

Mr Stephen Clark  
Rail Programme Director  
Transport for Greater Manchester  
2 Piccadilly Place  
Manchester  
M1 3BG

6 December 2011

Dear Stephen,

**Alliance Rail Holdings (Alliance) Section 17 and Section 18 Applications: Great North Western Railway (GNWR).**

Thank you for your response dated 6<sup>th</sup> September to consultation on Alliance's track access applications.

Alliance wishes to thank Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) for its, albeit cautious, welcome for the additional connectivity that would be provided by the proposal.

Alliance received a significant number of responses to its recent consultation for WCML access rights, including your own. This letter addresses the specific points you made. We have now written to all consultation respondents in a similar manner.

At the industry stakeholder meeting held in York on 18 August, and in the written responses that followed, a number of people felt it was difficult to understand the reasons for Alliance's applications being split, with one to be made under Section 18 of the Railways Act and one under Section 17. In view of those comments and Alliance's further work with Network Rail we have decided that the formal submission to the ORR will be made as one Section 17 application. This means that there is no longer any interdependence between applications and that issues raised separately during consultation have been consolidated into a single list.

Industry costs

Alliance notes your concern regarding the danger of increased industry costs because of inefficiencies that could arise with a timetable re-cast. In preparing its indicative timetable, Alliance has been careful to ensure that any other trains flexed are not only within contractual rights but also do not have their turn-rounds compromised. Alliance agrees with you that there can be synergies between local and long-distance services. We wish to work with you to develop a timetable that can

provide additional peak capacity into and out of Manchester, without additional rolling stock funded by the taxpayer.

### Northern Hub

Alliance has worked closely with Network Rail on this scheme and has kept the Northern Hub team informed of its plans. Network Rail makes clear in the Manchester Hub Rail Study, 'Our preferred option provides the capability for significant improvements to rail services across the North, including inter-regional, commuter and freight services'. In other words, the Northern Hub project is about creating the capacity, rather than delivering the proposed service patterns.

Despite suggestions from some respondents that the Northern Hub services are committed, this is not the case. Funding for new services, and rolling stock to resource them, is likely to be considered as part of the HLOS for CP5. Since most, if not all, of those services will require subsidy by the taxpayer, it is unclear if they will all be implemented. The Minister of State for Transport's recent announcement that the Northern Hub may not be fully funded reinforces this view. Alliance will operate without taxpayer subsidy.

### Best use of capacity

Alliance does not agree with your comment that its proposals may not represent the best use of capacity, or value for money, especially when compared with enhanced services proposed in connection with the Northern Hub.

Alliance will offer new journey opportunities and more capacity on existing local and inter-urban routes, as well as competition on the West Coast Main Line (WCML) itself. The Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) has identified that there are significant economic benefits from providing competition through open access services (*The potential for increased on-rail competition - a consultation document, October 2011*).

### Other operators' rights

Alliance notes that for a number of the WCML train operating companies (TOCs), both the franchise and corresponding access rights expire by the end of 2014. The ORR has indicated that any extensions of rights beyond December 2013 will be for quantum only. Therefore, regardless of Alliance's application, it is not possible to give assurances about continuing existing Northern services in precisely the same pattern.

Alliance is also applying for quantum rights only at this stage to fall in line with the requirements of other TOCs and the ORR's requirements.

### Rolling stock timescales

Alliance is still confident that, depending on the rolling stock procurement option chosen, it could still commence operations in 2014 should a positive decision be made by the ORR. However, following consultation we now expect this to be during the period of the May 2014 timetable.

### WCML Event Steering Group

Alliance plans to take an active part in the WCML Event Steering Group (ESG). Now that the timescales for the Group's work are clearer, Alliance has reviewed its position regarding ordering rolling stock. Depending on the nature of the ORR's decision, it may now be possible for Alliance to place an order based on the service pattern and journey times implied by the 31 weekday paths agreed with Network Rail. In other words, we may no longer rely on an improved timetable emerging from the ESG's deliberations, provided suitable access rights are granted.

