

Poacher Line Strategic Outline Business Case

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Executive Summary

This Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) presents a case for service and infrastructure improvements to the Poacher Line, a rail branch line that runs eastwards from Nottingham to Grantham, through the counties of Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, and Lincolnshire.

Local Authority partners note that this section of the Poacher Line suffers from inadequate frequency of service and elongated journey times due to infrastructure issues, leading to economic and social disadvantage for the communities along the line. With planned growth in housing and employment, the need for a more frequent service is becoming ever more pressing. The infrequent level of service limits the ability of the Poacher Line communities to sustainably access jobs and opportunities in Nottingham and beyond. The poor level of service appears particularly unfavourable when compared to the better-connected Nottingham commuter belt to the west of the city.

Providing a service that neither caters for existing or new users means potential train commuters and other rail users are forced to use the already congested highway network – and particularly the A52 – which suffers from significant congestion on the approach to Nottingham and resulting air quality problems. As a result, commuters at present discount the option of train travel due to the less than desired quality of service available; the Poacher Line is not seen as a viable commuter line by the communities alongside the line seeking improved access to employment and opportunity.

Key Concerns: Poacher Line Service and Infrastructure Improvements

- Upgrades to the Poacher Line can help the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), the three Counties, the Districts and communities to achieve their goals of enabling all communities to sustainably access economic prosperity. It will help local economies to grow and thrive.
- The aims of Midlands Connect and HS2, and the East Midlands Trains Re-Franchise, require good local rail connections; the Poacher Line is currently unable to assist in meeting this aim.
- Improvements to the level of service along the Poacher Line can unlock regeneration, provide for sustainable development, and provide access to jobs and opportunities for its commuters.
- Improvements to the facilities at the stations, particularly additional car parking, can ensure that all current and future residents are able to sustainably access an improved service.
- A more attractive and viable rail service will help to ensure planned developments are sustainable, accessible, and that the new and existing residents will consider rail as a mode of travel to work, leisure, and other activities.
- Enhancements to the Poacher Line from Grantham into Nottingham will ensure equity in the quality and utility of service for local communities comparable to lines entering Nottingham from the north and west.
- Accessibility and P&R facilities are key concerns for stakeholders, the latter of which could lever greater demand for the rail service.
- The A52 suffers considerable congestion near Nottingham, and rail is competitive compared to road travel, particularly in the AM peak.
- Parts of Netherfield do exhibit high levels of deprivation and social need which public transport investments could help address if targeted effectively.

Given the above, four key objectives have been set for the development of options for consideration in this SOBC:

- Objective 1:** Support the growth, development and vitality of communities along the Poacher Line;
- Objective 2:** Support the regeneration of Netherfield;
- Objective 3:** Enable commuters and leisure travellers to choose rail travel over car travel;
- Objective 4:** Make the case for the efficient, cost-effective and practicable delivery of a preferred option for this section of the Poacher Line.

The transport and socio-economic issues and opportunities for each of the stations along the line are considered in the SOBC, and the constraints to change identified. Principle amongst these are the single-track section of track on the approach to Grantham (limiting additional train movements to one in and one out of Grantham per hour), and the need to ensure the proposals are financially and commercially viable for the operator and the Department for Transport.

Economic analysis and rail modelling were conducted to develop preferred options for improving the service and facilities on the Poacher Line, to cater for current rail use, latent rail use, and future rail use resulting from the significant housing and employment growth expected in the study area.

Preferred Options

The analysis and context provided in the Strategic Case, combined with analysis in the Economic and Financial Cases in particular, presents a case for improvements to the Poacher Line between Nottingham and Grantham.

It is suggested that ‘Do Something 2’ or ‘Do Something 3’, shown in the table below, are taken forward for consideration.

