

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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[Prime Minister welcomes 'powerful show of solidarity' at European leaders' meeting](#)

- Prime Minister pays tribute to "collective resolve" of leaders to oppose Russian aggression
- UK agrees new regional energy cooperation and progress on Sizewell C nuclear development at Prague summit
- Ministers to take forward enhanced operational cooperation to address migrant crisis

The Prime Minister has welcomed the strong show of unity against tyranny at the summit of European leaders today, as the UK secures new commitments on energy and migration.

Convening 44 leaders from across the continent, the meeting in Prague reaffirmed the steadfast resistance to Russia's aggression.

In a meeting with French President Macron, both leaders confirmed their full support for the new nuclear power station at Sizewell C and committed to take all necessary steps to finalise investment decisions within the next month, progressing the next generation of the UK's nuclear power.

The UK and France will ramp up wider cooperation on civil-nuclear development ahead of a planned UK-France Summit in 2023, working together on issues including new innovation, infrastructure and workforce training.

Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala also confirmed plans to renew the UK's participation in the North Seas Energy Cooperation group, which supports the construction of wind farms and interconnectors in the region. The Prime Minister used the summit to push for the development of new, next-generation hybrid interconnectors in the North Sea to accelerate renewable energy capacity.

Prime Minister Liz Truss said:

"Leaders leave this summit with greater collective resolve to stand up to Russian aggression. What we have seen in Prague is a forceful show of solidarity with Ukraine, and for the principles of freedom and democracy.

"The UK will continue to work with our allies to deliver on the British people's priorities, including ending our reliance on authoritarian regimes for energy and reducing costs for families, tackling people smuggling gangs, and standing up to tyrants."

The Prime Minister also discussed the benefits of energy partnerships with Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Støre, highlighting today's announcement from London-based firm Neptune Energy that it will increase gas production at the Duva field as a successful example. Gas from Norway's Duva subsea field serves households in the UK.

On migration, the UK Prime Minister agreed with President Macron and Dutch Prime Minister Rutte to intensify cooperation on tackling illegal migration. The UK and France confirmed that their interior ministers would conclude an ambitious package of measures to address pernicious people smuggling gangs in the Channel this autumn.

The Prime Minister will attend the closing plenary session and dinner at the European leaders' summit this evening.

Recognising the clear link between illicit trading of natural resources and conflict

Thank you very much, President.

President Excellency, thank you for convening this important debate, and I thank our briefers as well this morning for their insights. I'd like to highlight three considerations.

First, as today's briefers and previous speakers have underlined, we recognise the clear link between illicit trading of natural resources and conflict. From Somalia to Sudan to the Democratic Republic of Congo, the illicit trade in natural resources of charcoal, timber and gold has helped fund conflict and the activities of armed groups.

And we should bear in mind that increased global demand for critical minerals – essential to decarbonisation and our green growth goals – risks exacerbating the illegal sourcing of natural resources without appropriate action.

So we do need a concerted and coordinated effort to tackle illicit trafficking as a root cause of conflict, and in this context, I welcome the African Union's efforts including conflict prevention, including the work of Commissioner Bankole and his department. As a Council, too, we should look at ways to strengthen the UN Security Council's sanctions regimes both against individuals and entities that illegally exploit natural resources to fund or prolong or provoke conflict. The Council acted in Somalia by banning the export of charcoal to inhibit Al-Shabaab's revenue streams; we can and should do more across other mandates.

Second, President, we need stronger regulation and governance efforts to tackle the illicit trafficking of natural resources, including stringent certification and verification processes.

And in this context, the UK is proud to support a number of international mechanisms that deliver this, including the OECD's Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Mineral Supply Chains and the Kimberley Process that helps stem the flow of conflict diamonds.

Finally, President, we share the view of previous distinguished speakers of the dangerous consequences of the exploitation of Africa's natural resources by private military companies.

