



24 Hatton Garden Liverpool L3 2AN
Tel: 0151-227 5181 Fax: 0151-236 2457
www.merseytravel.gov.uk

Merseytravel

Our ref: IT/JLD-710/SL*

Contact: Neil Scales

Your ref:

Tel: 0151 330 1101

Date: 16 September 2011

Mr Chris Hanks
Head of Development
Alliance Rail Holdings
88 The Mount
York
YO24 1AR

Dear *Chris*

Alliance Rail Track Access Pre-Application Consultation

Please find enclosed Merseytravel's response to the above consultation. I hope it is helpful to you.

Regards.

Yours sincerely

Neil Scales
Chief Executive & Director General

Enc.

Alliance Rail Track Access Pre-Application Consultation: Merseytravel Response

1. Consultation Procedure

- 1.1 Merseytravel must start by placing on record that it is extremely disappointed and seriously concerned by the failure of both parties to consult Merseytravel directly on two proposed Track Access Applications which incorporate services calling at a station within Merseyside, supported by Merseytravel and appearing to assume that significant investment will be made at that station in facilities designed to complement the services proposed. It further records its extreme disappointment and serious concern that Merseytravel was not invited to the rail industry seminar at which the applicants presented their proposals and has neither received the information presented at this seminar nor that supplied subsequently to those participating. Merseytravel discovered that these applications were to be made through being contacted by colleagues at West Yorkshire PTE and Transport for Greater Manchester a few days before the original closing date for responses. Merseytravel looks to the parties and the Office of Rail Regulation to ensure that similar failures do not happen again. In view of the above, Merseytravel will copy this response directly to the Office of Rail Regulation.
- 1.2 Despite this, Merseytravel will endeavour to provide a response to the parties within the revised deadline but reserves the right to make additional or amended comments when the Office of Rail Regulation carries out its formal consultation on these applications.

2. General Comments

- 2.1 Merseytravel is disappointed to note that neither of these applications features additional services to and from Liverpool. This is despite the recommendations of the West Coast Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy (WCML RUS), in which Alliance Rail participated, for improved services for Liverpool.
- 2.2 Merseytravel is content with the principle of Open Access operation, noting that in other areas Open Access operators have provided innovative fare offers and effective competition on service quality with the franchised operators. It does have comments to make on the detail of both applications.
- 2.3 Merseytravel is concerned to ensure that the overall package of services proposed by franchised and Open Access operators, taken together, best meets the needs of Merseyside. It would not support the granting of access rights to one operator which prevented the development or implementation of an overall service package

maximising the economic or social benefits to Merseyside, regardless of the strength of the business case for the individual operator making the application.

- 2.4 Merseytravel has taken a very active part in the development of each of the Route Utilisation Strategies which are relevant to Merseyside and would oppose the granting of access rights which hindered the implementation of the agreed, cross-industry recommendations made in the WCML RUS and other relevant RUSs or equivalent strategies, such as the Northern Hub Study.
- 2.5 Merseytravel notes that Alliance Rail now proposes to operate its services with 200 km/h (125mph) tilting, dual-mode rolling stock from the outset. This is a welcome development, yet Merseytravel must express reservations that a period of little over two years is far from sufficient for procurement, design, construction and type approval of such complex rolling stock. Type approval could itself occupy half of that time. As there are presently no trains of similar design in operation on the British railway network, it would be helpful if Alliance were to provide evidence of the successful in-service operation of trains of equivalent specification on long distance, high speed passenger services on at least one rail network elsewhere in the world, ideally indicating the timescales within which the rolling stock was procured, designed, constructed and approved for operation in passenger service.
- 2.6 In the absence of such evidence, Merseytravel would question whether these applications were, at best, premature. The InterCity West Coast franchise is due to be re-let in December 2012, on a basis which is designed to encourage innovation from the bidders and Merseytravel anticipates that each of the four short-listed bidders will bring forward its own proposals for new and amended services. All four bidders will be represented on the West Coast Event Steering Group. Unless Alliance can provide more concrete evidence that it will be able to introduce the services for which it has applied for access rights, operated by the specified new rolling stock, in December 2013, its plans should be deferred for appraisal alongside any changes proposed by the successful bidder for the ICWC franchise. There are alternative mechanisms in place by which such access aspirations can be considered and assessed, short of an application for firm track access rights which may be granted well before they can be used and if granted may pre-empt other applications for services which could be introduced more quickly and which would have wider economic and social benefits.

