

News story: The future of the Great Western franchise

- Great Western rail franchise could be split up to ensure best possible experience for passengers
- option put forward in new consultation on future priorities for the franchise

The Great Western rail franchise could be split up to maintain the strongest possible focus on passengers under proposals unveiled today (29 November 2017).

The plans would create a new West of England rail franchise to provide long-distance services between London, Wiltshire, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall together with local and regional services across the south-west.

The proposals were released today in a [consultation asking passengers how they want the Great Western rail service to look in future](#).

Billions of pounds are being spent to upgrade services for passengers on Great Western, which carries 100 million passengers a year and stretches from London to Penzance and from Portsmouth to Worcester.

Improvements include brand-new electric and bi-mode trains to provide more seats and more comfortable journeys, while timetable changes will mean faster and more frequent trips on many routes by 2019.

The Government has decided to extend the franchise for the current operator Great Western Railway (GWR) until March 2020 to make sure passengers get the best possible service while these upgrades are carried out.

And the Department for Transport will also seek to agree terms for them to continue operating until 2022, which will allow the improved services to be in fully before running a competition for a new long-term franchise.

Rail Minister Paul Maynard said:

We are investing in the biggest modernisation of the railways for over a century. Working with GWR, we are bringing the very latest in rail technology to some of the world's oldest lines, putting passengers first so that they benefit from a transformational programme of upgrades as quickly as possible.

The benefits of these improvements will be felt right across the franchise area. But as the franchise continues to grow into the 2020s, we want to ensure every line, station and passenger remains central to the train operator's strategy. This consultation asks passengers how they want their railway to look into the 2020s and

beyond and how it will best deliver for them.

The [consultation opened today and will run for 12 weeks, closing on 21 February 2018.](#)