable customers to reach these destinations and others earlier than is currently possible. To provide this we would suggest that the 10.30 departure from Bristol to Glasgow is extended to commence from Plymouth. This would not require any additional resource as the train used to provide the service would be from a late Saturday arrival.

This could provide an opportunity for an earlier Sunday service from Bristol to Plymouth to provide a train to cover the later departure that the unit allocated to the first departure would have formed. The current 08.44 service from Bristol should be looked at to see if this could be retimed to depart an hour earlier to arrive at Plymouth in time to form the current 10.25 departure.

Other improvements that could be included are for an additional service to run on Friday's during the Summer to Newquay which could relieve some of the pressure on the trains that serve the seaside resort over the weekend.

We do not think that there is any requirement for earlier or later trains as the current service frequency should be maintained as the minimum requirement in the franchise specification.

**Q4: If it were possible, would you agree with transferring these local routes to the West Midlands franchise?**

**A - Birmingham to Nottingham;**

**B - Birmingham to Leicester**

We have no opinion on either suggestion as these are outside of the South West peninsula and do not affect regional connectivity as passengers from the region are already required to change journey on route to reach these destinations.

**Would you like to see any other routes or stations transferred to or from the Cross Country franchise?**

We have no opinion on this but any changes that do occur should result in reduced journey times, increase regional connectivity, improve reliability and improve the customer experience.

**Q5: If the network was unable to cope with all the service enhancement aspirations north of Northallerton on the East Coast mainline would a curtailment of one of the existing Cross Country services be acceptable (with the resources redeployed to enhance other existing or new routes)? Yes / No and why?**

We would not support the curtailment of an existing Cross Country service in order to ensure that the network north of Northallerton would be able to meet the proposed service enhancements. Such a proposal would reduce the connectivity and require passengers to have to change train on route to reach their destination with the problems that can bring in maintaining connections to destinations beyond the Cross Country network.

Alternatives could be to:

- Divert a current Cross Country service from Northallerton via Sunderland to reach Newcastle. This would continue to provide a through service, serving new destinations which do not currently see Cross Country services and increases the journey options for customers increasing connectivity, or;
- Changing the destinations of services from Birmingham New Street to free up capacity on the East Coast Main Line providing new destinations which better serve the

journeys being made by Cross Country customers. The number of journeys from the South West to the North West have increased between by 40% since 1995/6 whilst journeys to the North East and Scotland have decreased by 32% and 57% respectively over the same time period, or;

We would recommend that the franchise specification includes the provision of a new fleet of bi-mode trains as part of the franchise specification. These would replace the current fleet of High Speed Trains and Voyagers operating long distance services. The new fleet would be able to can run at higher speeds over the electrified sections of the Cross Country network fitting in alongside the new IET trains being introduced to services on the East Coast and would still be able to reach destinations where there is no electrification thus maintaining connectivity between regions.

Enabling services to run at higher speeds would reduce overall journey times on the Cross Country network, benefitting from planned line speed improvements on sections of the Exeter to Plymouth route and from electrification schemes that are currently being delivered, for example the extension of electrification to Bromsgrove on the line between Bristol and Birmingham.

The current diesel engine Voyager fleet suffers from reliability issues when there are adverse weather conditions on the sea wall section between Teignmouth and Dawlish. The longest period of disruption to this section was in 2014 when the line was severed for 9 weeks following the collapse of both the sea wall and a section of cliff. Network Rail is predicting that this section will be increasingly disrupted over the next century. Disruption leads to services either starting or terminating at stations to the east of this section resulting in increased journey times and disconnected journeys for customers who may not be aware of the disruption until they arrive at the station to commence their journey.

**Q6: Should bidders be given flexibility to make limited changes to the extremities of the network so that benefits such as reduced crowding in the centre of the network can be provided? Yes / Yes but only if alternatives are provided / No**

Address crowding in core of network through looking at calling patterns / destinations served but have to protect services through communities at the end of the current Cross Country network - especially Cornwall as gives passengers from across Devon and Cornwall regular services to Bristol north of Taunton and GWR alternative would involve changing trains which can be a disincentive to travel by train - especially for older travellers or those with children / large amount of luggage

If passengers are required to break their journey on route to make a connection on to another operators services this results in longer journey times - 87% Cross Country passengers surveyed satisfied with length of time journey scheduled to take - 89% satisfaction for long distance TOCs (Transport Focus NRPS Spring 2018)

**Q7: Do you agree that the current level of Cross Country services to the following routes are the minimum that must be specified for: West of Plymouth to Penzance; From Exeter / Newton Abbot to Paignton; North**

**of Edinburgh to Aberdeen; Southampton to Bournemouth; Guildford; Bath; Cardiff to Bristol Temple Meads?**

Yes we would agree that the current level of service needs to be the minimum requirement for the new franchise across the South West region. These services provide valuable, long established connections for customers in rural areas to the Midlands and the North. This increases passenger choice when deciding which operator to travel with and can better meet the journey needs of customers through the provision of direct links rather than expecting changes of train and operator to be made on route.

