

## New contracts for GWR and Southeastern: Owners' reaction

March 30, 2020



The owners of Great Western Railway says the continuity of rail services will be critical to a restoration of normal life when the present uncertain and difficult situation is overcome.

It comes after FirstGroup, which owns GWR, has been awarded a direct award for three years, extendable to 4.

Govia, which owns Southeastern, has also been awarded a direct award for up to 2 years.

The Government says the move is to ensure vital train services continue to connect the South of England and Wales during the COVID-19 outbreak, and ensure those who need to can continue to travel and will provide certainty for staff working on the railways.

The FirstGroup says the agreement has a strong emphasis on improving regional connectivity, helping customers return to the railway by making rail a more convenient and environmentally-friendly way to travel. As part of this, GWR will bring additional trains into service to provide thousands of extra seats on regional routes across the network.

There will also be increased funding to improve services for local communities and at stations, and the introduction of a combination of new flexible ticket products for customers who do not commute to work every day, such as discounted part-time season tickets and the extension of paperless pay-as-you-go schemes.

Since 2015, GWR has successfully delivered new fleets of modern intercity and local trains comprising 785 new carriages, and introduced faster, more frequent services for customers across the network through the successful introduction of the largest timetable change in decades last December. GWR recently posted some of its highest ever passenger satisfaction scores and delivered the most improved punctuality scores in the UK last year.

Commenting, Matthew Gregory, FirstGroup Chief Executive, said: “Whilst the immediate focus of GWR is to ensure that key workers, vital to the country’s response to coronavirus, can get to where they need to go, continuity of rail services will also be critical to a restoration of normal life when the present uncertain and difficult situation is overcome. In the longer term this new agreement will mean that customers can return to rail as their preferred choice of travel; with more seats, more services, better stations and more flexible ticketing to help reconnect the people and communities we serve.

“When the present emergency measures agreed with Government come to an end, today’s agreement will ensure that GWR will continue to deliver sustainable benefits for customers and an appropriate balance of risk and reward for our shareholders and the Government. We are proud of GWR’s achievements over the last few years, working with industry partners to transform the experience for passengers with new, faster and more environmentally friendly trains and a timetable offering record fast journey times to the major towns and cities on the route.”

The new contract for Southeastern commences on April 1st, 2020 and will run until October 16th, 2021, with the option to extend at the Department for Transport’s discretion until March 31st, 2022.

Govia is a subsidiary of the Go Ahead Group (65%) and Keolis (35%).

David Brown, Go-Ahead CEO, said: “This new contract provides continuity and stability during a challenging time.

“The immediate priority remains the health and wellbeing of colleagues and customers, and to support society by providing an essential service for key workers.”

Click [here](#) for the article on the Government announcement.

*Photo credit: Southeastern*