

Green light for Great Northern's Class 717 to operate with in-cab digital signalling

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Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) has received authorisation from the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to place its Class 717 fleet into passenger service using Level 2 European Train Control System (ETCS) digital signalling.

This is a key step towards the introduction of digital signalling on both the Northern City Line, between Finsbury Park and Moorgate in London, and the East Coast Main Line between London and Grantham, as part of the government-funded East Coast Digital Programme (ECDP).

The programme will see traditional lineside signals replaced by state-of-the-art in-cab signalling technology (ETCS). On the Northern City Line this will give Great Northern passengers a more reliable service.

The trains, leased to GTR by Rock Rail, will begin running in passenger service once Network Rail has

completed its approval works to switch on the trackside ETCS system. Once this second milestone is achieved later this year, GTR will start training, in passenger service, two hundred and fifty of its Great Northern drivers to drive using ETCS.

The new system overlays the traditional signals, so drivers will be able to continue using ETCS alongside their untrained colleagues once they are qualified, ensuring they maintain full competency until everyone is trained and the old system can be switched off.

Consultants Taylor Airey and approval body Aegis Certification Services supported GTR in the preparation of its submission to the ORR which ensures that national standards are met for interoperability.

Steve Lammin, Engineering Director at GTR, said: "Achieving authorisation to place our Class 717s into passenger service using ETCS is significant, both for us as an operator and the programme - it's the first train to achieve this for digital signalling as part of the East Coast Digital Programme.

"It's the culmination of months of hard work by the team - both within GTR and our partners Taylor Airey and Aegis - and demonstrates that we're making real progress towards being ready for digitally signalled operations to begin on the Northern City Line later this year."

James Airey, Director Taylor Airey, said: "I'm delighted that the Class 717 fleet has received level 2 ETCS APIS from the ORR. This is a major milestone for both GTR and the ECDP. Taylor Airey is proud to have been part of GTR's team that worked hard to achieve this, and it continues our long-standing successful relationship with GTR."

Mark McCool, CEO AEGIS Rail, said: "I'm really proud of the team at AEGIS Certification who apply their rail approvals expertise with impartiality to support GTR in the delivery of such a significant milestone for the digital signalling programme."

Mark Swindell, CEO Rock Rail, said: "Rock Rail is very pleased that its Class 717 fleet is the first train to achieve authorisation to enter passenger service using state-of-the-art ETCS digital signalling as part of the East Coast Digital Programme, a leading digital signalling programme that is essential for increasing capacity and reliability on one of the busiest parts of Britain's railway network."

Photo credit: GTR