**Do you agree that the changes to the following routes would be acceptable if a similar or improved service was provided by another operator: West of Plymouth to Penzance; From Exeter / Newton Abbot to Paignton; North of Edinburgh to Aberdeen; Southampton to Bournemouth; Guildford; Bath; Cardiff to Bristol Temple Meads?**

The current level of service should be the minimum for the franchise and should be included in the franchise specification. Although there will be an enhanced Great Western service from Plymouth to Penzance terminating Cross Country services at Plymouth would result in the need for passengers to change trains on journeys being made to / from Cornwall. This would result in extended journey times with issues around needing to maintain connections especially for northbound services where there may only be one train operated by Cross Country to the customers intended destination.

Cross Country currently sees poor reliability with a CaSL score of 4.9% and a PPM score of 87.7%. With reliability and performance an issue for the franchise it would be increasingly important to be able to ensure that connections to destinations on lightly served branch lines or to stations which Cross Country passes through but does not stop at would prolong passenger. Cross Country and Great Western services need to be viewed as complementing each other to meet a range of different journey needs rather than competing against each other for the same passengers as they serve different markets / destinations.

**Q8: Do you think the Department's minimum specification should preserve exactly today's pattern of services and station calls rather than offer an opportunity to change? Yes / No**

We agree that the minimum specification for the franchise should allow for changes to be made to the destinations or origins of services but it is important that the current frequency level from stations in the South West region should be maintained. Cross Country services provide valuable links across the region and beyond complementing the services operated by Great Western.

The new franchise should be seen as an opportunity to enhance the network and increase connectivity. If people are going to be encouraged to use the train then providing services going to destinations they wish to travel to while reducing the need to change trains on route can only encourage this. We also consider that it is important to maintain the current two trains per hour frequency between Exeter and Bristol to ensure connectivity to other major conurbations

**Q9: Should bidders have some flexibility to make fewer calls at some stations, for example if that enabled them to accelerate services? Yes / No**

The franchise should only allow bidders to propose changes to the number of calls at some stations if they are lightly used and where there are suitable connections from other stations to allow customers on Cross Country services to reach these destinations. If there are no suitable connections then bidders should be required to maintain the existing number of calls at these stations and to support Community Rail Partnership activities to increasing the use of those stations.

**Q10: Should the minimum specification have the number of trains from each station to Birmingham but give bidders the flexibility to decide where trains go after Birmingham?**

We consider that it is important that the connectivity from stations in the South West to Birmingham is maintained as Cross Country services provide an important link from the region to major urban areas in the Midlands and the North. However there does need to be flexibility to allow for the network to develop to meet changing travel patterns rather than retaining a service pattern that may no longer meet the needs of the customers using these services. By allowing bidders to determine the destinations of services beyond Birmingham provides for increased inter-regional connectivity through allowing for new destinations to be served. Allowing bidders to make changes to destinations beyond Birmingham capacity on sections of the route where there is currently congestion or congestion is predicted.

