

# HARROGATE - LONDON EAST COAST SERVICES

## NEED FOR EXTRA HARROGATE – LONDON DIRECT SERVICES

Issue 7

Harrogate District is close to the geographical centre of the UK, accessible from north, south, east and west. It attracts large numbers of visitors all the year round, for both business and leisure. Easy access for visitors is vital for the economic future well being of Harrogate & Knaresborough. The latest published estimate of Total Direct Visitor Spend in the District was £331m per year from a total of 6.4 million visitor-days including both business and holiday tourism visitors.

Over 60 years ago Harrogate enjoyed a frequent London-Harrogate-Edinburgh Pullman Car service with up to 10 trains per day. This was cut back in stages until Harrogate had just one direct London service, south bound, Monday to Saturday mornings only. After extensive lobbying, a new northbound service from London to Harrogate was introduced from May 2011, the first NEW service TO Harrogate for over 25 years. East Coast was also persuaded by this Chamber to operate a new direct service in each direction on Sundays which has proved very popular in both directions during the past year. Harrogate now has one direct train in each direction to and from London, seven days a week.

The new everyday return train service from Kings Cross to Harrogate has just completed its first year of operation with very good results. East Coast Trains say that over 43,000 passengers have used the Harrogate leg of the direct Kings Cross daily services during its first year, comparing very favourably with the loadings of other services to similar destinations in the region. The new direct service has clearly been welcomed not only by Harrogate business people and local residents returning from trips to London, but even more importantly by the thousands of business and leisure visitors coming to Harrogate from London, from the South-East of England and from East Anglia.

We now ask East Coast Trains, the Department for Transport and the Office of Rail Regulation to improve the existing direct services and provide additional services, such as the 2-hourly direct service previously proposed by National Express in 2008 and granted as contingent rights by the ORR in 2009.

### 1. SPEED UP EXISTING DIRECT SERVICES

#### 1.1 Faster HGT-KGX southbound morning service 07.28-10.37 (Weekday times)

The new Eureka timetable has actually "slowed-down" the long-established 07.28am departure from Harrogate to Kings Cross. It used to take 2hrs 57mins and arrive at 10.25 but it is now scheduled to take 3hrs 09mins, arriving at 10.37 – 12 minutes later. This is mostly due to the new "clock-face" timing of departure from Leeds at 08.15 instead of the previous 08.05, so the Harrogate Train stands in Leeds for over 18 minutes. Once signalling upgrades are done, can the departure from Harrogate be delayed by about 10 minutes to say 07.38, before Northern Rail's 07.40 departure?

Most of the other xx.15 LDS-KGT services are scheduled to arrive at xx.30 (i.e. a journey time of 2h15 minutes from Leeds.) Why is the 08.15 not due until 10.37? There are no other ECML services arriving about this time to be avoided. Harrogate ought to have similar journey times. Is it possible to speed up the Leeds to Kings Cross leg by omitting some of the four intermediate stops?

Some business customers have told us that they prefer to drive to York – or even to Doncaster – rather than take the much slower direct service from Harrogate, when the fastest East Coast trains from York to King's Cross at this time of day only take about 2 hours, arriving well before 10.00am.

#### 1.2. Faster northbound KGX-HGT evening service 17.33-20.27 (Weekday times)

The new evening return service from KGX to Harrogate is very much appreciated, but it is quite slow with an overall journey time of 2hrs 54mins. It currently stops at Stevenage, Grantham, Doncaster and Wakefield before arriving in Leeds at 19.52. Could some stops be eliminated? There is then a 7 minute delay in Leeds before departure to Harrogate where 29 minutes is scheduled. In practice this non-stop journey only takes about 20 minutes. We believe this time to be unduly conservative for the 16 mile run and the advertised journey times could be speeded up based on current performance data, once the signalling upgrade on the Harrogate Line is completed in Autumn 2012.

#### 1.3. Weekend service performance improvements

Similar improvements would be beneficial on the existing weekend services in both directions.

## **2. EXTRA DIRECT SERVICES NEEDED IN 2012-13**

### **2.1. King's Cross to Harrogate – new morning northbound**

This service is needed primarily to meet the needs of Conference, Exhibition and leisure visitors from the South East to Harrogate District. It can be achieved by extending an existing KGX-LDS service. Ideally the 07.05 from KGX with an arrival time in Leeds of 09.19 could give a subsequent Harrogate arrival at about 09.50. Alternatively, the 07.35 from KGX to LDS could arrive about 10.20.

