



Norfolk MPs' Rail Inquiry

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INQUIRY REPORT

MARCH 2007

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Finally, Tom Davis, who devoted long hours to organising the Inquiry's public hearing, and late nights to completing the final report.



When an MP is continuously bombarded by constituents and travellers on the inadequacies of a public service and finds after letters, questions, and media interaction that there is little effect or signs of improvement, then it is important to take the issue on, and hold those responsible to account.

The delivery of services by One Railway, in conjunction with Network Rail, on the Great Eastern Main Line beggars belief. Those who travel once or twice a year might be lucky, and feel satisfied about the service. For the regular commuters, though, there is a completely different experience on offer.

Three Norfolk Members of Parliament with experience on Parliamentary Select Committees decided to cross question as many representatives as could be mustered, in order to get some answers for regular rail users.

When I sit alongside commuters during my weekly travels between Norwich and London, I am often told to put questions to those at One Railway and Network Rail to find out exactly what's going wrong. I took your advice, and I hope this report provides the answers that you need.

Dr Ian Gibson
Member of Parliament for Norwich North

"Rail passengers are rightly demanding ever higher quality from the rail services they use. Our vision for Greater Anglia is to create the UK's top performing Train Operating Company (TOC). We have significant experience in integrating different rail businesses into a single company and in performing robustly against demanding service measurements. Now we hope to use our skills to deliver a quality passenger network in Eastern England."

Phil White

**Chief Executive, National Express Group,
announcing his company's bid for the Greater
Anglia franchise
September 2003**

Introduction

In launching a bid for the Greater Anglia franchise, National Express Group undertook to provide the East of England with a passenger network - 'one' railway - of which we could be proud. Now, with travellers becoming increasingly vocal about their unhappiness with the service, and since it is now over three years since that announcement was made, questions still remain about the ability of One to operate a consistently successful rail service.

The problems that have occurred on One Railway's services, particularly over the past six months, have caused no end of frustration for passengers who depend on a reliable train network every day. Of all the feedback that the Inquiry received, no question was asked more frequently than the obvious: are the providers of the Great Eastern Main Line rail service, One and Network Rail, satisfied that the current standards of service are acceptable?

This section of the Inquiry Report is designed to provide readers with clear and comprehensive answers to the questions that the Inquiry raised. In short, what measures are the company taking to ensure they live up to the promises made in their initial franchise bid.

1. Are One and Network Rail of the opinion that the current standards of service are acceptable?

In Summary

- £40,000,000 to renew rail line brought forward from 2009 to December 2007
- 4 years to complete the renewal of the line, with a 9 day blockade at Christmas 2007
- Independent figures show that punctuality is improving, with 2006 figures slightly ahead of 2005
- Most serious problems in 2006 could have been avoided with better planning
- Main focus is avoiding major disruptions
- Monitoring train and helicopter regularly deployed to check on the state of the line

- 1.1 At present, One claim that the technical standards they are maintaining are ahead of the targets set out in the franchise agreement. For 2006, figures provided by a Department for Transport-appointed independent auditor show that punctuality is improving and the figures for 2006 were slightly ahead of those for 2005.
- 1.2 Despite these improvements, executives at One are still not satisfied with every aspect of their service, and, alongside Network Rail, say there is no hint of complacency within either operation. They also say that many of the problems that occurred in 2006 could have been avoided if better monitoring procedures had been in place.
- 1.3 The need for investment is also clear in the minds of those behind the running of the Great Eastern Main Line, and managers and executives say that one of their most important jobs now is to avoid the major disruptions that occur.

What must be borne in mind is that even a relatively small incident on one train at the south of the line can throw off the schedule sufficiently to disrupt departures at the north of the line, and vice versa.

- 1.4 In terms of what progress has been made since the start of the franchise, it is fair to say that One's tenure as TOC for Greater Anglia has seen improvements in some areas of the service offered, but opinion amongst passengers appears to be split as to whether this outweighs some of the more catastrophic failures the company has presided over.
- 1.5 Remedying the problems, particularly in relation to over head power lines (OHPs), is unquestionably difficult and Network Rail representatives readily admit that the problems experienced in September 2006, where passengers were stranded on trains along the Great Eastern Main Line for up to 4 hours, could happen again. Despite this, Network Rail and One have been making progress with the implementation of a monitoring train to check the condition of the line and a specially-equipped helicopter deployed twice-weekly to check for deterioration and potential problems.
- 1.6 One and Network Rail's major plan for the line over the coming years involves the renewal of a significant portion of track and power cabling. This work was originally scheduled to start in 2009, but Network Rail announced to the Inquiry that £40,000,000 used to fund the project had in fact been brought forward and work was due to commence at London Liverpool Street Station from Christmas 2007. This will involve a 9 day blockade on the line, and work continuing until the London 2012 Olympics. The timetable is a 4 year completion plan for work on the line from London Liverpool Street to Chelmsford. It is Network Rail's assessment that many of the delays experienced throughout 2006 were the result of poor infrastructure, and that these problems will be avoided when the upgrade works have been completed. Both operations made it clear that although the plans were running to schedule, extra pressure on the government would be useful in order to make sure that the programme went ahead on time.

