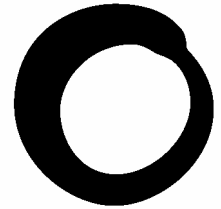


November 2002



**Friends of
the Earth**

Briefing

Changing trains in the North

What we need from the new Northern rail franchise

Introduction

The North of England deserves better rail services. For too long, passengers have put up with slow, unreliable and uncomfortable trains. The Government's Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is about to decide who will run commuter and rural train services in the North for the next 15 years. Friends of the Earth believes this is a real opportunity to introduce radical improvements and in this briefing we present our vision of a better railway. Some of our proposals may seem pie-in-the-sky to train operators but they are all based on good practice which already exists in the UK or in Europe. We can have a better railway but only if the Government, the SRA and the franchisee have the ambition and provide the investment to make it happen.

Friends of the Earth inspires solutions to environmental problems, which make life better for people.

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- the most extensive environmental network in the world, with almost one million supporters across five continents and over 60 national organisations worldwide**
- a unique network of campaigning local groups, working in over 200 communities throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland**
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What needs to change nationally?

Friends of the Earth believes that Britain needs a safe, efficient, reliable and affordable railway to help provide a real alternative to the private car.

Funding

Decades of neglect have left our railways in urgent need of investment – the Government must spend more if we're to see the improvements needed. Both the CBI and an expert Committee of MPs have said so. Friends of the Earth has shown how we could raise another £25 billion for rail (see our briefing sheet *Paying for Rail*).

Growth targets

The Government's target is to increase rail use nationally by 50 per cent. The SRA plans to meet this target largely through investment in the South East and in inter-city services. But why should the North miss out on a better railway? A truly national rail policy should have targets to increase rail use countrywide.

Who runs the trains?

The SRA has just published a new approach to franchising rail services. Friends of the Earth believes that the new tougher contracts will give passengers a better deal. But the process is secretive and passengers don't have a say in what services are run and when. We believe it makes basic business sense to ask the customers what they want. Friends of the Earth wants the SRA to:-

- Consult passengers directly on the level and quality of services; and
- Publish key documents such as the 'Core Specification', which lays down the level and quality of service to be provided.

Service standards

Rail operators have to get their act together if they are to provide an attractive alternative to the car. New franchises must:

- Require operators to run services to serve new stations or lines that the SRA re-opens;
- Make operators run late night services from major towns and cities; and
- Offer a decent service on Sundays, including trains early on Sunday mornings.

Fares

Our complicated and expensive fares put lots of people off from using the trains. Friends of the Earth's wants new train operators to be obliged to:-

- Honour any national off peak railcard the SRA introduces;
- Use standard ticket names and conditions; and
- Honour any national compensation arrangements introduced.

Punctuality & reliability

Friends of the Earth believes that if more people are to use trains then the service must be much more dependable and reliable. Passengers must also get prompt and clear information when things do go wrong.

In the UK only 8 out of 10 trains arrive on time¹. This compares badly with other European countries. If they can do better so can we. The rail industry claims that the 30 per cent increase in passengers in the last five years has made trains unreliable. The SRA and Network Rail must provide better signalling and infrastructure so that more trains can run and run on time. In the short-term, Friends of the Earth wants to see rail franchise contracts that force operators to:-

- Provide spare trains and crews along rail routes in order that a substitute service can be provided at short notice - this is already happening in Birmingham;
- Provide clear information when things go wrong;
- Set up a 'no-quibble' compensation scheme for passengers based on best European practice – a half-price refund for journeys delayed by 30 minutes and a full refund for an hour's delay²;
- Ensure that 95 per cent of trains are on time and fewer than 1 per cent cancelled by 2005. The loophole that allows operators not to count days of particularly bad performance should be scrapped;
- Deliver passenger to their final destination at no extra charge if the trains fail; and
- Scrap penalties that force operators to ignore connections.

Station standards

Friends of the Earth believes that if we want more people to use the trains we must have attractive, safe stations with decent facilities. Basic facilities like clocks, PA systems and shelters should be provided at all stations. Operators should be given a deadline to bring all stations up to a minimum standard, dependent on the size of the station³.

Integrated transport

If more people are to use the railways, it must be safe and easy to get to stations and possible to buy a single ticket for the whole of the journey. Friends of the Earth believes it should be easy to transfer from one mode of transport to another and easy to cycle and walk to stations. Friends of the Earth wants to see train operators, bus operators, local councils and PTEs work together to provide:-

- Connecting bus services with through tickets;
- Paper and on-line guides showing train services and the buses that link to them;
- Safe cycle and walking routes to stations; and
- 'Train-taxi' schemes that provide an add-on group taxi fare for rail tickets⁴.

What is needed in the North?

Service standards

Trains in the North of England must be fast, frequent, clean and reliable, if more people are going to use them instead of their cars. They must also run at the times that people want to travel. Friends of the Earth believes that the new operator must have sufficient rolling stock and staff in order to provide a reliable service and prevent over-crowding⁵. The new operator must also be compelled to work closely with the operator on Trans-Pennine routes to provide good, reliable connections.

