

# Avanti West Coast placed on short-term contract to drastically improve services

News story

The Department for Transport has placed Avanti West Coast on a short-term contract and challenged it to deliver the urgent increase in services required.



- Avanti West Coast placed on short-term contract to stabilise its operational challenges
- government has only approved a limited extension of 6 months to 1 April 2023
- Avanti must roll out its recovery plan and deliver long-overdue reliability for passengers

The Department for Transport has placed Avanti West Coast on a short-term contract and challenged it to deliver the urgent increase in services required.

Over the past few months, Avanti has seen major operational issues primarily caused by a shortage of available drivers. Nearly 100 additional drivers will have entered formal service this year between April and December. This has meant the company has begun to add more services as new drivers and those who need re-training become available to work. They have also added extra trains on its key London-Manchester and London-Birmingham routes, bringing service levels closer to normal running.

With Avanti's previous contract coming to an end, the short-term extension will see it continue to run services on the route until 1 April 2023. This window is designed to provide Avanti with the opportunity to improve their services. The government will then consider Avanti's performance while finalising a National Rail Contract that will have a renewed focus on resilience of train services and continuity for passengers.

Alongside rolling ahead with training new drivers, Avanti's service improvement plans include:

- the successful delivery of its timetable recovery plan and a significant, sustained and reliable increase from about 180 trains per day to 264 trains per day on weekdays as new and retrained drivers become available
- continuing to deliver on its traincrew recruitment and plans to reduce reliance on rest day working to operate services
- extending booking options for passengers, making the full range of tickets available as early as possible

Transport Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

We need train services which are reliable and resilient to modern day life. Services on Avanti have been unacceptable and while the company has taken positive steps to get more trains moving, it must do more to deliver certainty of service to its passengers.

We have agreed a 6-month extension to Avanti to assess whether it is capable of running this crucial route to a standard passengers deserve and expect.

The problems facing Avanti over recent weeks stem from old working practices that mean shifts are often covered by existing drivers volunteering to work above their 35 contracted hours. This antiquated practice shows just how urgent it is for us to modernise our railways, so passengers benefit from reliable services that don't rely on the goodwill of drivers volunteering to work overtime.

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