Inquiry Recommendations

- 1.7 Companies will always make bold promises when bidding for contracts - it attracts the decision-maker's attention and gives an impression of commitment from the supplier. The catch is that, should the company win the contract, they're expected to live up to all those promises and plenty more besides.
- 1.8 There is little doubt that the management at One and Network Rail do genuinely want to make the Great Eastern Main Line 'great', and the plans announced in response to the Inquiry will ensure that improvements to the line are completed ahead of the previously announced schedule. However, it should not take a hauling over the coals by a group of MPs, and a rising tide of criticism from passengers to spur the two operations into action. In a country historically so reliant on its railway network, we should expect Train Operating Companies (TOCs) to be proactive rather than reactive; they should be improving the lines in an effort to provide an even better rail service, not to prevent it from getting even worse.
- 1.9 The Inquiry is pleased to see that the improvements, although due to be carried out over a lengthy period of time, are being moved forward. We only hope that, with the work due to begin in about eleven months time and last for a further four years, One and Network Rail will not sit back and use these upgrades as an excuse to fall back on when things go wrong. Regular rail passengers' feelings towards the service are near to breaking point; they won't tolerate brush-offs to criticism of the TOC and Network Rail akin to "our improvement plan is in progress". The £40 million on offer to for these improvements must be spent wisely and within a tight budget and strict timetable - this investment is a great opportunity to fix the problems that are currently so invasive on commuters' lives, it must not be wasted.

The Question of Trust

How important is the question of 'trust' to One Railway? Do they care if they are trusted, and do they want to be proud of their services? Speaking on behalf of One, Managing Director Dominic Booth stated that One both wanted and needed to be trusted by its customers. The improvements to rolling stock, station refurbishments, and attempts to improve reliability were part of a programme to ensure that trust in the services did not deteriorate. The key problem that needs to be addressed here is consistency – One can, and indeed do, maintain good levels of service for the majority of their trains (over 88% are on time, according to figures from the Office of Rail Regulation "National Trends", 2006-2007 Q1), but the lack of a consistently good service and high profile catastrophes have meant that the problems on a minority of trains are highlighted and overshadow the improvements that are being made.

2. Would reducing the number of stations that the Norwich to London service stops at increase journey times?

In Summary

- Passengers at the larger stations are concerned that the frequent stops at small stations delay their journeys
- One believe that services to smaller stations cannot be jeopardised at the expense of serving only the major towns and cities. They have a commitment to rural as well as urban areas
- Recommendation would be to provide a number of 'rapid' services only stopping at the largest towns and cities (Norwich, Ipswich, Colchester, London)

2.1 The punctuality of peak-time mainline services has been the focus of much attention in the media, and the perception amongst passengers is that this is where most of the problems have been occurring. One Railway's perspective is that there are now more trains, more often, calling at more stations than ever before, and their trains are more punctual than ever.

Some passengers are not satisfied with this response, with one rail user succinctly commenting in their submission to the inquiry that:

"One is keen to promote the fact Intercity trains now stop at more stations, but for those of us at the end of the line, the service is quite simply too slow and not good enough."

2.2 Frustration with trains stopping for even short periods at relatively small stations is a complaint oft-recounted by passengers, who believe that the majority of service users in the larger towns and cities on One's route – Colchester, Ipswich, Norwich – have to suffer their trains stopping at smaller stations for several minutes where often very few individuals embark or leave the carriages. To passengers living in larger settlements, such waits can seem a waste of time, particularly if the train they are on is already delayed.

- 2.3 In response to such criticism, One Railway state that they run in the region of 600,000 trains a year and that providing information about specific trains would be 'unhelpful'. However, in response to the issue of train services stopping at stations with a lower passenger user quota, it was explained that the customers in these areas relied upon a good rail service passing through their area and that smaller stations could not be jeopardised at the expense of commuters in larger towns.

Inquiry Recommendations

- 2.4 Past experience with Anglia Railways tells us that the most efficient and effective service is not necessarily the one that stops at more stations and sets off more often. The Inquiry was told by an ASLEF representative that Liverpool Street is definitely close to or at full capacity. As such, just one delayed train can have a domino effect on the entire Main Line and the service has to scramble to resynchronise itself, leaving passengers sitting on trains in the middle of the countryside or stuck at stations with no progress in sight.
- 2.5 A more sensible solution might be to run several 'rapid' services that stop only at the largest towns and cities – i.e. London, Colchester, Ipswich, and Norwich. That said, the Inquiry wishes to make it clear that maintaining the current services running to existing rural station is important and reduction of those services would be unhelpful. There are a few services on the route that stop at a reduced number of stations, but according to One's customer service centre the vast majority of services stop at all the larger stations and plenty more besides. Although One's argument may be that the smaller stations on the route take up just a few extra minutes, cutting ten or twenty minutes off existing journey times is better than the alternative of waiting at stations with just a couple of passengers. It would seem logical for some services to run to fewer stations and get to their destination more quickly, and we believe that One should be seriously considering implementing such a change.

Delays on peak time rail services have been at the heart of passengers' concerns since One took over the franchise.

Data from the Traindelays.co.uk website finds that more passengers report problems with One Railway to that site than any other service provider on the rail network. The figures are not in any way representative of all service user experiences, but they perhaps reflect the fact that passengers on the One route feel a general dissatisfaction at the service and are willing to make their feelings known more frequently.

In response to these figures, One explained that figures checked by Department for Transport-appointed independent auditors found that they were in the middle of the league table for delays. It was accepted that One's cancellations were above average, but that continual improvements were being made to reliability.

At the time of publication, 218 delays had been registered by passengers for 2007 on One services. The company with the next highest number of registered delays was South Eastern Trains with 109 passenger-recorded delays.

