

NORTHERN RAIL FRANCHISE

From: Dick Smith [<mailto:rdsmith47@btinternet.com>]

Sent: 26 October 2015 22:06

To: Adrian

Cc: 'Barry Butler'; Robert Talbot; Malcolm Conway LLRUG; Tim Owen; Jim Trotman

Subject: Re: Northern Rail Franchise

Dear Mr Faulkner,

Thank you for your email about the franchise situation regarding the Oxenholme – Windermere line. I apologise for not replying instantly, but as you will see your questions raise some complex issues which require detailed explanation.

I am Assistant Secretary of the Lakes Line Rail User Group (LLRUG), which is a purely voluntary organisation which seeks to look after the interests of the passengers using the line to Windermere. I represent the Group on the Lakes Line Community Rail Partnership (LLCRP), a statutorily constituted body which involves the train operators and local authorities and other groups. I am the Secretary of the CRP.

The current Trans Pennine and Northern franchises will cease on 31st March 2016. The new franchises will be different, even though at present the names are the same. Neither of the current franchisee companies will continue to exist after March 31st. The partners in First TransPennine Express, First Group and Keolis have submitted separate bids for the new Trans Pennine franchise. (By the way, you will note that in this explanation the actual franchise has 'Pennine' as a separate word, the current trading name not). Keolis is bidding together with its British partner, Go Via. The third short-listed bidder is Stagecoach. Currently Northern Rail is a joint venture between Abellio (Netherlands State Railways) and Serco; Serco has decided not to be part of the new bid so Abellio has bid on its own. The other bidders are Arriva, a subsidiary of Deutsche Bahn, and Govia Northern Limited. This means that whoever wins the franchise, the new management will not be the same as the current one.

When the consultation document for the new franchises was issued, the RUG and the CRP both campaigned for the Lakes Line to be retained in the Trans Pennine franchise. Despite our representations, and support from the two MPs involved, local councils and organisations, the Department for Transport (DfT) decided to transfer Windermere and Barrow line services from the Trans Pennine to the Northern franchise.

We expect to hear who the successful bidders are in late November and early December; the two announcements will probably not be made at the same time, and we have been warned there may be some negotiation after the announcements to clarify the roles of the two new franchises.

Because we do not know who the new operator of the Northern franchise will be, I do not have a contact name to give you at present.

Initially the timetable will continue much as now. The current TransPennine Express team has been working on the May 2016 timetable and from what they have told us, no major timing changes are likely. The new franchise specification includes a requirement for two return trips per weekday between Windermere and Manchester Airport from December 2017. The DfT trumpets this as an increase, which it is if you take the

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current service – two through trains from Windermere to the Airport, one from there to Windermere – as the norm. You and your members may well remember that there used to be five return services each weekday, and compared to that a mere two seems poor. However, in our consultations with representatives of all three bidders both the RUG and the CRP have stressed the desirability of more than the minimum two return services. The operator can seek to run more than the minimum.

The position regarding rolling stock is not clear. I attach a copy of the latest LLRUG Bulletin, where there is an article on page 6 summarising the current position. The uncertainty is compounded by the delay to electrification. We are confident this will happen, indeed Network Rail has started work on the project, but the delays to other parts of the North West scheme, and resignation of main contractor Balfour Beatty, have made further delay seem likely. Whereas the original target was the December 2016 timetable change, now December 2017 or even May 2018 seem more likely. By the time the Lakes Line is electrified, there should be enough refurbished electric trains available in the North West for good quality rolling stock not to be a problem. The CRP has established from Network Rail that, though the electrification budget will not stretch to any upgrades to the line, the work will be planned so it does not preclude any foreseeable upgrades such as installing a passing loop.

You asked about facilities for the disabled. We are not aware of any particular measures, though all bids must comply with current regulations and the successful bidder may well have planned improvements beyond the statutory minimum. Staveley with Ings Parish Council is leading on the issue of better access to the station there, with strong support from both the CRP and the RUG. As you probably know, Staveley station's 41 steps present the most severe of the access problems for the disabled on the Lakes Line.

When the preferred bidders for the new franchises are announced both the RUG and CRP will be in contact with them about facilities and services along the line and at Oxenholme. The Chamber of Trade could, of course, make contact too. However, if you decided to join either the CRP and/or Rail User Group, the Chamber would have input to these discussions. Both organisations would value the support of the Chamber. The LLRUG website includes a downloadable membership form, and of course members automatically receive the quarterly Bulletin. If you would like to know more about the CRP, please contact Jim Trotman, the Community Rail officer, or me.

I hope this reply answers the points you raised. Please do get back to me if there is anything you would like more information about.

Best wishes,
Dick Smith
Assistant Secretary, LLRUG
Secretary, LLCRP

Copies to
Robert Talbot, Chairman LLRUG, Malcolm Conway, Secretary LLRUG
Tim Owen, Chairman, LLCRP, Jim Trotman, CRP Officer