

Castle line News

The administrative, regulatory, financial, logistical, technological, and economic complexity of running and improving a train service is immense. When there's enough money, requirements can be met, attendant issues addressed, and progress made; when there isn't, you can't hope for much more than maintaining the status quo.

Passenger numbers and revenue continue to increase along the line, pre-eminently at Hykeham where economic and infrastructural investment remains significant. Rising demand exerts pressure to increase rolling stock, reduce overcrowding, and improve weekend services, but it will be difficult to do much about it. Further improvement to the Saturday service is imminent but the Sunday service is foreseeably destined to remain skeletal. Infrastructural development at Lincoln (to the level crossings and the station) is on track. The re-signalling of the Newark Castle-Lowdham stretch will be completed in November 2016 and faster Nottingham-Newark Castle journey times should be reflected in the December 2016 timetable. Improvements to Castle Line – East Coast Main Line connectivity at Newark North Gate, including clearer pedestrian and bus transfer information between Newark North Gate and Newark Castle, will be made. The ticket office at Newark Castle is open, and the long-promised adjoining retail outlet is scheduled to materialise this September.

There is no money for a flyover to take the Castle Line over the East Coast Main Line at the Newark flat crossing (which would have eliminated delay caused by the prioritisation of main line services). Without it capacity to increase traffic on the Castle Line (and in particular a twice-hourly Newark Castle-Collingham-Lincoln service via an extension to Lincoln of the recently-introduced twice-hourly Nottingham-Newark Castle service) will remain severely restricted. The re-signalling of the Newark Castle- Swinderby stretch is scheduled for completion in 2019 but there is no money to increase Newark Castle-Lincoln line-speed on its back. I do not know what, if anything, this disappointment portends for the Cross Lane crossing. It may be that it will stay as it is.

Long-term strategic aspirations focus on East – West Midlands connectivity via direct Lincoln-Newark Castle-Nottingham-Birmingham-Bristol/Cardiff services. Nothing of this kind or on this scale can be planned before the next East Midlands rail franchise process has been completed in 2018-2019. The Castle Line Stakeholder Board has formed the view that, apart from minor timetable improvements, there is very little more it can do before the strategic and funding framework arising from the franchising process has been determined; it may therefore decide to wind itself up.

The station car park is filling up and the yellow lines have reduced nearby on-street parking. Some passengers continue to park on the grass verges to the east of the station. They should stop it or, if they don't want to use the car park, walk farther. The road there is narrow. Parked cars make it narrower. There is no pavement. Does the risk to pedestrians have to be spelled out in words of one syllable?

Keith Burd

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