3. How are the problems with overcrowding being tackled?

In Summary

- Passenger complaints about overcrowding on trains was one of the most frequently raised issues with the Inquiry
- One believe that trains on the line are no more overcrowded than the national average
- Upon reaching Colchester when coming from London, overcrowding is no longer a major problem
- Discussions on adding extra carriages to trains between London and Colchester are on-going
- One needs to look at how it is going to manage the increasing number of passengers using its service. If no changes occur, overcrowding will get worse
- The company line on whether it is acceptable for people to stand is not satisfactory

3.1 The problem of overcrowding in carriages will be familiar to most passengers at peak hours. The Inquiry received countless submissions from passengers about the issue, with some claiming that on one service the only unoccupied seats on the train were the lavatories, and there were already people standing in the cubicles.

"...almost every morning and evening there are people standing between Liverpool St and Colchester." - passenger.

"By Colchester, the train had 140 people standing..." – passenger.

3.2 In terms of a meaningful comparison to the national average, One Railway state that there are discussions about adding extra carriages to trains on the Colchester - Liverpool Street line in the hope of alleviating overcrowding in peak times.

- 3.3 The common denominator in the overcrowding problem appears to be the large number of rail users who use the commuter rail hubs of Colchester and Manningtree stations to travel into Central London. The result of this is that for those travelling the full length of the line (Norwich - Liverpool Street) half of their journey is spent in a relatively spacious environment with plenty of seats to choose from, whilst the other half of the journey is uncomfortable and overcrowded. For those who only experience travel between Colchester and London in peak hours, the whole service they experience is usually overcrowded and perceptions suffer as a result. This situation looks as though it could continue to deteriorate, and despite the undeniable problems with the service, passenger numbers have actually been growing year-on-year. The latest figures show a 6% year-on-year increase in passenger numbers and One have acknowledged that they need to find a way of coping with these extra demands.
- 3.4 In response to questioning as to whether it was acceptable to have passengers standing up on trains, One's Managing Director refused to comment.

Inquiry Recommendations

- 3.5 Encouraging people to get out of their cars and on to the trains – not difficult, one might assume, as East Anglia's lack of a motorway network is notorious – has been a major objective of the government's transport plans since 1997. Whilst it is fair to say that in no area of the country has this been successfully achieved, the situation is only made worse by the lack of a comfortable railway network. If consumers are forced to make a trade-off between a comfortable journey of 'two and a bit' hours from Norfolk to London in a car, and a theoretically quicker journey on an overcrowded and uncomfortable train, it is understandable that many would want to avoid the latter.
- 3.6 It is oft stated by the TOC's management that by the overcrowding problem desists upon reaching Colchester from London. Whilst this is mostly an accurate claim it is of little comfort to regular commuters who are crammed into corridors and forced to fight for seats when one becomes available. The Inquiry heard from a number of passengers that often there are many first class carriages that

go practically unoccupied. If passengers are forced to stand in standard class they should be allowed to take up any available first class seats with no questions asked.

- 3.7 Given the highly publicised problems that have occurred on the Great Eastern Main Line, it may seem somewhat remarkable that there are actually more and more people choosing to use the service every year. On the face of it, this is pleasing news: more passengers, ever-increasing fares, means higher profits and hopefully greater investment down the line. One should be showing these new customers that it could offer a reliable service; at present it appears as though they are not.
- 3.8 The official line appears to be that One offer you the luxury of choice: you can choose to travel on a busy peak-time train and stand, or you can choose to travel on a quiet off-peak train and sit; in terms of getting a busy train and sitting, the only advice on offer is to book well in advance. There is no justification whatsoever for such an approach, and the company needs to assess – and quickly – how they are going to resolve overcrowding issues. Extra carriages on extra trains is the obvious answer, but slow deliberating from One's management is doing nothing to alleviate problems that are occurring in the here and now.

4. Overhead power lines: why do they fail, and who is to blame?

In Summary

- It should be made clear that One are not responsible for every problem with the service, and that line maintenance is handled by Network Rail
- Network Rail perform better than average on the Great Eastern Main Line, One have a poorer than average standard for a Train Operating Company
- OHPs are failing because some areas of the track are up to 40 years old.
- Regular monitoring trains and helicopter scans, alongside foot patrols, are helping to identify problem areas
- One and Network Rail appear to communicate effectively, but need to be more open with passengers about what steps they are taking

- 4.1 A point that needs to be clarified in this report is that accountability for every problem on the Great Eastern Main Line cannot be put at the door of One Railway. Whilst One does operate the trains and timetabling of their services, the lines on the route are managed by Network Rail, effectively a government-managed private company.
- 4.2 As well as the problems that passengers outline with overcrowding, increased fares, dirty trains, and lack of cheap tickets, the most severe delays have been because of overhead power line problems that have beset the Great Eastern mainline. One Railway has been the public face for much of the passengers' frustration - it is One from whom they purchase their tickets; they sit on delayed trains emblazoned with the One livery; and their frustration is taken out on staff wearing uniforms with the corporate logo displayed proudly on the front. What many passengers are unaware of is that One's operational responsibility does not extend to the line on which their trains operate.
- 4.3 Figures provided to the inquiry by Network Rail's representative showed that the current percentage was Network Rail taking responsibility for 54% of reliability failures, and One taking responsibility for 46%. Network Rail say they are at an

above average performance level for this area, although the insinuation is that by consequence One Railway are at a below average performance level. The typical figures for other mainlines are Network Rail: 60%, TOC: 40%