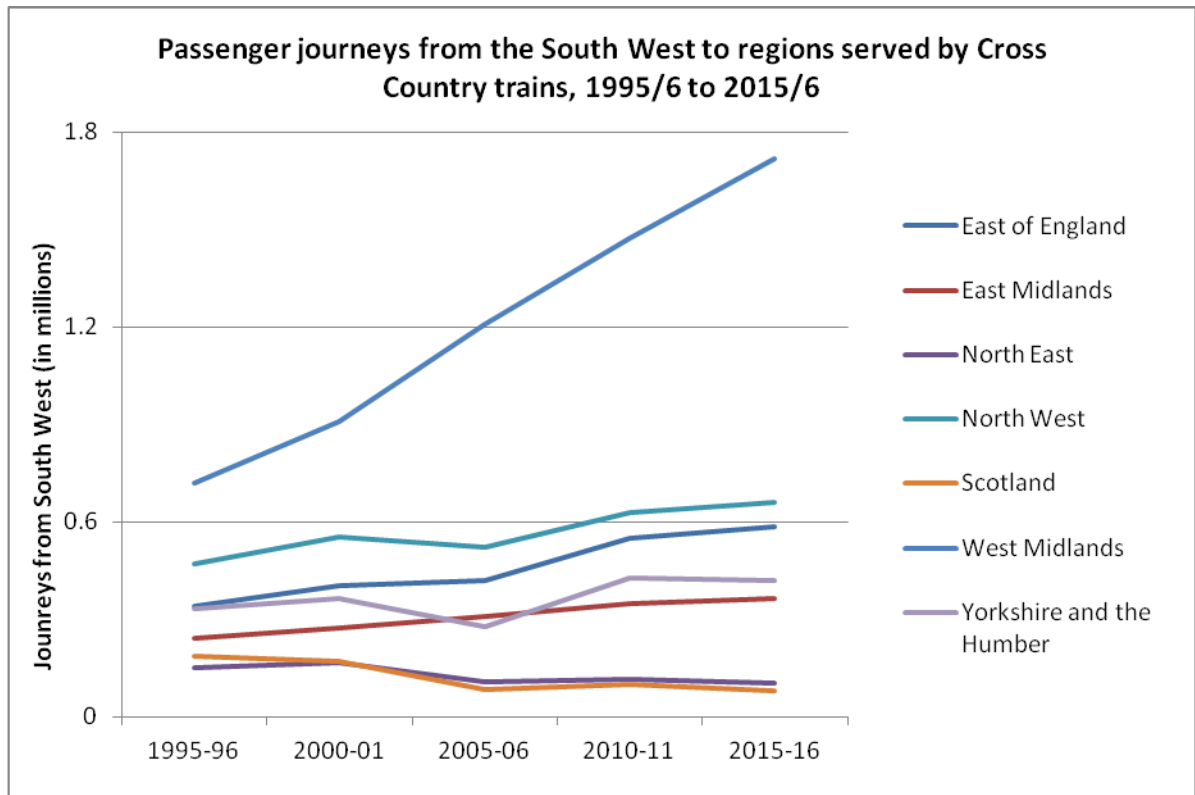
**Q11: Are there stations or routes beyond the geography of the current Cross Country network that should receive calls that they currently do not receive?**

There has been continued growth in the number of passengers travelling on Cross Country services since the network was privatised in the mid-1990s. This increase has seen passenger journeys increase from 3.5 million in 1995/6 to almost 7 million in 2015/6, as shown in the graph below.<sup>12</sup>

Over that time there has been a change in the origins and destinations of passengers travelling on Cross Country trains to and from the South West. There has been a shift away from journeys to Scotland and the North East to those made to the East / West Midlands and the North West. However these changes have not been reflected in the Cross Country network which has remained the same since it was reconfigured in 2007. This saw the removal of the majority of services from the South West region to the North West with the concentration of services to the North East and Scotland via the East Coast Main Line. Services to the North West run either from the South Coast or Reading or require passengers to change trains at Bristol Temple Meads.

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<sup>12</sup> Connecting the Dots, TravelWatch South West, October 2017



This change in the regions to which passengers are travelling needs to be reflected in the Cross Country network so that passengers are able to reach a wider range of destinations without the need to change trains on route. This would also increase inter-regional connectivity bringing major urban areas within easier reach of the South West.

To meet this there would be a need for some services which currently run via the North East to Scotland to be altered so that they serve Manchester, Liverpool and the North West. These were areas traditionally served by Cross Country services from the South West but which have not had direct trains since the recasting of the Cross Country network in 2007. This would reduce the need for passengers to change trains at Birmingham which sees current Cross Country services waiting for on average seven minutes to allow for connections from other operators services. A recasting of the Cross Country network with a better distribution of services to the North East and North West would ease pressure on the East Coast Main Line north of Northallerton where the network may not be able to cope with all the aspirations for enhanced services.

**Q12: Are there stations within the geography of the current Cross Country network that should receive calls that they currently do not receive?**

We believe that consideration should be given to Cross Country trains including stops at Ivybridge station which is the only station to the east of Plymouth before Totnes. Ivybridge station serves the town of the same name, the South Hams and the growing new urban area of Sherford which is currently being built on the edge of Plymouth. Sherford will eventually total 5,500 households and 80,000m<sup>2</sup> employment and retail space.