That train could then turnaround in Harrogate and depart about 10.15 or 10.45 and become the 10.45 or 11.15 departure from Leeds to KGX. Currently these are scheduled to operate with electric trains, but the later 12.45 departure from Leeds to KGX is listed as an HST.

Could one of the evening electric services between Kings Cross and Leeds or Newcastle be changed to HST to enable the 07.05 KGX to LDS to use an HST train? For example, the current 22.00 northbound from KGX to Newcastle is listed as an HST and presumably that becomes the 05.56 or the 06.30 from Newcastle to KGX the following morning. Could this be operated by a Class 91 electric train instead, allowing the HST set to operate an early morning service Leeds and Harrogate?

### **2.2. Harrogate to King's Cross – extra early morning southbound**

The current 07.28 direct service from Harrogate to King's Cross does not arrive until 10.38, which is too late for many business people with all-day meetings in London – or for international air travellers with morning departures from Heathrow or Gatwick. We therefore propose that the existing 06.05 HST departure from Leeds should start from Harrogate at about 05.40, due in King's Cross at 08.36.

Alternatively the 06.40 LDS-KGX departure due at KGX at 08.53 would be an even better timing with about 06.00 departure from Harrogate, provided that an HST set can replace the current scheduled electric train. Now that the signalling between Leeds and Harrogate is being upgraded, such earlier working hours and a shorter headway between trains on the line should be possible from late 2012.

Failing a second early morning train, could the existing 07.28 HGT-KGX service be re-scheduled earlier to about 06.40 so as to form the 07.15 departure from Leeds to King's Cross, with an improved end-to-end journey time under three hours and local services adjusted accordingly?

### **2.3. Harrogate to King's Cross – new evening southbound**

Our many conference and exhibition visitors need an early evening direct return service to London that avoids the problems of changing trains in Leeds or York during the evening rush hour. We suggest that the current 18.45 HST departure from Leeds should start from Harrogate at say 18.15, due into King's Cross at 21.03, so they can get home that night.

This could be achieved by operating the 15.05 KGX-LDS service with the HST set currently used for the 15.08 KGX to York. Due into Leeds at 17.19 it could reach Harrogate about 17.45 and then be the proposed 18.15 departure from Harrogate and the 18.45 from Leeds due into KGX at 21.03.

Alternatively could one of the earlier electric services from Leeds to KGX be switched with the 18.45 HST from LDS to KGX to enable an earlier departure from Harrogate at say 17.40 departing Leeds at 18.15 and arriving KGX at 20.30. (*We realise that full train operating diagrams would be needed.*)

### **2.4 Harrogate to Kings Cross – extra Sunday morning southbound service**

Given the popularity of Sunday services and the very limited local services; there is a growing demand for a second southbound direct service – ideally on Sunday mid-morning. Both 10.05 and 11.05 LDS-KGX services are scheduled as HST. One of these trains could start from Harrogate about 09.30 or 10.30 to reach KGX by 12.37 or 13.35. This is feasible but vulnerable to engineering work.

### **2.5 Kings Cross to Harrogate – extra Sunday afternoon northbound services**

Given the above extra southbound service, then it should be possible for this HST to turnaround at KGX and return to Leeds and Harrogate as either the 13.03 or 14.03 – currently scheduled as electric services. Due into Leeds at 15.30 or 16.29 this could then reach Harrogate about 16.00 or 17.00 – when it could turnaround and be the current 17.05 Sunday southbound service to KGX eta 20.12. We believe that adequate rolling stock resources already exist to enable these Sunday services.

## **3. EXTRA DIRECT SERVICES DESIRABLE IN NEW FRANCHISE 2013-14**

### **3.1. Two-hourly service HGT-KGX each way every day**

Department for Transport is asked to consider including in the new Franchise Specification for the East Coast mainline services several additional extensions of existing northbound services from King's Cross via Leeds to Harrogate using the existing HST diesel trains sets plus one extra set.

