Stafford to Stoke Service

The Secretary of State intends to ask the West Coast Partnership (WCP) to include a service to Stoke-on-Trent in its market development and service planning. We recognise there may also be a case to extend this service to Manchester Piccadilly, as well as to look at other options to serve not just Stoke-on-Trent but other destinations with either HS2 services or new direct West Coast Main Line (WCML) services to London.

The WCML is a particularly busy line with significant capacity constraints and as a result we are unable to commit to extending this service at this time (for the reasons set out below). However the WCP operator will be asked to examine the potential for such services, alongside meeting stakeholder aspirations for other improved local and regional services, recognising the limitations of rail network capacity in areas not directly relieved by the HS2 network.

As Phase 2a will not come into operation until 2027 there is still some time to finalise service patterns, with decisions on final HS2 and WCML services not expected until the early 2020s. The WCP will work with HS2 Ltd to design, launch and operate the initial HS2 services, as well as redesign services on the WCML to take advantage of the extra capacity provided by HS2. The WCP operator will ensure that passenger needs are placed at the heart of the design of the new railway and services, to meet the needs and aspirations of all users.

Current Service Constraints

**HS2** - The proposed HS2 Stafford - Stoke service will leave the HS2 line at the Handsacre junction, near Lichfield, and join the WCML. Once on the conventional network, high speed trains will be subject to the same speed and capacity constraints as conventional trains.

**Crewe** - The conventional railway line from Crewe to Stoke is single track so has severe capacity constraints. Currently 2 local trains per hour use this route each way and Network Rail have advised that no additional trains can be accommodated without adding a second track. It is therefore not possible to send the HS2 Stoke service to Crewe without significant and costly infrastructure enhancements or removing existing services.

**Liverpool** - If the HS2 train were to go on from Stoke to Liverpool, it would have to go via Crewe, which means the same constraints as outlined above. Similarly the conventional line between Crewe and Weaver Junction (where the line to Liverpool leaves the WCML) will be at capacity with the planned HS2 services plus existing services, so no additional trains could be accommodated.

**Manchester** - The route to Manchester is already constrained and given the projected growth in the region, there is no spare capacity between 2027 and 2033 for an additional service from Stoke to Manchester. The capacity released by Phase 2b of HS2 may alter this position and we will keep this under review.
On Mr Lefroy MP’s Request for a Commitment to Serve Stoke in the Future

Specifying and legislating a particular service for Stoke or indeed any other location through the Bill or by a binding undertaking would displace the existing statutory process for the determination of services and access to the rail network by the operators. These steps are appropriately considered by the industry regulator, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), at the point at which a franchised operator is approaching regulatory approval for access to the rail network.

Access to the network and the services that are run are regulated by the Railways Act 1993 and legislation which gives effect to EU Rail Directives, namely the Railways (Access, Management and Licensing of Railway Undertakings) Regulations 2016.

Both the Secretary of State for Transport and the ORR have prescribed duties in relation to the operation of the railways under section 4 of the Railways Act 1993. These include promoting improvements in railway service performance, protecting the interests of railway users and promoting use of the rail network for the carriage of passengers and goods. It also includes developing the network and a number of other concerns about promoting efficiency and economy on the part of those providing rail services. These represent a need to balance interests taking a variety of users into account and it would be premature and preferential to fix a particular operation at this point before reaching the point of settling services for all who would be served.

Fixing a service now would cut across the existing duties on the Secretary of State under the Railways Act 1993 in designating passenger services for franchising and engaging with tenderers for the service to be provided. It would also cut across the duty of the ORR in ruling on track access and approving use of the network under franchise or other access arrangements. Fixing it in perpetuity would also tie their hands against any change in services or operators and consideration of new track access contracts to meet future growth and changing passenger demand.