Ivybridge station currently sees only limited services operated by Great Western call there with frequencies varying from 30 minutes to four hours depending on the day of the week and time of day.

<b>Ivybridge Station services<sup>13</sup></b>			
<b>West</b>	<b>First train</b>	<b>Last train</b>	<b>Number of services</b>
<b>Monday to Friday</b>	0723	0025	10
<b>Saturday</b>	0758	1904	9
<b>Sunday</b>	0946	1706	3

<b>East</b>	<b>First train</b>	<b>Last train</b>	<b>Number of services</b>
<b>Monday to Friday</b>	0824	2326	10
<b>Saturday</b>	0813	2130	8
<b>Sunday</b>	1423	2130	4

Ivybridge station has been identified as a rural hub town using the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs methodology. This identifies rural hub towns where there is a population of 10,000 to 30,000 that play ‘very important roles as ‘hubs’ in the rural areas around them (rural hinterland) in terms of providing services, employments and businesses’.<sup>14</sup> In 2016-17, 55,518 journeys made from the station, an increase of 5% on the number made in 2015-16.<sup>15</sup>

The inclusion of Ivybridge as a station on the Cross Country network would increase the level of connectivity from the town and the surrounding area to other regions of the country reducing journey times for passengers making use of the station. Likewise customers travelling in the opposite direction would be able to reach the area without the need to change trains more than they need to or by alighting at Totnes and then continuing their journey by another mode of transport.

Customers who already wish to travel on services to either Bristol, the Midlands or the North currently have the option of making use of a Great Western service for the initial leg of their journey and then changing trains at either Totnes, Newton Abbot or Exeter Saint David’s or to drive either to Plymouth or Totnes. If they decide to make use of a car for the first leg of their journey this adds to the number of car journeys being made in to the centre of Plymouth or to Totnes along the A38.

We would also recommend that Saltash is included as a calling point on the Cross Country network. As with Ivybridge this station currently sees a limited number of services provided by Great Western and the provision of additional services could unlock the potential for increased passenger journeys to and from the station. This would also provide a stop between Plymouth

<sup>13</sup> Train service are based on the May to December 2018 Great Western Railway timetable

<sup>14</sup> Connecting the Dots, TravelWatch South West, October 2017

<sup>15</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/excel\\_doc/0012/26130/estimates-of-station-usage-2016-17.xlsx](http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/excel_doc/0012/26130/estimates-of-station-usage-2016-17.xlsx)



and Liskeard and reduce the need for customers to either change trains or to drive into Plymouth to commence their journey.

**Q13: What changes would you like to see to the way Cross Country currently sells and provides tickets?**

The way in which passengers purchase train tickets has changed greatly since the development of the internet and mobile phone technology. The traditional method of paying for a ticket either by cash or debit /credit card at a ticket office, whilst still the preferred method for many customers, may no longer be experienced by a growing proportion of the population as they have moved online to undertake these transactions allowing them to check prices, ticket validity and make the best choice price/time combination for their journey.

Cross Country provides customers with the ability to use a mobile phone app to check train times, fares and purchase tickets. The phone app also provides passengers with the ability to check live train information so they can keep up to date with service information.

As mobile technology develops further then the ways in which people are able to pay for services will evolve. Future developments should include the implementation of EMV / pay wave technology which should be rolled out across the franchise as a customer benefit.

Although the use of mobile technology has increased, smart cards have remained popular and can bring customers the benefits of being able to make multi-modal journeys involving a range of different transport providers more easily. It has long been recognised that smart cards increase the use of public transport and this should be extended to rail ticketing.

Both mobile tickets and particularly smartcards have strong appeal for passengers with the expectation that these ticket formats work in the same fully integrated way that traditional paper tickets do currently.

Even with increasing use of mobile technology or online facilities there will still be a need for customers to be able to purchase a ticket in person using cash at the station and these facilities should be maintained.

**Q14: What changes would you like to see to the current Cross Country fares structure?**

It has been recognised that national fare structures need to be simplified and aligned with the changing needs of today's customers for multi-trip, smartcard and other user-friendly options.

There has been debate around the type of fares, the ease of using the rail fares structures and value for money for the customer within the UK rail market over recent years. Most customers may not pay attention to who operates the train they travel on, rather basing their choice on arrival / departure times, the journeys duration and how much the ticket costs. The option to purchase one ticket for any complete journey regardless of operator is an important customer benefit and should not disadvantage customers in respect of value for money.