The East Coast scheduling experts estimate that they could operate six trains a day each way

between Harrogate and Kings Cross on a seven-day basis with a regular two-hourly frequency of services. For example – with indicative timings using existing ECML weekday paths and times:-

<b>Harrogate – Leeds - Kings Cross</b>	<b>Kings Cross- Leeds - Harrogate</b>
*07.34 – 08.03 # 08.15 – 10.37*	07.35 – 09.49 # 09.55 – 10.15
09.34 – 10.03 # 10.15 – 12.28	09.35 – 11.49 # 11.55 – 12.15
11.34 – 12.03 # 12.15 – 14.29	11.35 – 13.49 # 13.55 – 14.15
13.34 – 14.03 # 14.15 – 16.28	13.35 – 15.49 # 15.55 – 16.15
15.34 – 16.03 # 16.15 – 18.30	15.35 – 17.50 # 17.55 – 18.15
17.34 – 18.03 # 18.15 – 20.29	*17.33 – 19.59 # 20.05 – 20.27*
KEY: * = Existing direct services; # = Standing at Leeds Station (Subject to diagrams)	

A similar two-hourly direct service was actually proposed by National Express in 2008 and granted as contingent rights by the ORR in 2009. However the subsequent failure of the franchise stopped it.

We believe this two-hourly service could be achieved with just one additional diesel HST train set, either by withdrawal of a diesel service from other routes or by cascading of a diesel unit replaced by an electric train elsewhere in the UK. The DfT specification for the new InterCity Express programme (IEP) should also include sufficient new bi-mode or dual voltage trains to facilitate this option, perhaps using the proposed “half-length” trains with five coaches. This would also enable Harrogate to have a 2-hourly service to London, with the alternate hour service going to Bradford or Skipton.

There is also a sound justification for the Harrogate Line between Leeds to York to be electrified within the overall remit of the Trans-Pennine electrification scheme. This would make significant improvements to local services and also facilitate additional direct London services through greatly improved operational flexibility (i.e. not constrained by using only diesel trains as currently)

#### 4. **WHY ARE EXTRA DIRECT LONDON-HARROGATE TRAINS JUSTIFIABLE?** (See Section 6)

Harrogate has the worst provision of direct services to/from London for the size of the underlying demand on the East Coast Main Line. For example, it has an underlying demand approaching three times that of London-Sunderland yet is provided with only 25% of the direct services enjoyed by Sunderland. This is a perverse situation in terms of matching supply with demand for passenger benefit and maximising rail industry revenues. In summary, the principle reasons why more direct Harrogate-London Trains are needed and why they should be a commercial success are as follows:

- High proportion of premium fare passengers all the year round in both directions
- Not primarily dependent on residents travelling to London – many visitors both ways
- Inbound long-distance business passengers and partners for Conferences and Conventions
- Inbound long-distance visitors for Trade Exhibitions, Fairs, Agric. & Hort. Shows, etc
- Inbound leisure visitors to Harrogate Town, Harrogate District & the Yorkshire Dales
- Harrogate business people attending meetings in London or flying from LHR or LGW
- Harrogate residents visiting London and the South-East or flying from LHR or LGW
- Potential for new Parkway Stations & Park & Rail services along the Harrogate Line
- Potential for bus shuttle services from Ripon and Wetherby, etc., to a new Parkway Station
- Potential for extra trains for big events – e.g. Gt Yorkshire Show, Test Matches, York Races
- Provides extra commuter services between Harrogate, Leeds and York + vice versa

#### 5. **WHY HARROGATE CANNOT BE SERVED VIA YORK.**

The Leeds–Harrogate–York line is not electrified, whereas the main lines from York and Leeds to London are electrified. This means that only diesel trains can operate to Harrogate. The York to Knaresborough track has two single line sections with manual signals which are a major constraint on capacity and operating hours. There are no plans to upgrade this part of the route until around 2020 when signalling renewals fall due. The need for improvements on the Leeds-Harrogate-York line is recognised and work is now underway to upgrade signalling between Leeds and Harrogate.

