

Longer trains and more seats for passengers across the Midlands

- £2.5 million new government funding agreed to deliver improvements for CrossCountry passengers
- longer trains will add more than 20,000 extra seats each week from May 2021 to support passengers
- investment will also expand seat and bike reservation service

Thousands of passengers will benefit from improvements on CrossCountry trains including over 20,000 extra seats a week, thanks to a £2.5 million government investment announced by the Rail Minister today (24 February 2020).

Passengers travelling from Birmingham to Nottingham, Leicester and Cardiff will start to see longer trains on some services from May 2020 delivering more than 5,000 more seats each week. A further 15,000 seats per week are planned to be in place from mid-2021, including to and from Cambridge and Stansted Airport to support the region's commuters, businesses and leisure travellers.

More customers are set to benefit as the Department for Transport (DfT) and CrossCountry finalise plans to deliver thousands more seats on long distance routes each week from December 2020. Longer trains will operate on some services on Mondays to Thursdays on the routes from Scotland, the North East and Manchester to the South West and the South Coast.

The £2.5 million new government funding was agreed by the DfT and CrossCountry to help tackle overcrowding. Work is underway on further improvements in the years to come when more rolling stock will be available, especially for longer distance routes that Cross Country serves.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris, said:

Investing in transport is essential to levelling up the country, as we look to modernise our rail network and restructure the industry to put passengers at the heart of the railway.

But we want to fund benefits to address pressing needs and improve journeys for passengers in the short-term, as well as in the future.

More seats mean more people can travel, increasing access to opportunities and better connecting our regions.

Tom Joyner, CrossCountry's Managing Director, said:

We are delighted to now be able to get on and deliver these

benefits for our customers, with improvements to the journey experience and 3 new community groups to bring our train services closer to the places we serve.

Most importantly, many of our trains have become increasingly busy as more and more people choose rail for their journeys.

This delivers the biggest increase in seats for our services in more than 13 years, helping customers enjoy a relaxing and comfortable journey every day. These improvements will deliver an immediate boost for rail users in the Midlands, with the promise of even more to come on other routes in the near future.

Investment will also be made to expand CrossCountry's seat reservation service to allow passengers to reserve a seat on most services to ensure they can travel in comfort for their journey, as well as to reserve a space for their bike. The investment will also improve communication and signage, pointing to places where luggage can be stored during a journey, both when travelling and as they board the train.

Three recently established Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) are also being supported. These are groups of committed and dedicated people who work with the rail industry and local authorities to promote the line and improve stations, train services, bus links and access. The CRPs for Worcestershire, Heart of England and Bolton will receive financial support to deliver initiatives to benefit local communities, stations and train services.

The funding from the government follows an agreement to extend the CrossCountry franchise last summer to October 2020.