Research undertaken by Transport Focus has shown that the perception of the value for money on Cross Country services as only 50% either satisfied or good compared to 55% for long distance operators.<sup>16</sup>

**Q15: What changes would you like to see to the Advanced Purchase on the Day (APOD) system?**

We would recommend the removal of the allocated seat from APOD tickets. The availability of a purchase on the day ticket with a seat reservation included causes issues for passengers already on board having to move when an APOD ticket holder boards and wishes to occupy their reserved seat. These APOD tickets should be treated in the same as other tickets which are purchased on the day and on which seat reservations are not available.

Sales of APOD tickets are currently limited to online purchases and are not available at station ticket offices or via self-service ticket machines. By limiting their availability in this way passengers who would benefit from purchasing an APOD ticket by paying less for a last minute journey but do not have the ability to purchase online are denied access to the savings they could make. Consideration should be given to widening the availability of these tickets so that they can be purchased in person at a station to ensure that all passengers can access these savings regardless of their access to the internet.

**Q16: What additional information could be useful to you when planning your journeys or making connections onto other services?**

Customers traveling by train like to be able to plan their entire journey from door to door. This is particularly true in areas where there are households without access to their own car or disproportionately high levels of residents aged over the age of 65. In 2011 only three out of four households had access to their own car or van in the major urban areas of Bristol, Bournemouth, Exeter, Plymouth and Torbay while over 30% of the population in the South Hams, East Devon, West Devon and West Somerset were over the age of 65.<sup>17</sup> These groups rely more heavily on public transport for the journeys that they make.

Information should be made available at the time of planning the journey and purchasing the ticket so that a customer is provided with details of:

- detailed from how to get to the station via public transport;
- information about any changes of train that need to be made on route with details on whether there is a need to change platform to do so, and;
- public transport information on how to get from their last station to their destination.

During a journey which has been delayed there is a need for more information on whether connecting services will be held as soon as delay is known and where there is little likelihood of service regaining time - if not able to hold connection and if on lightly

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<sup>16</sup> NRPS Spring 2018

<sup>17</sup> Connecting the Dots, TravelWatch South West, October 2017

served route where can find onward transport which should be provided for when train arrives at station

### **How would you like it communicated to you?**

Any information communicated to customers either before or during a journey needs to be provided across in a range of different methods which meet the needs of the diverse nature of the customers who are traveling. Whilst people are using mobile technology more there are still groups for whom this is not the preferred method of communication. Any information would need to meet the needs of older or disabled customers so that they feel confident that they are able to reach their destination.

Updates on journey progress, connections to destinations not served by the operator and requiring a change can all be made by a range of social media platforms accessed by customers who regularly use those in their day to day lives. Social media and the use of the Cross Country ticket app for providing

For those passengers who do not use social media there is still a need for the traditional methods of on board announcements at regular intervals or when there is new information to provide so that customers are kept informed. Staff should be also be available on the train or at the station so passengers boarding know what has been arranged at times of major disruption or what the arrangements are in place at their interchange station for them to complete their journey.

### **Q17: How could the way in which Cross Country deals with your complaints and provides compensation to you be improved?**

We have no comment on this as we have no experience or anecdotal evidence to refer to on which to base an opinion on how the complaints / compensation process can be improved.

Cross Country currently scores well in terms of passenger satisfaction when compared with other operators with regards to complaints handling with 48% of respondents satisfied with process (29% national) and 47% satisfied with the outcome (28% national).<sup>18</sup>

### **Q18: What more could be done to improve access and provide facilities for those with disabilities or additional needs?**

The train presents a practical travel option for people with disabilities or additional needs but for these customers to feel that it is accessible to them there need to be improved facilities both on board and at the railway station. Step free access should be available at all stations in the South West peninsula and this would demonstrate that the rail industry is dedicated to promoting and providing access to more people within this category.

Information on assisted travel should be more visible when a customer from these groups is planning their journey, with trained staff available at the station to help them on and off the train. On board the train there should be an increase in the number of wheel chair spaces or priority seats that are available. Announcements and updates should also be made in ways that

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<sup>18</sup> ORR 'Measuring Up' Annual Rail Consumer Report 2018

meet the needs of these groups so that they are kept informed of any changes due to delays to the journey.

**Q19: How do you believe Cross Country staff could be more effective in providing the service and assistance that passengers need on a modern railway network?**

We believe that to meet passenger expectations for service and assistance there is a requirement for Cross Country staff to be available at the major stations that they serve and to be more visible on the train. Currently the operator relies upon other operators' staff at stations across the South West region to provide assistance to customers travelling on Cross Country services. Staff at stations and on trains will need to be proactive, visible and informed so that they can meet passengers expectations at both ends of the journey.