Option	Peak Service	Off-Peak Service	Sunday Service	Park & Ride
Do Minimum (current scenario)	Hourly at all stations barring Elton & Orston	Hourly at Bingham 1 every 2/3 hours at Aslockton, Bottesford, & Radcliffe on Trent No service at Netherfield	Bingham only (5 trains per day in each direction)	Aslockton: 11 Bingham: 6 Bottesford: 13 Others: 0
Do Something 2 (DS2)	As per DS1 but half hourly peak service from Radcliffe on Trent, Bingham, Aslockton, and Bottesford	1 per hour, except Netherfield (every 2/3 hours)	Minimum, e.g. single Derby-Grantham service every 3 hours	Aslockton: 30 Bingham: 50 Bottesford: 50 Radcliffe on Trent: 30
Do Something 3 (DS3)	As per DS2 but retimes Nottingham-Skegness to provide even interval	As per DS2 but retimes Nottingham-Skegness to provide even interval	Minimum, e.g. single Derby-Grantham service every 3 hours	Aslockton: 30 Bingham: 50 Bottesford: 50 Radcliffe on Trent: 30

With a positive BCR of 1.07 (DS2) and 1.04 (DS3), these two options would deliver enhanced sustainable transport options and access to economic opportunity for the communities of the Poacher Line and the study area. DS2 delivers the best economic appraisal results, but DS3 re-times the services to create less ‘bunching’ in the timetable, to the benefit of passengers (delivering on the Franchise Prospectus’ imperative to ‘put the customer first’).

These two options deliver an hourly service for almost all the stations throughout the day from approximately 6.30am until 10pm, depending on the station. They deliver a half-hourly service during the peak hours at Radcliffe on Trent, Bingham, Aslockton and Bottesford, and additional Park and Ride at these stations to accommodate and encourage the additional demand for rail travel, brought about both by these improvements and the expected growth in the settlements' populations.

There is strong political and stakeholder support from the communities along this section of the Poacher Line for the increased services proposed in DS2 and DS3, and the improvements in infrastructure. Sensitivity Test 1 (in Chapter 4) shows that the impacts of the improvements in service could exceed those expected in the standard economic appraisal.

Realising the Benefits

DS2 and DS3 would deliver the objectives for the Poacher Line between Nottingham and Grantham. If either preferred option is delivered, we would anticipate meeting the SOBC objectives identified:

Objective 1: Support the growth, development and vitality of communities along the Poacher Line

The preferred options deliver capacity and infrastructure improvements designed to accommodate the levels of growth allocated in the study areas' Local Plans. They will encourage more travel to and from each of the station's towns and villages, and make these places more attractive locations for commuter-based families and individuals to settle. Local people will be able to access the leisure and service economy in larger urban areas such as Nottingham more conveniently and later into the evening. The economic development and vitality of each of the settlements, and the larger districts and regions they are part of, will be supported.

Objective 2: Support the regeneration of Netherfield

Netherfield will have two viable, convenient train stations, with Netherfield station more than doubling its stopping trains per day, and its last stopping train from Nottingham now four hours later than is currently provided. These will benefit new and existing residents as the town regenerates. The DfT and the franchisee will consider accessibility improvements at the station. Although we cannot provide a level of service at Netherfield through DS2 or DS3 that is comparable with some of the other stations on the Line, since it would lead to a much poorer economic case, the improvements that are proposed for services at Netherfield station can be seen within a wider sustainable transport offer to Netherfield's population, in combination with Carlton station and their regular bus service.

Objective 3: Enable commuters and leisure travellers to choose rail travel over car travel

Rail travel will be more frequent and more convenient, and present a more attractive option than currently, when compared to travelling by car. Congestion and its associated delays and air pollution could be reduced as people choose to travel by a more reliable and frequent rail alternative. People will be able to combine car and rail travel using the additional P&R capacity to avoid delays and unreliability on the road network when travelling to congested areas such as Nottingham City Centre. The improvements to the Poacher Line's level of service will not significantly dis-benefit other travellers coming in to (or returning from) Nottingham from further afield than Bottesford.

Objective 4: Make the case for efficient, cost-effective and practicable delivery of a preferred option for this section of the Poacher Line

The proposed service changes re-cast the Poacher Line timetable as efficiently as possible and work within the practical constraints set out earlier in the Strategic Case. The economic appraisal shows DS2 and DS3 provide value for money and although some subsidy is required, there is capacity to reduce this from our forecast levels, and this subsidy is in line with (and in fact less than) many other examples from across the country. The improvements it will generate for the Poacher Line communities and study area will, in our opinion, provide economic, social and environmental benefits that are worth investing in.