- 4.4 Of the problems experienced in terms of delays, the vast majority of serious incidents have been because of a failure to maintain the overhead power lines (OHPs) towards the London end of the line.
- 4.5 The key problem with the OHPs appears to be that the bridle wire on the lines becomes loose and is burnt out by the electrical current. The reason for this deterioration is that the lines and their components are, in some cases, up to 40 years old. A detection and replacement programme is now underway by Network Rail, and it is understood that passenger safety is not being compromised by these problems. Inspection programmes by Network Rail include four weekly foot patrols along the lines as well as the monitoring train and helicopter scans. Such scans are also intended to detect areas where vegetation can have an impact on the smooth running of train services.

Inquiry Recommendations

- 4.6 It is easy to understand the frustrations of One executives when they are blamed for problems that they are so intimately linked to, and yet have no direct control over. The problems with power lines do fall outside of the company's jurisdiction, and indeed it is the management at Network Rail who must get their house in order and act quickly to prevent further problems on the line.
- 4.7 For One's part, the company appears to have good communications with Network Rail. In the immediate aftermath of the most serious problems experienced with overhead power lines in September 2006, One met with Network Rail within a few days to discuss the incidents and look for assurances that there would be no repeat of the problems. Unfortunately, the outcomes of these meetings have not been publicly disclosed and discussions, however extensive, appear to have had little obvious impact on preventing OHP

problems. The inquiry recommends that One be more open about its discussions with Network Rail, and communicate better with passengers about the outcome of those meetings. If the problems are indeed the fault of Network Rail, One has nothing to fear by coming forward and giving details about how it is representing its passengers.

5. How can One be held to account for failures to meet their franchise conditions?

In Summary

- DfT ability to carry out the most extreme action and revoke or cut short a franchise if the TOC is not performing adequately is important element in ensuring that TOCs are held accountable when things go wrong
- The lesser warnings, "Enforcement Notices" can be issued, and One have been in receipt of such a caution
- The news that One has failed to meet service benchmarks on 17 occasions has been the subject of discussions between the company and DfT officials

5.1 Accountability to the Government is a central tenet of the franchise system. The ability of the Government, through the Department for Transport, to award and revoke rail franchises supposedly keeps rail operators on their toes, and attempts to ensure that a level of service is achieved that is in line with commitments made in the franchise agreement. Companies such as Connex and, more recently, GNER have had their licences cut short through an inability to keep their services up to the agreed standard. It is not unheard of for the DfT to summon representatives of train operating companies to appear before Ministers to explain failings.

"One has failed to meet a service benchmark on 17 occasions since June 2005... As required by the Franchising Agreement, One put together a corrective plan of actions that has been the subject of a number of discussions with my officials to monitor progress". – Answer from Tom Harris, Under-Secretary of State for Transport to a Written Parliamentary Question from Dr Ian Gibson, MP

5.2 If necessary, the DfT can issue an "Enforcement Notice" on the TOC. According to an answer from Tom Harris, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport, in response to a Written Parliamentary Question asked for the inquiry, One have been issued with such a warning.

“There is no specific obligation within the ‘One’ Franchise Agreement to allow penalties to be imposed. However, an enforcement notice may be served requiring a remedial plan, notifying the steps that will be taken to secure or facilitate compliance, to be provided” Answer from Tom Harris, Under-Secretary of State for Transport to a Written Parliamentary Question from Dr Ian Gibson, MP

- 5.3 The inquiry was told that John Wilson of Network Rail and Mark Phillips of One have attended a meeting at the Department for Transport, to discuss the overhead line problems that have plagued services between Liverpool Street and Colchester.

Inquiry Recommendations

- 5.4 We believe that accountability is of the utmost importance to the running of a successful rail operation. When things go wrong, the individuals responsible should be held publicly to account rather than subject to private words-in-their-ear from civil servants.
- 5.5 We also question whether Enforcement Notices are something of a ‘railway-ASBO’. Do they actually serve any useful purpose, or are they there to make it look as though something is being done?
- 5.6 The Inquiry recommends that the means by which Train Operating Companies are held to account is re-examined, with a view to considering tougher penalties and more publicly available information about what action is being taken.

Listening to customers?

One have the worst response level to customer enquiries of any Train Operating Company in the United Kingdom.

Office of Rail Regulation "Rail Trends, 2006-7 Q1"

In January 2007, One employed a full-time expert in communications, with a view to reassessing how they talk to their customers and how to improve management of complaints and questions.

6. What contingency plans are in place to ensure the smooth running of the service in the event of an incident?

In Summary

- It is impossible to prevent every problem occurring on the rail line, and many incidents are outside of One and Network Rail's hands
- A full review of contingency plans has been implemented following the problems in September 2006
- Communications breakdowns in crises have made situations worse for passengers and staff, and improvements need to be implemented
- One are looking at their bus replacement services, and how effectively they operate
- One have now taken control of the announcements system at Liverpool Street Station, giving them greater flexibility with announcements and allowing them to provide more useful information to passengers when things go wrong

6.1 Incidents occurring along the Great Eastern Main Line are not just the result of line problems or train failures. An ASLEF representative informed the inquiry that some train delays are simply unavoidable, and it is not possible to prevent people attempting suicide on the line, disruption from freight trains, and extreme weather conditions. The best way for a company to handle such situations is to be prepared and provide a swift response.