**Q20: What comment, if any do you have on improving the overall passenger experience before and after the journey?**

The passenger journey experience is made up of many different points from the moment when the decision to travel is made to when the journey is completed. Each point contributes to the overall satisfaction of the customer with the journey and the likelihood of them to make use of the services provided in the future.

Improvements need to be made to the ease of access to information on the Cross Country website. Important information which is of value either to customers with specific needs (for example, how to book assisted travel) or on train facilities is often hidden away requiring either several clicks through links or a familiarity with the website to access. Information is sometimes located in less than intuitive locations – assisted travel, for example is to be found under the 'Customer relations' section rather than the 'On board' section.

The current franchise does not operate stations although at certain locations on their routes they are the only operator serving that station, e.g. Burton-on-Trent which is served by Cross Country long distance and regional services but is operated by East Midlands Trains. As a result passengers have to rely on staff from other operators for information about Cross Country services. There is a need for an increase in the number of staff, especially at key stations where customers require assistance to find their train, direction to a connecting service, and help at times of disruption or to access a pre-arranged service.

**Q21: Please rank your priority for improvement to the carriage layouts for regional / local trains on Cross Country: a - extra room for luggage; b - cycle storage; c - more seats; d - greater leg-room; e - more table seats as opposed to airline seats; f - seats that align with windows; g - more comfortable room for short distance standing**

We have no comment to make as these trains do not operate on the Cross Country network in the South West region.

**Q22: Please rank your priority for improvement to the carriage layouts for long distance inter-city trains on Cross Country: a - extra room for luggage; b - cycle storage; c - more seats; d - greater leg-room; e -**

**more table seats as opposed to airline seats; f – seats that align with windows; g – more comfortable room for short distance standing**

The challenge for the next franchise is to meet increasing demand whilst enhancing the on train environment so that customers have an improved journey experience. To meet passenger expectations we believe the priorities for carriage layouts should be:

1. The provision of extra room for luggage. Journeys on Cross-Country are predominantly for leisure purposes with customers traveling with multiple items of luggage with holidays no longer only being taken during the summer months. In the Spring 2018 NRPS survey 60% of customers felt the space for luggage was either satisfactory or good.
2. There needs to be an increase in the seating capacity of trains operating services so that the increases in the number medium to long distance train journeys can be met without the need for customers to stand for part of their journey.
3. On longer distance journeys passengers naturally spend the majority of journey sat down so it is important that the amount of leg room is sufficient to allow passengers to stretch out their legs with seats provide enough support to be comfortable without being too hard. Greater leg room with more comfortable seats for passengers making longer journeys. In the most recent passenger survey only 69% of customers responded that the comfort of the seats was either satisfactory or good.
4. On long distance journeys passengers like to be able to sit back and watch the world go by with the time on the train forming the start of their holiday. Ensuring that seats align with windows, even for airline seats which may currently be placed alongside a structural support between windows, would require some reconfiguration of the spacing between which could increase legroom and increase levels of passenger comfort.
5. The current layout of carriages used for Cross Country services means that there are either two or four tables per carriage with the remaining seating being of the airline style. This results in passengers travelling as a group often being split up for the entirety of their journey with this being a particular issue where there are children within a family group. The provision of additional tables could address some of this issue but there would be a trade off in the need to reduce the number of seats per carriage to accommodate the additional tables. Increasing the length of trains to provide extra seating capacity could address this.
6. Increasing the amount of cycle storage is probably more important for shorter distance journeys; however the rise in the number of cycle riders in the UK means that more people may wish to take their bicycle with them on the train for either a short break or longer holiday. Department of Transport statistics show that in 2016 12% of the population cycled for any purpose at least once per week.<sup>19</sup>
7. This is more of a priority for the regional/local trains operated on the franchise. Any increase in standing space on long distance trains could only happen if this did not lead to a reduction in the amount of seating available on the trains operating these services.

**Q23: What other comments or suggestions do you have about the on-board experience?**

As passengers are traveling for long distances with calls at stations where there are limited facilities there is a requirement for an improved on board refreshment offer. The current use of

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<sup>19</sup> Department for Transport, Walking and Cycling Statistics, England: 2016

an at seat refreshment trolley service is often hampered by the inability of the steward to negotiate the train due to levels of crowding or luggage blocking aisles. This results in passengers having to navigate their way through the train to find the refreshment trolley and then have to negotiate their way back to their seat. The provision of enhanced refreshment facilities, perhaps through a fixed buffet counter, would allow for a wider range of refreshments to be offered and be easier for customers to locate when on the train.

