

Rail update: Written statement - HCWS85

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Department for Transport

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Commons

HCWS85

Rail update

I wish to inform the House about some important developments regarding the rail networks of the Midland Main Line, South Wales and the North of England.

Passenger numbers on the UK rail network have more than doubled since privatisation 20 years ago and our country's railways need to adapt and change to be able to meet current and future demand. Therefore we are delivering the largest upgrade of the rail network since Victorian times, including modernising rail services and infrastructure on the Great Western Main Line, Midland Main Line and in the North.

Technology is advancing quickly, and this Government is committed to using the best available technologies to improve each part of the network. New bi-mode train technology offers seamless transfer from diesel power to electric that is undetectable to passengers. The industry is also developing alternative fuel trains, using battery and hydrogen power. This means that we no longer need to electrify every line to achieve the same significant improvements to journeys, and we will only electrify lines where it delivers a genuine benefit to passengers.

These new technologies mean that we can improve journeys for passengers on the Great Western Main Line in South Wales, the Midland Main Line, and on the Lakes Line between Windermere and Oxenholme sooner than expected with state of the art trains, instead of carrying out disruptive electrification works along the whole of these routes.

Midlands

The competition to find the next operator for the Midland Main Line is underway. Our goals for the next East Midlands franchise are to improve journeys for passengers, drive even stronger economic growth and support investment across the whole region. We want to hear from passengers and local communities about the next rail franchise to ensure it delivers the services that passengers want. I am therefore pleased to inform the House that my Department is today launching a public consultation on the next franchise. The consultation, which will run for 12 weeks from today, will help to inform and develop the franchise specification for inclusion in the Invitation to Tender. The consultation is available online and will also include a number of local stakeholder events.

The next East Midlands franchise will help drive the Midlands Engine and improve passenger journeys by maximising the passenger benefits of the significant upgrade of the Midland Main Line, the biggest investment in the route since it was completed in 1870. The upgrade will enable reduced journey times and more seats for long distance passengers during the peaks, as well as more capacity for commuters with dedicated services with longer trains. Journeys will improve from 2020 and, once the full benefits are realised, there will be almost twice as many seats into London St Pancras in the peak compared to today.

The next operator will be required to deliver modern, fast and efficient trains. This includes a brand new fleet of bi-mode intercity trains from 2022, delivering more seats and comfort for long-distance passengers. The provision of these trains will replace plans to electrify the line north of Kettering to Sheffield and Nottingham, improving journeys sooner, without the need for wires and masts on the whole route, and causing less disruption to services. We do not intend to proceed with plans to

electrify the line from Kettering to Sheffield and Nottingham, and there will be further investment to come to ensure Sheffield is HS2-ready.

Wales

From Autumn 2017, passengers in Wales will benefit from new Intercity Express trains which will each deliver over 130 more seats, faster journey times and improved connectivity for South Wales to London with 40% more seats in the morning peak once the full fleet is in service.

These innovative new trains switch seamlessly between electric and diesel power, delivering faster journeys and more seats for passengers without disruptive work to put up wires and masts along routes where they are no longer required.

Rapid delivery of passenger benefits, minimising disruption and engineering work should always be our priority and as technology changes we must we must reconsider our approach to modernising the railways. We will only electrify lines where it provides a genuine benefit to passengers which cannot be achieved through other technologies.

As a result, we no longer need to electrify the Great Western route west of Cardiff. In addition to the new trains, Network Rail will develop further options to improve journeys for passengers in Wales. These will include, but not be limited to:

- Improving journeys times and connections between Swansea and Cardiff, and South Wales, Bristol and London
- Improving journeys times and connections across North Wales
- Direct services from Pembroke Dock to London via Carmarthen on new, state of the art Intercity Express trains
- Station improvements at Cardiff Station
- Station improvements in and around Swansea including looking at the case for additional provision

I also support a proposal for Wales' first privately funded railway station at St Mellons. My Department will work with the promoters of the scheme as they develop their plans to the next stage.

The first new Intercity Express trains will enter service from this October and once the whole fleet is introduced and electrification to Cardiff is complete journey times between Swansea, London and other stations along the route will be approximately 15 minutes shorter.

The North

We are investing in the Northern Powerhouse, upgrading rail services across one of the country's largest networks to improve connections between towns and cities. Passengers in the Lake District will benefit from double the number of direct services to Manchester Airport from May 2018. From 2019, there will be brand new trains with more seats and better on-board facilities including air conditioning, toilets, free wi-fi and plug sockets, subject to business case.

We have listened to concerns about electrification gantries spoiling protected landscapes. Northern, the train operator, will therefore begin work to explore the possibility of deploying alternative-fuel trains on the route by 2021, improving comfort and on-board facilities for passengers whilst protecting the sensitive environment of this World Heritage Site. This trial will pilot an alternative-fuelled train, removing the need to construct intrusive wires and masts in this National Park. Journeys between Windermere and Manchester Airport will be improved sooner and with less disruption to services and local communities. This replaces plans to electrify the line between Windermere and Oxenholme.

This investment is a part of the Great North Rail Project, which will deliver more frequent trains and new direct services on the West Coast Main Line, with faster journeys and increased frequency into and through Manchester from across the North West. It will boost access to jobs and new opportunities, growing the Northern Powerhouse by improving connections between the Lake District and the Manchester Airport international gateway.

Train operators and Network Rail will need to work as one to deliver these upgrades and introduce the new fleets in a way which ensures passengers experience better journeys as soon as possible.

Rail Franchise Schedule

The Government has also today published the updated Rail Franchise Schedule, which includes changes to the timescales for the East Midlands, Cross Country and West Midlands rail franchises. A copy of the schedule will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[Rail Franchise Schedule \(PDF Document, 262.15 KB\)](#)

[This statement has also been made in the House of Lords: HLWS85](#)

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-07-20/HCWS85/>