6.2 The inquiry was also told that a full review of contingency arrangements has been implemented. A major criticism of One during the problems in September 2006 was that the company did not have adequate measures in place to ensure that staff and passengers were kept informed about what why trains were breaking down or how quickly the problems were going to be resolved. This communications breakdown resulted in those on-board the train, including

staff, not knowing why they were delayed and with no clear timetable as to when they would get home.

- 6.3 A consultant who specialises in communications joined One in January 2007, and they will be looking at new ways of informing passengers of what actions the company was taking when delays occurred.
- 6.4 In the event of a train breaking down or a suspended service, it is a standard response for a train operator to provide a replacement bus service, and indeed One Railway are no exception to this. However, the replacement services have not always been as efficient as passengers might expect and there have been several occasions when there have been too few buses available to cope with the number of passengers on the train. As a result of these problems, One are putting together a bus service provision supply, which aims to improve their contingency plans for providing enough buses for every passenger on their trains should a breakdown occur. In addition to this, they will also be gaining control of the announcements at Liverpool Street Station and improving the quality of the announcements system; the intention here is that One can provide passengers at Liverpool Street with information just as soon as it is available to them, and in the case of severe delays, regular updates can be provided through this channel.

Inquiry Recommendations

- 6.5 Given the number of highly publicised failures on the Norwich to London line of late, it is not surprising that the Inquiry heard from so many passengers who had little or no confidence in One's contingency plans. Indeed, perhaps a more pertinent question when considering one train that was four hours late is: are there any contingency plans?
- 6.6 One say that they are carrying out a wholesale review of their bus provision supply. The Inquiry hopes that, particularly for a company owned by coach operator National Express Group, an effective and workable outcome will be achieved. It goes without saying that leaving customers to sit for hours on

stranded trains is unacceptable behaviour, and compensating them by offering them yet more journeys where they might encounter similar chaos may be seen as rubbing salt into a gaping wound.

- 6.7 Rail users need to be made aware of what the contingency plans are in the event of a train failure – this could be easily achieved by providing documentation in carriages or the on-board magazine that is available to customers.
- 6.8 In the event of delays, passengers can find themselves sitting on a static train with no explanation given. Often the explanation and apology for the delay only comes when the train begins to move again. It would be more sensible to inform passengers what the reasons for the delay are just as soon as the driver is made aware of the situation, rather than when that situation has been resolved.
- 6.9 It would also be helpful if One provided information as to how frequently, if at all, their contingency plans are tested and evaluated. It may inspire passenger confidence to be able to see for themselves that their train operator has tested their contingency measures.

One Statement on changing their contingency plans

27th September 2006

“Following a special joint inquiry, which took account of both passengers' criticisms and feedback from employees on duty on the relevant occasions, we have identified a set of initiatives which will be implemented to ensure that provision of information, alternative transport and assistance for passengers is improved in the event of any similar disruptive incidents.

These actions include :

- The re-design of the contingency plan for the Shenfield to Colchester line.**
- The introduction of new guidelines covering the frequency and clarity of updates provided to 'front-line' employees during times of disruption.**
- Improving the process for information provision and station announcements during disruption.**
- Arranging for additional employees to be sent to the busiest stations in the event of major problems.”**

7. Are trains from the 1970s really a sign of a modern railway network, and do the refurbishment programmes go far enough?

In Summary

- Rolling stock from the 1970s is being used on the line, but with refurbishments to bring them up to what One believes is an acceptable standard
- Many passengers have stated to the Inquiry that they do not believe the refurbishments have gone far enough in comparison to other trains in the UK. Although more spacious, the interiors of the refurbished trains still appear very dated
- Rolling stock on rural services is being examined, with the possible introduction of more modern trains

7.1 In a late submission to the Inquiry, one passenger remarked that:

“The rolling stock on the London line I recognise from journeys I took in 1973 from Aldershot to Paddington. The Sheringham line stock my father recognises from a journey he took from Alexandria to Benghazi in 1946.”

7.2 Whilst it may be stretching things a little to suggest that the trains serving Sheringham station were, in a previous life, holding up routes from Egypt to Libya, the British Rail Mk3 carriages that are now in use on the Great Eastern mainline do indeed trace their origins back to the 1970s.

7.3 The Class 90 trains currently in use by One were purchased from Virgin Trains when the operator of the West Coast mainline upgraded its trains to the new tilting Pendolino services.

- 7.4 One's approach to improving these trains has been to refurbish every Mk3 carriage and carry out significant maintenance on the Class 90 locomotives they purchased from Virgin. However, there have been questions from passengers as to what exactly these refurbishments have changed, with some commenting that covering dated seats with new upholstery and a bit of rewiring does not constitute a significant improvement.
- 7.5 They also state that during franchise proposal discussions it was agreed that they would pitch on the basis of offering an Intercity-style service rather than an EMU (Electric Multiple Unit train -- effectively a metro/commuter style train rather than a large passenger train). It was the company's view that Norwich had traditionally been serviced by an intercity service and as such One believe that passenger reaction to the new trains has been positive and that the Class 90s with Mk3 carriages offer a level of comfort that is unmatched by some of the newer trains on the UK's rail network.
- 7.6 The company is also examining the quality of rolling stock on its rural services. There are new diesel trains that are being looked at by One for use on services including the Bittern Line, and they are also considering the possibility of extending their trains and making services more frequent.