With the growth in the use of mobile technology customers increasingly want to be able to access these services whilst on the move, as they would be able to do so at home. Customers use this technology to work whilst on the move remaining in contact with their place of work or with contacts by email as well as by phone. Train journeys have now become part of the working day and time spent on the train being used more productively.

Access to entertainment and being able to make productive use of the time spent on the train only works when there is a reliable connection to the internet via a wi-fi connection.

We recognise that the Government is rolling out free Wi-Fi through the franchise process, but that is only half of the picture. Having the equipment on trains makes no difference if users cannot access or rely on the service due to a lack of continuous mobile connectivity resulting in poor or no mobile phone signal strength in areas that the rail lines pass through.

This is a particular problem in rural areas such as Wiltshire, Somerset and South Devon where topography creates an additional challenge alongside a sparse population. Voice and data signals are affected. The map below, although taken from the GWR website, indicates the scale of the problem within the South West peninsula for all train operators;





The provision of good quality continuous and, consistent Wi-Fi and mobile connectivity enables business travel to be productive and improves the customer experience for all. The latest Transport Focus survey shows that customer's satisfaction with wi-fi availability on Cross Country is only 32%.<sup>20</sup> The franchise specification should require that:

- Modern standard Wi-Fi and mobile connectivity should be available and usable on all trains by 2020 in line with the DfT rolling stock perspective<sup>21</sup>
- Express trains and services should have on board entertainment systems that allow customers to use their own devices to access the entertainment and reduce the use of Wi-Fi bandwidth required
- Transport focus customer satisfaction score targets should be set across the franchise for wi-fi and mobile connectivity availability

**Q24: Which initiatives would you suggest to try to reduce the disturbance caused by the 'churn' of passengers alighting and boarding at frequent station calls?**

The provision of a carriage which is mainly left unreserved may be a possible solution to the limiting the disturbance caused by the 'churn' of passengers where there are frequent station calls with short journeys being made. Such an initiative would not prevent passengers making short journeys from sitting in a seat which may already have been vacated or where a reservation starts beyond the station where they will be alighting but could help to reduce the impact of these shorter journeys on passengers who are travelling longer distances.

**Q25: Are there any improvements to the level of stakeholder engagement by Cross Country that you would like to see?**

Currently there is no engagement between Cross Country and Plymouth City Council other than through both being members of the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership. This contrasts with stakeholder engagement between the Council and Great Western where there are meetings held quarterly. Great Western and Plymouth City Council also engage at timetable meetings which are held twice yearly as a minimum.

**And how could stakeholder engagement be improved?**

It should be a requirement of the franchise specification for regular meetings between the franchise holder and stakeholders at agreed intervals. There should be a minimum of two meetings per year with additional meetings to be held as required.

**Q26: Does Cross Country provide a sufficient level of support to Community Rail Partnerships in your experience?**

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<sup>20</sup> NRPS Spring 2018

<sup>21</sup> DfT rolling stock perspective May 2016 second edition – Moving Britain ahead

The view of our local Community Rail Partnership, the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership, of which Plymouth City Council is a core member, is that Cross Country provides a sufficient level of support.

The funding provided by Cross Country to Community Rail Partnerships is very welcome and helpful, particularly at a time when local government budgets are under great pressure. The core payment of £10,000 per year is especially important and helps ensure the Partnerships' sustainability.

**Has this improved in the last year / 18 months?**

The support provided by Cross Country to DCRP has improved since the beginning of their Direct Award in October 2016.

**Q27: Please provide ideas on what more you feel the franchise could do to help the relevant Community Rail Partnerships?**

As detailed above Cross Country provides considerable financial support each year which helps to ensure the Partnerships' sustainability. Any increase in this amount would of course be much appreciated. There is the opportunity too to bid to Cross Country's Community Engagement Fund and this is currently £170,000 per year. It would be good to see this continued and the amount increased.

Cross Country's liaison with Community Rail Partnerships is mainly through their Stakeholder Managers. This works well. One area that it would be good to develop is that of joint marketing, with the company doing more work with Community Rail Partnerships and others to promote rail travel to areas and destinations covered by the CRPs. This should include the opportunity for joint leaflets and posters which would appear in Cross Country allocated spaces at stations.