A detailed study of operating constraints shows that Harrogate could most effectively be served to and from London as an extension of existing services via Leeds rather than via York. Previous economic modelling has also suggested that the overall benefit is increased when services operate via Leeds. As several daily services are already diagrammed with Class 43 diesel trains this option would not require any new rolling stock or extra slots on the East Coast Main Line. Platforms 1, 6 & 8 at Leeds currently used for London Trains would allow trains to reverse without conflict with other services. This is the most efficient and cost-effective way to provide services for Harrogate.

## **6. WHY HARROGATE NEEDS MORE DIRECT LONDON TRAINS** *(In more detail)*

Harrogate in North Yorkshire is a unique area of high economic growth forming a "golden triangle" with Leeds, Wetherby and York. It is the north-east quadrant of the Leeds City Region, which is the most significant economic driver of the Yorkshire and Humber Region.

Harrogate Town has a population of 72,000, whilst the whole Harrogate District has 158,000, with an older age profile than the Region. It has a predominantly professional demographic profile with higher than average levels of social class, household income, property values and car ownership. Harrogate has been repeatedly quoted as one of the best places to live in the UK. Hence Harrogate attracts upwardly mobile individuals to live in Harrogate and work all over the country - or across the whole world. These factors all indicate a propensity to travel.

Consequently, the route's most significant proportion (approximately 39%) of passenger miles generated is to/from London (2009-10 information). According to recent information provided by the existing franchise, London-Harrogate represents the 12th largest revenue flow.

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Harrogate has a unique combination of Conference, Exhibition and Event facilities located in a Town Centre, alongside many well established visitor attractions. It is supported by numerous nearby hotels, guest houses and restaurants; a combination not matched anywhere else in the UK. These facilities combined with a relaxing rural environment attract international, national and regional corporate, professional and trade events of all types virtually all the year round. Planning permission has recently been granted for two new hotels, whilst older ones are being updated.

Harrogate International Conference centre is the third largest integrated conference and exhibition venue in the UK after Excel, London and EICC, Edinburgh, but our national and international air connections are inferior, making rail travel more important for Harrogate. Phase 1 of a £45m expansion programme was completed in Autumn 2011 which added two new exhibition and event halls and a new entrance foyer. These additional facilities are attracting significant new business.

Conferences, Exhibitions, Trade Shows and Entertainments at HIC attract well over 200,000 business visitors per annum, with around 40% visiting from London and South East. In a recent event survey, 78% of delegates came from outside Yorkshire, but few travelled by rail. Harrogate's poor air and rail connectivity has frustrated the attraction of some major new conferences – and risks losing others to better connected venues such as Birmingham and Manchester.

The largest event at the Harrogate Showground is the Great Yorkshire Agricultural Show which takes place in mid-July each year. With the demise of the Royal Show at Stoneleigh, the Great Yorkshire Show is now the largest agricultural show in the UK. Many smaller events of various types are held on the Showground all year round, with an average of over 600 events and a total attendance of nearly 440,000 visitors a year. The RHS Harlow Carr Garden has over 300,000 pa.

Harrogate has a large number of successful hotels, guest houses and restaurants that cater for both business and leisure visitors. The Tourist Information Centre says that there are 1,472 bedrooms in hotels and 284 in guest houses within Harrogate – making a total of 1,756 rooms with over 2,100 beds - excluding the surrounding District. These figures far outweigh comparable towns that already have direct London rail services.

Whilst there are frequent fast services from Kings Cross to Leeds and York, the local connections to Harrogate are poor quality and often ill-timed. Changing trains is seen as risky, inconvenient, and time consuming - whilst the rolling stock falls significantly below most customer expectations! Nevertheless there are nearly three million passenger journeys a year to and from the Harrogate District Stations, with many over-crowded trains, confirming the local propensity for rail travel.

Recent developments in Harrogate District that could increase demand for rail travel include; construction of two new exhibition halls at HIC; opening of the Harrogate International Business School; creation of a new Destination Management Organisation entitled Welcome to Harrogate; adoption of a broad Local Development Framework with new housing and business developments; aspirations for Park & Rail or Parkway Stations; a proposed Bus-Rail Transport Interchange, etc.

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Compiled by Brian L Dunsby, Chief Executive, Harrogate Chamber of Trade & Commerce. Sept. 2012  
Based on extensive consultation with East Coast, Harrogate Borough Council, METRO, Network Rail,  
North Yorkshire County Council and the Harrogate Line Supporters Group (now 88 business members)