3. North West Services

- 3.1 While noting the differences between this proposed Application and Alliance Rail's previous application for track access rights on the WCML, Merseytravel does not believe that the concerns it expressed in its earlier response have been addressed sufficiently for it to modify significantly the stance taken at that time.
- 3.2 Merseytravel notes that Alliance Rail's London – Blackpool and London – Carlisle services do not call at Wigan North Western. In other words, they do not provide the additional services between London and Preston calling at both Warrington Bank Quay and Wigan North Western recommended by the WCML RUS to allow London – Glasgow services to be accelerated. It should be recalled that, as well as their long distance function, WCML services provide the only local service between these two towns, both of which have populations of over 150,000. Merseytravel has concerns that Alliance Rail's applications, if accepted in this form, may hinder or even prevent the implementation of an agreed RUS recommendation. Merseytravel would remind the parties and the ORR of the support it expressed in January 2011 for the DfT's application for access rights to allow implementation of the pattern of long distance services to and from London recommended by the WCML RUS, which specifically included additional services between London and Preston calling at both Warrington Bank Quay and Wigan North Western.
- 3.3 Merseytravel has concerns at the routing of Alliance's services through Newton-le-Willows. This would require appropriate paths to be available in each direction for diverging movements through six flat junctions, in quick succession, on two independent main lines, all of which are used by passenger and freight services making movements which would conflict with Alliance's proposed trains. These are the junctions at Winwick, Earlestown South, Earlestown East, Newton-le-Willows, Lowton and Golborne. The distance by this route between Winwick Jn and Golborne Jn is 3 miles 28 chains (5.39 km). Undaunted, Alliance Rail proposes station calls at Newton-le-Willows, in the centre of this section of railway, 2m 26ch (3.74 km) from Winwick and 1m 2ch (1.65 km) from Golborne, with three junctions on each side of the station. It should be noted that in recent years Merseytravel has had to decline requests to consider the introduction of regular local services between Liverpool, Newton-le-Willows and Wigan, or between Warrington, Newton-le-Willows and Wigan, in part due to the difficulty of securing credible paths for such services. Aspirations to reopen the station at Golborne and provide it with regular services to Wigan, Manchester or Liverpool have foundered for similar reasons.
- 3.4 From the information available to Merseytravel currently, it is not possible for Merseytravel to assess fully the impact of Alliance Rail's proposals on its existing supported services between Liverpool, Earlestown, Newton-le-Willows and Manchester Airport, Manchester

Victoria or Warrington Bank Quay, which is in itself a reason for Merseytravel to oppose the applications.

- 3.5 Merseytravel would like to see more detail of Alliance Rail's plans and anticipated funding sources for "Newton-le-Willows Parkway," so that it can understand better the implications for the development of its own services and the impact of Alliance Rail's proposals on the public transport and highway networks in that area of Merseyside.

4. **West Yorkshire services**

- 4.1 Alliance Rail's proposed services from Euston to West Yorkshire are another matter entirely. While there may be suitable paths available now across the flat junctions at Heaton Norris, Guide Bridge and Stalybridge for London Euston – Huddersfield – Leeds trains and at Winwick, Earlestown South and East, Newton-le-Willows, Parkside, Ordsall Lane and Victoria East for London Euston – Bradford trains, this is unlikely to be the case once the enhanced Northern Hub services are introduced. It should be recalled that implementation of the full Northern Hub service package is a recommendation of the Northern RUS, to which Alliance Rail has signed up as a member of the Northern RUS Stakeholder Management Group.
- 4.2 From the information available to Merseytravel currently, it is not possible for Merseytravel to assess fully the impact of Alliance Rail's proposals on its existing supported services between Liverpool, Earlestown, Newton-le-Willows and Manchester Airport, Manchester Victoria or Warrington Bank Quay, which is in itself a reason for Merseytravel to oppose the applications.
- 4.3 Merseytravel believes that the London Euston – Newton-le-Willows – Calder Valley – Bradford service puts at risk the increase to 4 fast trains per hour between Liverpool and one station in central Manchester, recommended by the North West RUS as long ago as 2007 yet still to be implemented, the increase to 2 trains per hour between Chester and Manchester, the introduction of through services between Liverpool and Calder Valley stations and the introduction of through services between North Wales, Chester and Leeds. Among its other purposes, the Chester – Leeds service preserves and improves the direct link between Warrington and the north east, which would otherwise be broken by the Northern Hub proposals to concentrate Manchester – Leeds services at Victoria and Manchester – Sheffield services at Piccadilly, with both the fast services through Warrington Central continuing to Sheffield. An infrequent service terminating at Bradford is no substitute for the regular interval, direct service between Warrington and Leeds, with onward connections to the north east, which the Northern Hub study's Chester – Leeds service would provide.

- 4.4 On the Calder valley line the Northern Hub study proposes 4 trains per hour between Manchester and Leeds, two from Liverpool and two from Manchester Airport, with additional hourly trains between Blackpool and Leeds and between Huddersfield and Leeds and an hourly freight path. It must be debatable whether the Alliance service can be pathed over the Calder Valley line without displacing other services.
- 4.5 The Northern Hub study identifies a path across the junctions at Heaton Norris, Guide Bridge and Stalybridge, which is reserved for and presently used by, freight services. It would appear that Alliance Rail hopes to use this path. Beyond Huddersfield this train path is routed to Wakefield, not via Dewsbury to Leeds. The Hub study proposes 9 trains per hour over the line between Thornhill LNW Junction and Leeds via Dewsbury, a mixture of express, fast and stopping services, so it is unlikely that Alliance Rail would be able to secure a path to Leeds via Dewsbury without displacing another service.
- 4.6 Both services put at risk the delivery of additional and faster services between Liverpool, Manchester, Huddersfield and Leeds, vital to the economy of the north of England.
- 4.7 In summary, Merseytravel has real concerns that introduction of these services may impact adversely on its existing supported rail services between Liverpool, Earlestown, Warrington and Manchester and that they will prevent the delivery of the full package of east-west service improvements across the north of England proposed in the Northern Hub study, in particular the service of four fast trains per hour between Liverpool and one central Manchester station (Victoria) which is crucial to Merseyside, the faster services between Liverpool and Leeds and the proposed through fast services between Liverpool and the Calder Valley towns. This was first recommended in the North West RUS, carried forward into the Northern Hub study and then into the Northern RUS, to which Alliance Rail has signed up as a member of its Stakeholder Management Group. In the absence of any demonstration that the full, agreed Northern Hub service package can be accommodated alongside Alliance Rail's aspirations for London Euston – West Yorkshire services Merseytravel opposes the Alliance Rail application for these services.
- 4.8 Merseytravel would seek the ORR's assurance that it will give priority to implementation of the WCML RUS, Northern RUS and Northern Hub study, agreed by cross-industry groups of which Alliance Rail is itself a member.