



Department
for Transport

Nigel Evans MP
evansn@parliament.uk

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

30 October 2017

Dear Nigel

Following the Westminster Hall debate on Tuesday 24 October, I undertook to provide further information on work in the South West to use Network Rail's global system for mobile communications-railway (GSM-R) masts to improve Wi-Fi and mobile signal on trains.

Network Rail currently offers a service that allows mobile network operators to deploy their base stations on Network Rail's GSM-R masts and will continue to do this. Permission is granted on a case by case basis, subject to safety requirements, the structural design parameters of individual masts and service level agreements.

Going forward, I understand that there have been discussions with Network Rail Telecom (NRT) about a feasibility study in the South West but, unfortunately, I am not able to say more at this stage for commercial reasons. I will, of course, ask NRT to update me when it is appropriate to do so. I am also aware that NRT is actively talking to train operating companies (TOCs), as contracts are being negotiated with their suppliers, to help deliver Wi-Fi and mobile connectivity on our railways. These suppliers include mobile network operators and other technology and infrastructure companies.

As I am sure you are aware, it is important to trial new and emerging technologies in a safe environment prior to releasing it along a live rail corridor due to the challenges of the railway environment. In some cases, this may call for the use of several technological solutions to deliver the passenger connectivity needs for now and in the future.

There are two franchises operating in the area: South Western and Great Western.

The South Western franchise has recently been awarded to a joint venture between First Group and MTR. As part of the franchise, they have voluntarily offered to provide free Wi-Fi and significantly to improve coverage along the route, within three years, on all their trains and stations (excluding the island line). Additionally, they are currently working with NRT to trial an innovative ultra-high speed free on-board Wi-Fi which, if successful, would be built from 2021 to serve those passenger travelling on what they determine to be the busiest parts of the network.

The Rail Franchise Schedule shows Great Western being re-let by April 2020. My department now mandates all new franchises to deliver free WiFi to all passengers (already offered on all GWR trains due to remain in the franchise in the longer-term), ensuring 85% of passenger route coverage and a minimum megabits per second (Mbps) speed to the train for passenger use within three years. It further mandates them after three years to improve the minimum Mbps by 25% year on year and cover the remaining 15% of passenger routes.

I hope the above information is satisfactory and I wish to assure you that I will continue to engage with NRT on this important work as it develops.

A copy of this letter will be placed in the library of both Houses.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul Maynard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P' and a long, sweeping underline.

PAUL MAYNARD