**Q28: Do you have any other views on how the future Cross Country franchise could be improved that have not been captured in the questions above?**

We believe that it is important that there is a requirement within the franchise specification for a future operator to introduce a fleet of new bi-mode trains.

The current fleet is unable to operate a full service when adverse weather affects the sea wall section between Dawlish and Teignmouth. This lack of resilience means that passengers are faced with disconnected journeys that are extended through having to wait for another train to complete their journey, with no assurance of being able to find a seat or space for luggage.

The average age of the current Cross Country fleet is 18.60 years compared to 21.08 years nationally, placing the fleet as the eighth oldest on the network.<sup>22</sup> As other franchises benefit

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<sup>22</sup> <http://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/displayreport/report/html/eb76bd71-3fe0-4f1c-8f2a-977de6e833c0>



from investment in new rolling stock this is a position which will only worsen if similar there is no similar investment for the franchise.

The provision of a more reliable and resilient fleet can deliver the increases in capacity and improvements to comfort and on train facilities that passenger will have become used to on other operators train services. A new fleet of trains should also lead to reduced journey times by being able to run at higher speeds, making full use of line speed improvements or by making use switching from diesel power to electric traction on electrified sections of the network.

Improvements to the train fleet would meet passenger expectations of being able to make journeys comfortably and quickly whilst delivering increased capacity that is better able to meet future passenger growth.

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<b>Improvement</b>	<b>Up to 2019</b>	<b>Up to 2020</b>	<b>Up to 2022</b>	<b>Post 2022</b>
Plymouth to Bristol one train an hour from 05:30 to 21:30 M-Sat	Development	Delivery		
Plymouth to Bristol one train an hour from 08:25 to 20:25 Sun	Development	Delivery		
Bristol(NE/Mid) to Plymouth one train an hour from 07:30 to 21:30 M-Sat	Development	Delivery		
Bristol(NE/Mid) to Plymouth one train an hour from 09:30 to 22:30 Sun	Development	Delivery		
Exeter to Plymouth two trains an hour (min) to arrive from 07:00 until 23:00 M-Sat	Development	Delivery		
Exeter to Plymouth one train every 45 mins (min) to arrive from 09:00 until 23:00 Sun	Development		Delivery	
Plymouth to Exeter two trains an hour (min) to arrive from 07:00 until 23:00 M-Sat	Development	Delivery		
Plymouth to Exeter one train every 45 minutes (min) to arrive from 09:00 until 23:00 Sun	Development		Delivery	
Penzance to Plymouth to operate from 06:30 to 21:45 every 30 minutes M-Sat	Development	Delivery		
Penzance to Plymouth to operate from 10:00 to 21:30 every 60 minutes Sun	Development	Delivery		
Plymouth to Penzance to operate from 07:15 to 22:00 every 30 minutes M-Sat	Development	Delivery		
Plymouth to Penzance to operate from 11:00 to 22:30 every 60 minutes Sun	Development	Delivery		
WI-FI improvements along the route	Development	Delivery		
On board entertainment systems	Development	Delivery		
Minimum specified levels of facilities, standards and response times for rail replacement vehicles should be contained with the franchise specification.	Delivery			
Speed to the West outcomes	Development		Delivery	
Plymouth station redevelopment phase 1	Development	Delivery		
Plymouth station redevelopment phase 2	Development		Delivery	

Plympton station	Development		Delivery
Tavistock line and station design and competitive tender	Development	Delivery	
Tavistock line and station build		Development	Delivery
Mayflower 400	Development	Delivery	
Support and services for local events	Delivery		
Key trains identified and safeguarded	Delivery		
Replacement local rolling stock	Development		Delivery
All trains to have Controlled emission toilets	Development		Delivery
Long Distance on train specification	Development	Delivery	
Regional on train specification	Development		Delivery
Local on train specification	Development		Delivery
Part electrification of Devon banks	Development		Delivery
Station improvements		Development	Delivery
Step free access to all stations	Development		Delivery
Adequate car parking and pre-booking arrangements	Development	Delivery	
Wider transport integration improvements	Development		Delivery
Mobile and e-tickets roll out		Development	Delivery
Additional self-service ticket machines		Development	Delivery
Standardised advance fares availability and approach			Development
Improvement to ticket gate volume to reduce crowding		Development	Delivery
Flexible season tickets	Development	Delivery	
Ability to staff 7day operation	Delivery		
Improved and expanded catering services	Delivery		

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