Inquiry Recommendations

- 7.7 It is fair to say that whilst the Mk3s are by no means the most modern carriages running in Britain but One are correct to claim that these trains offer a more spacious environment than many new trains. The refurbishments that have been completed across the Mk3 range have gone some way to improving the level of comfort on board.
- 7.8 That considered, in contrast to some train companies, One's offering still looks poor – no digital displays in carriages to inform passengers of progress, no laptop power points, no headphone sockets on offer, and not even an adjustable armrest in sight. Whilst such creature comforts are perhaps not as important to customers as arriving on time and avoiding breakdowns, small

changes in these areas would make travelling on One's services more pleasant. With the age of the trains being what they are, it is fair to assume that any improvements on this level are a long way off.

8. When will the ticket situation at Norwich station improve?

- 8.1 Norwich station has recently been refurbished in line with One's plans to perform upgrades to stations across their network. However, problems with ticketing services at the station remain and passengers frequently complain about the speed of service. Some even attribute missing their trains to the fact that there are not enough staff serving at the ticket office, and a reduced-price ticket cannot be purchased on board.
- 8.2 In response to this, One say that they are aware of the problem and are in the process of recruiting an additional 3 members of staff for their Norwich ticket office. The electronic ticket machine at Norwich station has improved the situation enormously and One believe that they are very successful at reducing waiting times for customers; the company is attempting to install a second electronic ticket machine at Norwich station, however, as the station is a listed building, One are waiting on confirmation from Norwich City Council that they are able to proceed with the introduction of a machine.
- 8.3 Many passengers have been forced to board trains without tickets, having to buy them from the conductor at full price. One state that conductors do have discretion for such incidents. However, ensuring that staff are aware of the rules is a difficult business, and as such there have been incidents where customers have been treated differently by different members of staff and been given conflicting advice. One's approach to staff training is to put staff through their training academy at Stratford, where regular assessments are carried out.

Inquiry Recommendations

- 8.4 The inquiry believes that such a situation is nothing short of ridiculous. Whilst the problems with ticket issuing have undoubtedly been improved, and a second queue line for 'today's travel' has finally been introduced to the ticket

office, the delays from Norwich City Council are unacceptable. The inquiry will be making representations to the Council in order to assess what measures can be taken to stop a situation like this occurring again; it is vital that the station is allowed to modernise without going through lengthy bureaucratic delays, and the Council's approach to this situation does not allow for such development.

- 8.5 The inquiry also believes that it is important to ensure that all staff are properly briefed on the correct procedures to carry out and that equal treatment is applied to all passengers. The inquiry believes that it may be productive for One to make public information about the regulations that staff must follow; this could be in the form of a condensed booklet or online, making the public aware of just what the rules are in a simple format.

One's Staff

The inquiry believes that One's staff are a credit to the company and handle often very difficult situations in a manner that is a true credit to the company.

Staff are the public face of the company, and frequently face the full assault from customers when things don't run as smoothly as they should.

Their patience and efforts to improve services underlie the success of any improvements to be made, and as long as the staff are supportive and allowed to offer constructive feedback to the managers, the service will continue to improve.

Conclusions

Several days after the Inquiry's public hearing, we heard that the Managing Director of One Railway had resigned. It now appears that representatives from One were aware of his resignation plans before the public hearing took place, but chose not to disclose this on the day. Nonetheless, promises have been made and we plan to scrutinise the company closely to ensure that they are fulfilled.

In our conclusions, we can look back and say that the Inquiry has produced several constructive results and there are plenty of recommendations that we hope will be acted upon.

The £40,000,000 plan for renewing the line towards the south of the Great Eastern Main Line will hopefully help to resolve the problems caused by failing overhead power lines. However, the rail network in the UK does not have a great reputation for completing work either on time or on budget. As such, we would like to see a clear breakdown from the Department for Transport as to how the £40m will be spent. Also, we will be requesting regular reports from Network Rail about whether the work is running to time and budget, and if not why not. We intend to scrutinise the process of line renewal as closely as possible to ensure that this vast sum of money is not squandered on bureaucracy and instead produces results that rail passengers can notice.

The problem of overcrowding will not be resolved by investing in line improvements. Instead, there needs to be a wholesale re-evaluation of the Colchester-London stretch of track. Overcrowding occurs primarily as a result of the large number of passengers using the Norwich-London service as a commuter train from Essex into the capital. Here we can identify what appears to be a conflict with the actuality of the service and the ethos behind its design. One claim that the Great Eastern Main Line has always been an 'Intercity' route, and they felt it necessary to maintain this tradition. However, a large number of passengers using the service from Essex use the service as a commuter train, rather than a long distance Intercity operation. The Inquiry heard that One are considering proposals to extend the number of carriages for Colchester-London trains,

and we believe this can not come soon enough. In an ideal world, a more dedicated Essex-London high-speed commuter line would be put in place. Sadly, the political will and by consequence the funding are not forthcoming for such a project. Nonetheless, more people are now choosing to live outside the capital and make the daily commute in to work; the rail network needs to reflect this.

