

Statement to parliament: East Midlands, South Eastern and West Coast Partnership franchise updates

I am updating the House on the East Midlands, South Eastern and West Coast Partnership franchise competitions.

I am pleased to inform the House that, following rigorous competition, I intend to award the next East Midlands Railway franchise to Abellio East Midlands pending successful completion of a standstill period of at least 10 days.

The franchise is due to start on 18 August 2019 and will run for 8 years, until 21 August 2027, with an extension of 2 years callable at my discretion.

Passengers, local authorities, businesses and other stakeholders across the country contributed to a highly demanding and challenging specification for this new franchise. Bidders were invited to demonstrate how they would meet this specification, and I am very pleased that we have agreed a plan with Abellio East Midlands for them to exceed these expectations.

Abellio East Midlands will oversee the introduction of brand-new trains, entirely replacing the existing intercity fleet with more reliable and comfortable trains. Passengers will benefit from an 80% increase in the number of morning peak seats into Nottingham, Lincoln and St Pancras. Passengers will also see faster journey times over long-distances, with a new express service from Corby through Luton into London.

The East Midlands Railway will be at the forefront of the government's commitment to deliver a cleaner, greener rail network. Abellio East Midlands will trial hydrogen fuel cell trains on the Midland Main Line and will run zero-carbon pilots at six stations along the route.

The new franchise will also deliver a fairer deal for passengers. Over £17 million will be invested in improving station facilities across the route, including to deliver accessibility improvements. Abellio East Midlands will also deliver an additional 916 extra car park spaces and 1,050 cycle spaces.

Passengers will benefit from the provision of free wifi throughout the franchise, both on-trains and at stations, and a significant uplift to the current ticketing system, with the introduction of smart, flexible ticketing options, including to provide better value for those who travel regularly but less than 5 days a week, as well as improved ticket-buying facilities and nine newly staffed stations.

The new East Midlands Railway franchise will also introduce enhanced delay repay compensation, with passengers able to claim compensation if their train is more than 15 minutes late.

We look forward to working closely with Abellio East Midlands to ensure they deliver the high-quality services that passengers expect and deserve from the railway and the East Midlands Railway franchise.

With regards to the South Eastern franchise competition, I am also today updating the House that my department is negotiating a short-term extension to the current franchise agreement with Govia while we make a decision on the competition. This will ensure continuity of services for passengers until 10 November 2019, with an option to extend the agreement further to April 2020.

We are due to award the West Coast Partnership in June.

Alongside this, there is a [root-and-branch review of the railway underway, independently chaired by Keith Williams](#). This will make ambitious recommendations before the end of the year to reform the structure of the whole rail industry to prioritise passengers' and taxpayers' interests.

The next East Midlands Railway franchise and the ongoing competitions include significant improvements for passengers and steps to bring track and train closer together. From 2020, we will begin to roll-out further reforms, advised by the Rail Review, across the country. We will be guided by the approaches that deliver benefits to passengers and other rail users soonest. Awarding the new East Midlands Railway franchise is part of that strategy.