

WHY HARROGATE TRAINS? – 1st Success!

Harrogate Chamber welcomes new London-Harrogate Trains (Embargo 20/01/11)

Harrogate Chamber of Trade & Commerce welcomed the East Coast announcement that they will operate a new direct service between London Kings Cross and Harrogate daily from 23rd May 2011.

Chamber Chief Executive Brian Dunsby said that this will be the first new rail service to Harrogate for over 25 years and it would be welcomed not only by Harrogate business people and local residents returning from trips to London, but even more importantly by the thousands of business and leisure visitors coming to Harrogate from London, from the South-East of England and from East Anglia.

Brian said he understood that over 60 years ago Harrogate enjoyed a frequent London-Harrogate-Edinburgh Pullman Car service with up to 10 trains per day. This was cut back in stages and Harrogate now has just one direct London service, south bound, Monday to Saturday mornings only. He said that the weekday northbound service from London to Harrogate was withdrawn in May 1990 as an indirect consequence of electrification of the East Coast Main Line; so Harrogate has been without a London-Harrogate service for over 20 years. This will be the first NEW service TO Harrogate for over 25 years.

Simon Cotton, Chamber President, added that whilst there are now frequent fast services from Kings Cross to Leeds and York, connections to Harrogate are poor quality and often ill-timed. Changing trains is seen as risky, inconvenient, and time consuming - whilst the rolling stock falls significantly below most customer expectations. Nevertheless there are about 2 million passenger journeys a year to and from the Harrogate District Stations, confirming the local propensity for rail travel. Simon added that to enable Harrogate International Centre to compete with the other major Conference Towns in the UK we really need several direct trains to and from London every day.

Brian Dunsby explained that this new evening return train was just the first stage of the Chamber's campaign to achieve a direct return service between Harrogate and London Kings Cross several times each day. Their campaign group created a 25-page bid document entitled "*Why Harrogate Trains?*" which highlighted and substantiated the following points in considerable detail:

- Harrogate District is close to the geographical centre of the UK, accessible by road and rail from north, south, east and west. It attracts large numbers of visitors all the year round, for both business and leisure. The latest estimate of Total Direct Visitor Spend in the District was £331m per year from a total of 6.4 million visitor-days including both business and holiday tourism visitors.
- Harrogate has a unique combination of Conference, Exhibition and Event facilities alongside many well established visitor attractions. It is supported by numerous nearby hotels, guest houses and restaurants; a combination not matched anywhere else in the UK. These facilities combined with a relaxing rural environment attract international, national and regional corporate, professional and trade events of all types virtually all the year round. Planning permission has recently been granted for two new hotels, whilst older ones are being updated.
- Harrogate International Conference centre is the third largest integrated conference and exhibition venue in the UK after Excel, London and EICC, Edinburgh. Phase 1 of a £45m expansion programme is now in progress which will add two new exhibition and event halls and a new entrance to the venue. These are scheduled to open in Autumn 2011.
- Conferences, Exhibitions, Trade Shows and Entertainments at HIC attract well over 200,000 business visitors per annum, with around 40% visiting from London and South East. In a recent event survey, 78% of delegates came from outside Yorkshire, but few travelled by rail. Harrogate's poor rail connectivity has frustrated the attraction of some major new conferences – and risks losing others to better connected venues such as Birmingham and Manchester.
- The largest event at the showground in Harrogate is the Great Yorkshire Show which takes place in mid-July each year. With the demise of the Royal Show at Stoneleigh, the Great Yorkshire Show is now the largest agricultural show in the country. Many smaller events of various types are also held on the Showground all the year round, with an average of over 600 events and a total attendance of nearly 440,000 visitors a year. The RHS Garden at Harlow Carr has over 300,000 visitors each year.