When there are problems with the Great Eastern Main Line, much is made of the 'discussions' that have taken place between One and Network Rail. One can use these opportunities to put across its dissatisfaction with the job that Network Rail is doing and express the views of passengers who are caught up in the troubles. They also provide a forum for discussion of compensation and who is to blame for specific incidents. One and Network Rail having close ties and being on good terms is of course useful, but even the most regular passenger could be forgiven for not realising that the two ever hold any meaningful talks. Plenty of negotiations between the two sides took place after the incidents in September 2006 but so far there has been much reticence about coming forward and revealing what was discussed. This behaviour needs to be looked at with a view to being more open. Passengers would probably have a great deal more sympathy for both One and Network Rail if the two were honest about the problems that they are facing and the efforts they are making to resolve them. A lack of openness only creates mistrust amongst the public, and the Inquiry would like to see a greater spirit of honesty displayed on both sides.

The secretive nature of the rail industry in the UK extends to disciplinary action taken when a Train Operating Company, in this case One Railway, fails to meet the criteria set down in the Franchise Agreement. There is no public consultation about how to make things better or what passengers would like to see done. Instead, civil servants who have never travelled the Norwich-London line and representatives of One meet behind-closed-doors in order to discuss what went wrong. The most common outcome of these meetings is the issuing of an Enforcement Notice – effectively a ticking off from the government – and an action plan to prevent a recurrence of whatever went wrong this time. The Inquiry was able to determine that One has breached the terms of its franchise agreement 17 times since 2004. This figure may startle regular users of the service, who might be justified in expecting at least one zero, if not more, to be added to the end of that figure, such is the frequency with which delays and service failures

have been reported by passengers. We have concerns that Enforcement Notices drawn up by civil servants do not achieve particularly effective results, and that there is minimal passenger consultation in their design. We will be contacting the Department for Transport to express our concerns about the situation and outline alternatives. There is something fundamentally wrong with a system that lets a company break its promises 17 times and get away with just a light slap on the wrist.

In the event of a major incident, like any responsible operator One have a contingency plan in place. Through submissions to the Inquiry, it became clear that the plans in place for the Great Eastern Main Line were not always effective. We understand that there have been changes in recent months to the plans, and One have recently announced the appointment of a new Head of Performance and Planning who, amongst other duties, will work on their existing contingency plans. The Inquiry notes that One's contingency plans are not readily accessible to the public and believes it would be a positive step for One to inform passengers what action is taken to ensure their safe onward journey when things do not run smoothly. The Inquiry will be contacting One to make this suggestion, and we will also be asking how often contingency plans are tested, what improvements One expect to make to their existing plans, and what passenger consultation takes place when drawing up these plans.

A frequently raised point by passengers was the problems with ticketing at Norwich station. It was confirmed to the Inquiry that One have made efforts to install a second passenger-operated ticket machine in Norwich station but their plans have been delayed by Norwich City Council requiring planning permission for its installation. We will be looking at ways to avoid such problems in the future, and hope to hold discussions with City Hall on this issue.

The Inquiry was saddened to note that two fatal rail-related incidents occurred whilst this report was being drafted. The first occurred on the 23rd February 2007 at Grayrigg in Cumbria, and involved the derailment of a Virgin Pendolino train on the West Coast Mainline. The second occurred at Swainsthorpe, around 6 miles south of Norwich, on the 1st March 2007, and involved a One Railway train colliding with a car at a half-barrier level crossing on the Great Eastern Mainline.

In the case of the Cumbria derailment, much emphasis has been placed upon the safety features of the new Pendolino trains. Alston, the manufacturers of the Pendolino involved, stated in a press release that “rail experts and Virgin all attribute the relatively low number of casualties to the excellence of design and build of the train.”

It is therefore concerning that on the Great Eastern Mainline we are still using trains and carriages with their design rooted in the 1970s and 80s. Should a similar accident have happened here, the outcome could be much more serious simply because the Train Operating Company involved has chosen to use outdated rolling stock with only cosmetically improved interiors. Unfortunately for passengers, a new seat cover won't prevent fatalities if a train comes off the tracks. The number of fatalities that occur in a rail accident should not be dependent upon on which part of the railway network you are travelling. We should not think ourselves “lucky” if an accident happens on a modern train and “unlucky” if it happens on one of the more ancient examples gracing our railway network. Put another way, would air travellers be comfortable being told that they would be more likely to die on a Norwich – London flight if it crashed than a Manchester – London equivalent? Such standards would not be tolerated in the aviation industry, and they should not be acceptable on the railways.

The events in Cumbria have shown the value of having modern rolling stock in operation. The safety standards of the Pendolino disgrace the rolling stock on the Great Eastern Mainline and we will be pushing for changes in this area. There are no excuses or second chances where safety is concerned; old rolling stock with old safety features is simply not good enough.

The incident at a level crossing in Norfolk on 1st March 2007 was equally distressing, but raised different questions about safety on the network. With investigations at an early stage, preliminary findings suggest that the cause of this incident can be attributed to the half-barrier crossing design in place at Swainsthorpe. This is the second incident to occur at the Swainsthorpe crossing in as many years and if, when the cause of this incident is officially confirmed, it is deemed that the half-barrier crossing contributed to or was the cause of the crash then some very searching questions must be asked of Network Rail's commitment to safety on this line. There must also be an urgent review of their use with a view to replacing them with safer alternatives. It goes against common sense to allow a 100mph Intercity train to run

through a rural village without adequate warnings and protection; it should not take three Members of Parliament to point this out to the rail industry. A chronic lack of investment coming from central government does not help the situation, though, and it looks increasingly as though rail safety must now play second fiddle to Iraq and failed NHS computer systems.