There is significant independent reporting outlining the exploitation of gold resources in Sudan and the Central African Republic through Wagner Group's subsidiaries like Meroe Gold. Gold extraction and smuggling operations risk undermining local stability, present significant ecological and human rights

risks and are a significant loss to Sudan.

The United Kingdom reiterates our concerns over Wagner Group's activities in Africa, which undermine effective resource governance and offer no sustainable solutions to Africa's security challenges.

In concluding, President, I thank you again for convening this important debate during Gabon's Security Council Presidency.

Thank you.

[UK-France Joint Statement: 6 October 2022](#)

Press release

Prime Minister Liz Truss and President Emmanuel Macron met in the margins of the first Summit of the European Political Community in Prague.



Prime Minister Liz Truss and President Emmanuel Macron met in the margins of the first Summit of the European Political Community in Prague.

They underlined their determination to provide all necessary support to Ukraine for as long as it takes to restore Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, to resist Russian aggression, and to hold Russia to account for its actions.

The President and the Prime Minister reaffirmed the strong and historic ties between their two countries. They agreed to hold the next UK-France Summit in 2023 in France to take forward a renewed bilateral agenda.

Energy transition and decoupling from Russian hydro-carbons are common challenges. The Prime Minister and the President discussed advancing bilateral cooperation in particular on energy. They reaffirmed their belief that both renewable and nuclear energies are part of consistent strategies to

achieve energy transition and strategic autonomy. They confirmed the full support of the UK and French Governments for the new nuclear power station at Sizewell and expect the relevant bodies to finalise arrangements in the coming month.

The leaders committed to advance and increase UK-France civil-nuclear cooperation, including on innovation, infrastructure development and workforce skills, ahead of next year's UK-France Summit.

They further agreed to deepen cooperation on illegal migration within the bounds of international law, to tackle criminal groups trafficking people across Europe, ending in dangerous journeys across the Channel. Interior Ministers should conclude an ambitious package of measures this autumn. Leaders agreed to reinforce cooperation with near neighbours, including through an early meeting of the Calais group.

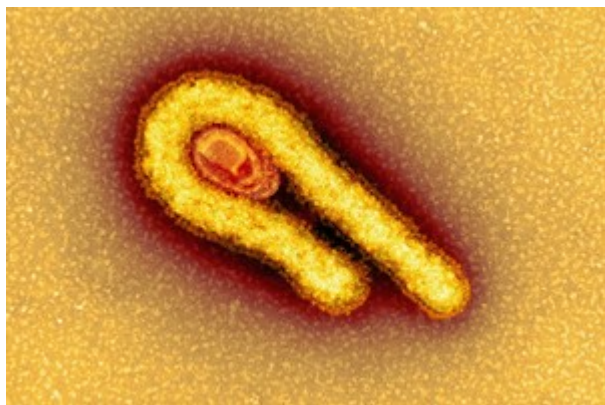
President Macron and Prime Minister Truss welcomed the quality of the discussions during the first summit of the European Political Community and look forward to next steps.

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[UKHSA monitoring Ebola outbreak in East Africa](#)

News story

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is currently monitoring an outbreak of Ebola virus disease cases in Uganda.



The risk to the public in the UK is very low and there are currently no cases of the disease confirmed in the UK. A [public health alert](#) has been issued to urge healthcare professionals to be vigilant to the symptoms in patients who

have recently returned from affected areas and to remind them of the established procedures for infection control and testing.

Ebola virus disease (EVD) is a rare but severe infection. It is caused by the Ebola virus, a filovirus that was first recognised in 1976 and has caused sporadic outbreaks since in several African countries.

Dr Meera Chand, UKHSA Director of Clinical and Emerging Infection, said:

UKHSA constantly monitors emerging infection threats in collaboration with partners across the world. We are aware of an outbreak of Ebola cases in Uganda and are monitoring the situation closely. The risk to the public in the UK is very low.

Background

There has never been a case of Ebola virus disease contracted in the UK. Two cases contracted overseas were transported to the UK in 2014. Both recovered after treatment in specialist high consequence infectious disease (HCID) units.

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