

Castle Line News

Efforts continue – primarily by Network Rail, East Midlands Trains, and the County, City, and District Councils covering the area through which the line runs – to improve the speed, frequency, and connectivity of passenger services on the Nottingham-Lincoln line, but they remain constrained by scarce funds, shortage of rolling stock, old technology, and limited line capacity. Residential and economic development along the line will generate demand for more and faster services which in turn will underpin the infrastructure necessary for such development to be achieved and sustained. Better services however can be delivered only to the extent they can be paid for and it is the job of the Stakeholder Board to secure the investment required to turn the Castle Line into a 21st century railway. That will not be easy and it is not going to happen quickly.

The resignalling of the Newark Castle (NCT)-Lowdham and NCT-Swinderby stretches is scheduled for late 2016 and 2018-2019 respectively and will be accompanied by the rationalisation and modernisation of ancillary level crossings. In 2016, Saturday Nottingham-NCT-Collingham-Lincoln services will be substantially improved to match the volume and frequency of Monday-Friday services. Some Lincoln-Newark Northgate (NNG) services will be re-timed to improve connections with East Coast Main Line (ECML) services to London, the North-East, and Scotland.

More generally, however, the NNG-Collingham-Lincoln service needs more two-carriage trains, especially during early mornings and at weekends, but the money and rolling stock required are not foreseeably available. Aspirations to introduce more direct Lincoln-King's Cross services, and a weekday half-hourly Lincoln-Collingham-NCT-Nottingham service, are similarly constrained. The long-term objective to take the Castle Line over the ECML at Newark, thereby eliminating delays caused when NCT-Nottingham services cede the track to ECML trains, has reached the drawing board, but its deliverability and affordability remain uncertain.

The effect on passenger numbers of the new timetable will be analysed later this year. East Midlands Trains staff have already reported noticeable increases in passenger traffic especially on commuter trains to both Lincoln and Nottingham, and on services carrying shoppers to both cities at weekends. By the time you read this report, the roads around Collingham station should have been yellow-lined, but don't believe it until you see it.

Keith Burd