It seems a shame to end on what is a tragic note, but from these incidents we believe that, with the support of passengers, improvements can and will come. To date, the only opportunity that rail passengers have had to see their opinions put directly to the leaders of One and Network Rail in East Anglia have been through this Inquiry. Clearly, for some it has been a cathartic exercise that is long overdue, but this is more important than just letting off pent-up aggression towards the two companies, it is about making passengers' views count for something when we decide the future of the rail network. One's publicity machine does not engage the public but is instead limited to responses to the odd media episode. With this in mind, in 2007 we aim to meet again in a public setting with representatives from One and Network Rail and use the opportunity to put passengers' thoughts on the service they use and discover just what progress has been made since the Inquiry's public hearing in 2006. We aim to repeat this process on a yearly basis to find out what improvements are being made to the service and how far there remains to go, as well as using it as an opportunity to let the two companies' management listen to passengers more directly. We will also be maintaining the Inquiry's website (www.freewebs.com/onerailwayinquiry) and encouraging passengers to submit their opinions to us throughout the year.

We are convinced that the route from Norwich to London has been underperforming, and are determined to work with One and Network Rail to put things right. Let the two companies be in no doubt, though, we have serious doubts about their ability to maintain a reliable service and if there is a continual series of delays we intend to visit the Minister to discuss their franchise arrangements.

We conclude by saying that with continued effort from One and Network Rail, support from the Government, and by listening to feedback of those who use the lines on a daily basis, the rail service in Norfolk will improve; as MPs, we look forward to playing our part in supporting our constituents and making sure their interests, as customers of the service, are always given the highest priority.



Passenger Submissions

What follows is a very small sample of the submissions that the Inquiry received from passengers during its consultation period.

Overall observations of One are that their service is getting worse. Their customer service and telephone booking is appalling to the point whereby they do not answer their phone so that you can book a ticket and when they do, you find that they are telling you a different price and a different time for tickets that were clearly available online. Quite often the reason is given that, due to the delay in answering the phone, the tickets have been sold, which is not an acceptable service. More recently, we had a ticket move from £35 to £97 in the space of one telephone call and when challenged the supervisor came onto the phone and agreed that we could have it at the original price. The telephone call took over half an hour - this was after a 20 minute wait for the telephone to be answered.

- Passenger submission, 16th November 2006

I have been commuting now for over 15 years on this line, and to be perfectly frank, I have never known it to be so bad and customer's moral to be at such a low level. Their expectations that anything will improve are totally non existent.

- Passenger submission, 21st November 2006

I cycled up to the 6.30 train to find it ready to leave, except that there AS NO DRIVER. I asked the guard to to unlock the doors .. this was FLATLY refused, but we waited another 5 minutes before the driver was found.... I had to stand there to watch my train go without me. I was SO ANGRY, and made this clear to the guard. A supervisor came to see what the fuss was about .She was very pleasant and understanding but supported her guard. .. and eventually bought me a coffee as she evidently felt bad about what had had happened.

- Passenger submission, 21st November 2006

Virgin having bought them off another company first. A lick of paint and a overhaul does not make the Loco any more reliable. It is nice to see that "One" can put new coffee machines on the train, kit out the staff in new uniforms, have a new ticketing

system, have a advertising campaign on local television, but that they can not run a reasonable reliable service to London. I am sorry to be a tail of woe but after the last few weeks the One railway service to London and return has been a nightmare.

- **Passenger submission, 22nd November 2006**

Regular commuters have become harden to this but let's be honest, when we are paying a great deal of money for a service, It is not unreasonable to expect the service to work or at the very least be communicated as to what is going on.

- **Passenger submission, 23rd November 2006**

The seats are dirty, uncomfortable, the toilets are disgusting, and far too many people are forced to stand up on journeys to and from London. In summer the air conditoning doesn't work in many coaches, and in the winter many coaches are often cold because the heaters don't work properly.

- **Passenger submission, 8th December 2006**

What exactly did you spend £25million pounds on when you introduced Virgin's old rolling stock as a "new replacement"

- **Passenger submission, 13th December 2006**

Quite simply, the 'service' provided by One is an utter disgrace. Perhaps the best example of One's contempt for their passengers is the attitude towards new capital investment. When reading about the new plans that NE/OR have for investing in the service, it is almost always in areas of revenue production, and concentrates almost entirely on the provision of more catering coaches, and new Cafe Bar services.

- **Passenger submission, 12th December 2006**

I live in Norwich - and for the first time in three years I am working back in London . For the past eight weeks I've been doing one or two return journeys each week between Norwich and London Liverpool Street . Of my twenty-one journeys so far, only three trains have run to time. This means that almost invariably every journey is now two hours plus – which as I'm sure many have commented, is slower than ever before.

- **Passenger submission, 14th December 2006**

Staffing levels are not good enough in the booking office on Norwich. Sometimes there are long queues and we have to buy our tickets on the train as we would miss it if we waited in the booking office. The separate queue for "Tickets for immediate use" has been reintroduced at long last, (Anglian Railways always had one) but even now that queue position is sometimes not manned.

- **Passenger submission, 15th December 2006**

Addendum

We regret that due to unavoidable diary commitments, including the Liberal Democrat Spring Conference in Harrogate, Norman Lamb MP was unable to revise the final draft of the report in time for the deadline.

Mr Lamb's comments will be published on the Inquiry website www.freewebs.com/onerailwayinquiry as soon as they are available.