Specific examples:

- Lengthen the Leeds-Harrogate-York trains to 4 carriages in peak hours to ease overcrowding.
- Introduce Sunday stopping services on the Manchester Victoria-Huddersfield line. Communities on this route don't have any Sunday rail service at present.
- Increase the frequency of trains on the Ellesmere Port–Helsby line (which has only 4 direct trains in each direction per day at the moment!)

Rolling stock

Friends of the Earth believes that trains have to be as comfortable as cars if we are to expect more people to use them. The quality of carriages in the North of England varies from clean, air conditioned and comfortable electric trains to draughty and dirty diesel bone-shakers. The SRA has said that there will be no new trains for the next 15 years⁶. Friends of the Earth believes this is unacceptable. Why should the South East and intercity routes get all the new trains? The SRA and operator must provide enough good quality carriages to run the specified service and cover for train failures.

Specific proposals:

- Replace all the unpopular and uncomfortable Pacer trains on the Harrogate, Penistone and other lines with sufficient new trains to provide a reliable service and prevent overcrowding.
- Set high standards for cleanliness of trains and ensure these standards are met.

New stations

If we want more people to use trains we must have more stations. Local councils and passenger transport authorities have long lists of stations to be reopened. Friends of the Earth believes that the SRA must speed up station re-openings.

Places needing new stations include:

- Kirkstall, (population 20,700) - a commuter suburb of Leeds.
- Middlewich, Cheshire, (pop.12,400) - trains would go to Crewe & Manchester
- Elland, West Yorkshire, (pop. 10,700) on Huddersfield-Halifax-Bradford-Leeds line
- Millhouses, a suburb of Sheffield, to serve commuters

New lines

Many people don't live near a rail station, yet there are many disused railway lines that could be reopened. They could also provide back-up routes to help make the existing network more reliable.

Lines that should be re-opened as soon as possible include:

- Alnmouth to Alnwick, Northumberland, (population 7,600) - this would provide a link for tourists and a commuter service to Newcastle.
- Colne (Lancs) to Skipton (West Yorks) - this line could help regenerate run-down communities in East Lancashire and provide new services linking Skipton with Preston and Manchester.
- Manchester to Sheffield ('Woodhead' line) - this fast passenger/freight route would relieve the busy Hope Valley route and provide a new link between towns such as Penistone and Glossop.
- Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton, North Yorkshire - this would put Ripon (pop.16,500) back on the rail network, link with the East Coast Main Line, and to Harrogate / Leeds for commuters.

Improved infrastructure

This is no longer the responsibility of train operators since the SRA changed the way it organises franchises. But extra tracks and better signals are essential if the railway is to work better for passengers. Many planned improvements to rail services in the North of England have now been put off until after 2010, due to lack of funds. Why should the North miss out?

Changing trains in the North

Friends of the Earth believes the Government must find the money to fund schemes such as:

- Better services in Manchester - A recent study⁷ found that fewer people were using trains than in other similar-sized cities because of the poor service. The study proposed £1.5 billion of improvements to provide new track and signals to allow more frequent and reliable trains and divert freight trains away from the congested city centre.
- Upgrading the Manchester-Leeds line - This very busy line carries about half of all the people travelling between city centres along its route. The mix of stopping and fast passenger trains, along with freight, causes unreliability. A £100 million⁸ plan to enable more trains to run and to achieve a 45 minute Manchester-Leeds journey time has been shelved. This scheme must go forward as soon as possible if car drivers are to be attracted from the M62. Although mainly for Trans Pennine express trains, these improvements would also benefit Northern stopping trains.

Direct trains between major stations

Some major towns and cities in the North of England have no direct trains. Many passengers including elderly and disabled people find it difficult to change trains. Friends of the Earth believes that the SRA must make new franchise operators fill these gaps with fast, regular, direct trains. In some cases these services will be provided by operators other than Northern. Providing a much better service does not require any new track in many cases although it may require some new trains. Passengers would get a much better service at minimal cost.

Examples:

- Bradford-Sheffield - There are no direct services between these two cities. Passengers are forced to change trains at least once. Journey times for the 36 mile journey vary between 1 hour 15 minutes and 1 hour and 45 minutes. Friends of the Earth believes faster direct services could be introduced via various routes.
- Leeds-Nottingham - At least one change is required which means that the 74 mile journey can take between 1 hour 42 minutes and almost 2½ hours.
- Manchester-Glasgow - The 220 mile journey also requires at least one change and takes between 3½ hours and 4 hours 10 minutes - nearly double the time from York to London which is a similar distance.

Conclusion

Providing the North with a better railway will take time and money but it is essential and it is possible. Friends of the Earth has shown what could be done. It's now up to the SRA to make it happen.

References

- ¹ Average for year to June2002 (SRA *National Rail Trends* June2002)
- ² % of single fare compensation (NS –Netherlands railways)
- ³ Railtrack *Modern Facilities at Stations* Network Management Statement 1999
- ⁴ NS offer a shared taxi service from 114 stations at fixed price within 8km radius of station
- ⁵ The former BR Regional Railways North East franchise has had insufficient carriages since 1997 (*Rail* magazine 430)
- ⁶ “No brand new trains...Pacers will have to last 15-20 years” – SRA (*Rail* magazine 439)
- ⁷ Manchester Strategic Rail Study (SRA June 2001)
- ⁸ Network Management Statement (Railtrack 2000)