- Harrogate has a large number of successful hotels, guest houses and restaurants that cater for both business and leisure visitors. The Tourist Information Centre says that there are 1,472 bedrooms in hotels and 284 in guest houses within Harrogate – a total of 1,756 rooms with over 2,100 beds. These figures far outweigh comparable towns that already have direct London rail services.
- Harrogate is a unique area of high economic growth forming a “golden triangle” with Leeds, Wetherby and York. Harrogate has a predominantly professional demographic profile with higher than average levels of social class, household income, property values and car ownership. Harrogate has been repeatedly quoted as one of the best places to live in the UK. Hence Harrogate attracts upwardly mobile individuals to live in Harrogate and work all over the country - or across the whole world. These factors all indicate a propensity to travel.
- Recent developments in Harrogate District that could increase demand for rail travel include loss of the Leeds Bradford to Heathrow air service; opening of Harrogate International Business School; adoption of a broad Local Development Framework; new housing and business park developments; aspirations for Park & Rail or Parkway Stations; a proposed Transport Interchange; and a planned Harrogate Convention Bureau.

The Why Harrogate Trains report proposes a series of immediate, short term, medium term and long term actions needed to provide the frequent direct trains to and from London that Harrogate and its many visitors deserve. In summary, these actions and expected outcomes are:

Immediate Actions 2010 (currently 1 direct train per day HGT-KGX southbound only)

- Harrogate Chamber will compile an integrated timetable showing all connections between Harrogate and Kings Cross and intermediate Stations on East Coast mainline. *(Now available on our web site)*
- Northern Rail is asked to change the remaining Class 14X diesel multiple units to Class 15X for all services on the Harrogate Line with 4-car units operating in the peak periods.
- Leeds Bradford Airport is asked to implement a Horsforth Rail-Air shuttle mini-bus on a trial basis in view of the likely demise of the Harrogate Airport Bus Service 767.

Short Term Actions 2011 (making 2 direct trains per day HGT-KGX every day- 1 each way)

- The Department for Transport & East Coast Trains are asked to reinstate the evening return service from Kings Cross to Harrogate on a seven day basis in the EUREKA timetable from May 2011.
- Northern Rail is asked to proceed with proposed plans to increase the duration and frequency of services on the Harrogate to York line during the evening and on Sundays.

Medium Term Actions 2012/13 (making 4 direct trains per day HGT-KGX- 2 each way)

- DfT is asked to put into the new ECML Franchise Specification one new early morning service from Kings Cross via Leeds to Harrogate and one new evening return from Harrogate to Kings Cross.
- North Yorkshire County Council and Harrogate Borough Council are asked to contact the shortlist of bidders for the new franchise so that they all come to Harrogate to see the potential.
- Network Rail is urged to proceed with the proposed Horsforth turn-back and the improved signalling between Leeds and Harrogate.
- Northern Rail is urged to procure additional Class 150 series rolling stock needed to serve Horsforth, Harrogate and Knaresborough.

Long Term Actions 2014/16 (making a 2 hourly service HGT-KGX every day – 7 each way)

- DfT is asked to put in the new ECML Franchise Specification several additional extensions of existing northbound services from Kings Cross via Leeds to Harrogate or alternatively via York to Harrogate.
- The Office of Rail Regulation is asked to allocate additional slots on the ECML for open access operators, as soon as planned work by Network Rail to remove bottlenecks is complete.
- Northern Rail is asked to include two trains per hour between Harrogate and York as part of the franchise renewal, subject to improved signalling and level crossings.
- North Yorkshire County Council & Harrogate Borough Council are asked to approve a Park & Ride or Parkway Station either south of Harrogate or east of Knaresborough.
- Network Rail is asked to consider whether the Leeds-Harrogate-York line could be an alternative or diversionary route for ECML diesel services. This might also enable some Trans-Pennine Express and Cross-Country diesel trains to go from Leeds to York via Harrogate.

ISSUED BY: Brian L Dunsby, Chief Executive, Harrogate Chamber of Trade & Commerce

E-mail: chiefexec@harrogatechamber.org Direct line: 01423 879208 Mobile: 07836 537512