

Grand Central consults passengers as plans to return gather steam

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Train operator Grand Central has launched an ambitious open-ended survey to gauge public attitudes to rail travel under COVID-19.

The company will use findings from the survey as it looks to shape a return to services following an initial two month 'hibernation' period which Grand Central bosses will review during May.

Grand Central Commercial & Customer Policy Director, Louise Blyth said: "Suspending all our trains at the beginning of April was a tough decision but, with the huge drop in passenger numbers, it was financially necessary. We operate under an open access business model which means we rely on ticket sales to run our services.

"Obviously getting our trains back into the communities they serve is our main priority but we have to get the timing right. With the UK trying to understand what the new normal will look like, we decided to ask our customers what they want to see from us once restrictions are lifted. The survey we are launching today is intended to get right to the crux of when and how people intend to use our trains once it's possible again."

The survey will seek opinions from existing customers through email but will also roll out across Grand Central's social media platforms. Mrs Blyth said the short questionnaire will seek attitudes on a number of post-lockdown issues such as social distancing on trains and reasons for travel, amongst other questions. With the survey intended to be a rolling project, people will be able to change their answers over time.

The York-based operator launched in 2007 running services between Sunderland and Kings Cross. This year Grand Central will celebrate the 10th anniversary of its Bradford - Kings Cross service. The company has been part of Arriva since 2011.

Mrs Blyth said: "Grand Central has a long-standing reputation for great value tickets and friendly service.

"We want to be there when people start travelling again and make sure we meet our customers' expectations and provide a great place to work for our staff.

"We've been overwhelmed by the fantastic messages of support from passengers, looking forward to our return. Meanwhile our staff, most of which are on the Government's furlough scheme, have shown superb levels of resilience and understanding.

"As a train operator we owe it those passengers and staff to get Grand Central back where it belongs as soon as it's safe to do so. You can help shape that return by taking a few minutes to answer our survey."

To take part in the survey, go to <https://bit.ly/2zWCBLr>

For details of ticket refunds and COVID-19 emergency restrictions, go to www.grandcentralrail.com

Last month we spoke to MD Richard McClean about the plans to come back stronger. Read the interview [here](#).

Photo credit: Grand Central