

Report on LNER Sunderland extension withdrawal from December 2024

Summary

LNER has made the difficult decision to withdraw (between Sunderland and Newcastle) its direct services between Sunderland and London King's Cross service from the December 2024 timetable, following consultation between 11 June and 5 August 2021. This means LNER will no longer depart from Sunderland at 05.39 southbound and arrive at 23.22 northbound. These services will both still operate between Newcastle and London.

Sunderland will continue to have good connectivity with LNER services via Northern Trains and the Tyne and Wear Metro, as well as direct London services operated by Grand Central. In May 2022 Grand Central increased its Sunderland-London services from 5 to 6 services per day.

The direct LNER Sunderland<>London King's Cross services have had low passenger numbers between Newcastle and Sunderland since it was introduced by Virgin Trains East Coast in 2015.

LNER has taken the difficult decision to remove services from its December 2024 timetable to support the delivery of a reliable and more sustainable timetable, made possible by using the most efficient use of limited resources.

Background

LNER's vision is to become the most loved, progressive and responsible railway for generations to come. To achieve this, we need to ensure that rail travel offers good value and is reliable for everyone across the route.

The withdrawal of LNER's Sunderland services were consulted on as part of a wider timetable uplift proposal in 2021. LNER has now made a decision with respect to the withdrawal of the Sunderland extension included in that consultation. Decisions with respect to other service proposals are still to be determined.

These LNER services are now being used by very few customers between Sunderland and Newcastle where there are already rail links provided by other train operators and the Metro. The proposed changes will enable LNER to deliver a more efficient and reliable timetable of services for our customers now and into the future.

Communication approach

A consultation website was established as the central information hub through which customers and stakeholders could view the details of the proposals.

The website presented the timetable in a regional structure so that customers and stakeholders could source and download station-specific timetable information quickly and easily. A full consultation document was also made available for download, which brought

together all the relevant information. Other supporting documents included LNER route maps and a list of frequently asked questions.

The consultation was also promoted on LNER's website; social media; consultation leaflets; a media release; Stakeholder e-shot; in station materials and through digital outreach via Facebook.

Responses

There were 65 responses, including from political representatives and rail user groups, to LNER's proposal to withdraw its Sunderland services. It was noted that those who identified Sunderland as their local station from the Teesside, Tyneside and County Durham region were least in favour to the proposals consulted on in 2021.

The most common themes raised were local, regional and national connectivity. Respondents highlighted that loss of connectivity would have an impact on the Sunderland economy and Sunderland as a destination. It was suggested that LNER increase the number of services.

Political representative responses

Political representatives objected to LNER's proposal to withdraw its Sunderland services. Reasons for objecting included: withdrawal did not support the UK's Government levelling up agenda; unpopular journey times being the reason for the low customer numbers. It was suggested that LNER services should be increased and operated at more accessible times.

Conclusion

After careful consideration, LNER has made the difficult decision to withdraw (between Sunderland and Newcastle) its direct services between Sunderland and London King's Cross service from the December 2024 timetable. This means LNER will no longer depart from Sunderland at 05.39 southbound and arrive at 23.22 northbound. These services will both still operate between Newcastle and London.

LNER understands the concerns with respect to the loss of local and regional connectivity. However, Sunderland will continue to have good connectivity with LNER services via Northern Trains and the Tyne and Wear Metro, as well as direct London services operated by Grand Central. In May 2022 Grand Central increased its Sunderland-London services from 5 to 6 services per day.

The direct LNER Sunderland<>London King's Cross services have had low passenger numbers between Newcastle and Sunderland since they were introduced by Virgin Trains East Coast in 2015. It is unfortunately not possible to increase the number of LNER Sunderland services or to amend the times of these services due to the limited track capacity and limited resources, such as available rolling stock.

The removal of these services will support the delivery of a reliable and more sustainable timetable, made possible by using the most efficient use of limited resources.