### Short platforms

Alliance notes your concern about the operation of 8-car trains where platforms are not long enough to accommodate this.

Firstly, Alliance expects to commence operations with a fleet of 6-car, rather than 8-car trains. The ability to extend to 8-cars is an option for expansion, and is part of the rolling stock specification. Rather more existing platforms are capable of holding a 138m train. However, on the Cumbrian Coast in particular, it will be necessary to use selective door opening (SDO). This is also part of the rolling stock specification.

### Station facilities and car parking

We note your concern about car parking, especially at Stalybridge. Alliance accepts that it has not followed up the issue of car parking with TfGM since the decision was made to switch from planned calls at Guide Bridge. Alliance will be happy to discuss these matters further with TfGM, including the idea of calls at Guide Bridge once the TransPennine Express services are routed through Manchester Victoria.

Alliance has previously made TfGM aware of its detailed proposals for Eccles station at a meeting in Swinton in January 2011. I can confirm these include provision for DDA access to platforms and CIS at street and platform levels. We know there are overlapping proposals from other parties and would be happy to discuss this in more detail. Please note that there are no plans at the moment to provide additional car parking in the vicinity of Eccles station.

Alliance's plans for Rochdale are less well developed. We would be happy to discuss with TfGM the possibility of funding of any existing plans for car parking or other station improvements.

#### Station operating costs

Whilst Alliance would like to ensure that stations where it calls are staffed throughout the day, this is a matter for discussion with the Station Facilities Operator (SFO).

Alliance will be obliged to pay its fair share of station costs to the SFO through station access charges. If costs remain broadly the same, this is additional revenue for the SFO. We also expect some tickets, especially local and other inter-available ones, to be sold at the stations, giving some additional revenue to the SFO from commission.

#### Limited capacity – Stockport to Guide Bridge

Alliance notes your concern that the Stockport to Guide Bridge route is highly constrained by both Heaton Norris Junction and the single track section between there and Denton.

Given that Network Rail has agreed 31 weekday paths (including on the Bradford route) that conform to timetable planning rules and do not require any other trains to be flexed outside contractual rights, there clearly is available capacity. In preparing this indicative timetable all existing trains and rights, including freight, have been taken into account.

#### Guide Bridge calls

We note that you would like Alliance to consider calling at Guide Bridge. The timetable we have developed is based on flexing operators within their contractual rights rather than a complete timetable rewrite. As part of the WCML ESG, and further discussions with stakeholders, Alliance will consider the emerging options on its calling pattern.

#### Prejudicing future plans

Alliance has taken account of all published plans and strategies in formulating its proposals. There are, however, a large number of rail projects and schemes in the planning stage at the moment, including your aspirations for more stopping trains between Greenfield and Manchester and proposals for a freight terminal at Port Salford. Many of these are understandably confidential and details are not readily available to Alliance. Alliance would be happy to comment if further details can be

made available to us. However, future aspirations should not be a reason for not progressing applications for access rights.

#### Development of Calder Valley services


The validation by Network Rail of indicative paths on the Calder Valley route demonstrates that there is capacity in the December 2011 timetable for an additional train each hour between Manchester and Bradford for most of the day. Unfortunately, the sequence of trains determines that most paths are no faster than the limited stop Northern Rail trains. Alliance has been involved in the work by Arup for Calderdale MBC and is keen to be part of the solution for improving services on the route. TfGM's encouragement in this respect is most welcome.

#### Blackpool and Carlisle service proposals

Alliance has not at this stage asked Network Rail to validate any paths to Blackpool or Carlisle. It is Alliance's view that capacity can be found. At this stage, in the absence of any track access application or published timetable for the proposed Manchester to Scotland electric services via Wigan, Alliance is unable to assess if there is likely to be any conflict between the proposals. Alliance also notes that a representative of TransPennine Express has gone on record saying that, if they were to remain in charge of the franchise, they might prefer to route the trains back through Bolton on completion of electrification to Preston in 2016.

A copy of your response and this letter will be made available to the ORR to accompany Alliance's application.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Hanks  
Head of Development