

## Castle Line News

The primary purpose of the Castle Line Stakeholder Board is to provide more, faster, train services between Lincoln and Nottingham (and, thanks to Bob Imrie, Collingham is the only lineside village to be represented on it). Service improvements however are costly and complicated, demand and competition for scarce resources fiercely intense, and rolling stock availability and infrastructural capacity severely constrained. Nonetheless, Castle Line services will continue to improve. From May this year the Saturday timetable will be upgraded to match the weekday service, with faster journey times and six additional services between Collingham and Lincoln, Newark, Nottingham, Leicester, and Derby. The re-signalling of the Newark-Lowdham stretch will be completed in November this year, allowing faster Newark-Nottingham services in subsequent timetables. A new car park at Swinderby is under construction.

Similar line-speed improvements should follow the planned re-signalling of the Newark-Swinderby stretch. Additionally, the Board remains alert to the need to provide more Sunday services, increase the capacity and frequency of the Lincoln-Newark Northgate service (with a concomitant improvement in Castle Line/East Coast Main Line connections), deliver a half-hourly Newark-Collingham-Lincoln service, reduce delays caused by freight traffic and at the Castle Line/East Coast Main Line crossing at Newark, and extend Castle Line services to the West Midlands and the 'Northern Powerhouse'. Government policy to devolve power and funding to the English regions requires a coherent, competitive, response; there isn't enough money for everything. Resource constraints are one thing; the lack of an agreed, defined, East Midlands identity, an integrated strategic vision for its economic development, and an enabling political consensus – in stark contrast to most other English regions – quite another. These are big issues, not (apparently) easily resolved, and they do not help.

Early data on passenger numbers suggest a 12% increase in passenger traffic since the introduction of the new timetable in 2015. This growth is expected to continue, and will be tracked. Between 2004/05 and 2014/15 passenger numbers at Collingham increased from 22,000 to 69,000 per year, making it the most used intermediate station after Newark. In recent years, Hykeham has seen exceptionally rapid growth, reflecting adjacent economic and residential development. These trends augur well for the future of Lincoln-Hykeham-Swinderby-Collingham-Newark services.

Still no sign of the yellow lines at Collingham station. The work requires rigorous safety control and a level of coordination between the County Council and Network Rail which has thus far proved elusive but which the Board has been assured is now imminent. There are those who affect towards 'health and safety' a dismissive, usually ill-informed, disdain, but it is not so long since a trackside worker at Newark Northgate suffered catastrophic, ultimately fatal, injuries, and I am not inclined to disparage agencies which treat their statutory health and safety obligations with the seriousness the law requires of them. Having said that, the sooner vehicles are stopped from parking on the verges of Station Road, narrowing the driving space and forcing pedestrians into the road, the safer it will be for everyone.

Keith Burd

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