



Department
for Transport

Louise Ellman MP

Chair of the Transport Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

From the Parliamentary
Under Secretary of State
Paul Maynard MP

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0300 330 3000
E-Mail: paul.maynard@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Web site: www.gov.uk/dft
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Dear Louise,

Rail Franchising: Cross Country Direct Award

As you know, my Department has been negotiating with Arriva Cross Country (AXC) to secure a directly awarded franchise for the operation of services on the Cross Country franchise from October this year when the current one expires.

I am therefore pleased to say that today I have announced the successful conclusion of these negotiations.

This deal will see AXC continue to run passenger rail services on the Cross Country franchise until the start of the services on the next competed franchise, which is expected in October 2019.

The Direct Award period will see some additional rolling stock and a better utilisation of the current fleet, with an expected delivery date of December 2017. This will relieve overcrowding and alleviate the issue of passengers standing for journeys greater than one hour by providing an additional 39,000 seats. These will be split evenly between morning and evening peak, along the Edinburgh-Plymouth route (through Leeds, Birmingham and Bristol).

Further, the December 2017 timetable is planned to include enhancements to reduce overcrowding and increase flexibility of capacity. The Department and AXC will work together to conduct a public consultation on this.

Last year, the Department has also engaged with stakeholders on the Cross Country route to help inform the specification for the Direct Award franchise and we are grateful to all those who took part.

Other benefits secured by the Direct Award include new station calls at Morpeth, planned additional calls at Gloucester, Solihull and Kenilworth to be considered as part of the December 2017 timetable development work which will include a public consultation toward the end of 2016; and shorter journey times from Birmingham to Manchester.

AXC will be making improvements to advance ticket booking and reservation of seats on the day of travel. These services will be available in only one carriage, and elsewhere on the train there will be a number of non-reservable seats to cater for those without advance tickets. Train managers will be able to manage reservations on board the train, and seat labelling will be made as clear as possible.

New passenger satisfaction, punctuality and cleanliness targets will be introduced on the franchise. We expect AXC to continue improving standards for its 33 million annual passengers including the provision of free Wi-Fi on all trains. In addition, the company will deepen its engagement with communities and stakeholders so that all the users of the franchise can continue to have a real influence in how services can be improved.

This Direct Award will also enable better customer information with 24/7 customer services; deliver modifications to the high speed diesel trains to improve access for disabled people and those with reduced mobility; and deliver new, improved toilets on these trains.

Reaching this agreement with AXC builds on the success of my Department's rail franchising programme, working in partnership with the rail industry to deliver better services for passengers as well as value for money for the taxpayer.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the libraries of both Houses.



PAUL MAYNARD