

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Date: 5 August 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **East Coast Mainline May 2022 Timetable Consultation**

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to GTR's East Coast Mainline May 2022 timetable consultation.

These are the comments from NHDC (North Hertfordshire District Council).

### **Page 7 – Timetables**

NHDC notes that to accommodate one additional LNER service that the current 1842 London King's Cross to Peterborough and proposed 1853 London King's Cross to Cambridge service's will both no longer call at Hitchin. In addition, the 1853 will no longer call at Ashwell & Morden either. Further, that the 1827 London King's Cross to Letchworth Garden City will instead terminate at Welwyn Garden City. Taken together, I feel that these proposed changes resulting in the loss of the 1842 and 1853 services is a retrograde step and will have a detrimental impact on passengers catching trains at stations in the District, as well as Ashwell & Morden in neighbouring Cambridgeshire which due to proximity to North Hertfordshire is used by many residents in the District.

In addition, as part of the North Hertfordshire Proposed Submission Local Plan it is proposing approximately 700 additional homes to be developed within the next 5+ years within Hitchin and it is considered important that the consultation needs to take into consideration this planned growth.



## **Page 8 – Great Northern Mainline**

NHDC notes the proposal to re-time the London to King's Lynn services that will enable shorter journey times both in the peak and off peak, as well as better integration with other operator's services.

## **Page 9 – Proposal: Cambridge to London**

NHDC notes the proposal to merge the current Cambridge stopping service with the semi-fast Baldock services for the benefits outlined in the consultation document

I note that as it stands, the proposed new service will result in passengers from Baldock, Ashwell & Morden and Royston losing direct services to stations between Potters Bar and Stevenage, except for Welwyn North. Instead, passengers will be required to change trains en-route and will result in increased journey times. For example, passengers catching an LNER service at Stevenage will now be required to change trains twice, whereas currently one change is required. As it stands NHDC feels that these proposals will be detrimental to passengers travelling from Baldock, Ashwell & Morden and Royston and requests that consideration be given to retaining some direct services that currently call at these stations.

I note that it is proposed that Baldock will lose the two faster services in both peaks, whilst the new Letchworth Garden City to King's Cross service, (see below) includes one AM peak service commencing from Royston and three PM peak services back to Royston, which will call at Baldock in both directions these will be slower services.

Overall NHDC finds these proposals unacceptable and considers them to be detrimental to Baldock passengers in the peak times compared to the current service. Although there might be relatively small numbers at present, as part of the North Hertfordshire District Council proposed Submission Local Plan it is proposing approximately 3,200 additional homes in Baldock to be developed by 2031. The Local Plan is also proposing an additional 19.6Ha of employment land at Baldock in close proximity to the station. This land is to accommodate future employment growth and will also seek to address the shortfall of employment land at Stevenage over the plan period. There is a high level of commuting between Baldock, Letchworth, Hitchin and Stevenage which is expected to continue. It is the Council's view that the consultation needs to take into consideration this planned growth as it is concerned that reducing such services at Baldock could result in further reduced rail travel in the longer term and pushing commuters more towards the already congested roads within the area and would be against the Government's recently published transport decarbonisation plan 'Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain' 15 July 2021.

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### **Page 10 – Proposal: Letchworth Garden City to King’s Cross**

NHDC welcomes the proposal to include the additional call at Alexandra Palace which currently requires a change of trains.

However, I note that the proposal will see a reduced level of direct services to Stevenage which will be a retrograde step as a large number of residents commute to Stevenage and this is expected to continue, given an additional 900 homes proposed to be developed north of Letchworth as part of the Submission Local Plan.

I would also like to highlight the new Herts Lynx DRT (Demand Responsive Transport) bus service that is due to commence in September 2021. Following a successful application to the DfT Rural Mobility Fund last year by Hertfordshire County Council, in partnership with NHDC, East Herts. District Council and Stevenage Borough Council. This service will substantially improve rural public transport across north east Hertfordshire. NHDC would welcome the opportunity to discuss with GTR service integration opportunities as to how this service can better connect rural communities with train services.

In conclusion, whilst appreciating the background to these proposed changes as part of the wider reconfiguration of the East Coast Mainline timetable, including the complexities due to the length of the line, number of train operating companies and range of services, the overall perception gained from the proposals contained in the consultation will leave North Hertfordshire passengers and residents with a reduced rather than improved service, both with regards to loss of services and direct connections. It is also of concern as to whether these proposals have taken into consideration future housing and employment growth within the District at Hitchin, Letchworth and in particular Baldock over the next 5 to 10 years as proposed in the Submission Local Plan. I would request that some of the proposals be reconsidered with these concerns in mind and that further consultation is undertaken on any further substantive changes to the proposals before they are finalised.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam Collins'.

Cllr. Sam Collins

Executive Member for Enterprise, the Arts and Transport