

Vital rail services protected through new deal with Arriva CrossCountry

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Vital long-distance rail services that people the length of Great Britain rely upon will continue to run and support the UK's recovery from COVID-19, thanks to a new contract signed between the Government and Arriva CrossCountry.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris has announced that Arriva CrossCountry, which has run the service since 2007, will continue to operate the franchise for three more years until October 2023. This will provide certainty for passengers and staff as the future direction of rail reform takes shape.

As people return to the railway, passengers will benefit from increased capacity, and more train drivers and on-board staff to improve services and performance. This comes alongside new measures to help passengers with disabilities, including the ability to reserve space for assistance dogs and better staff training to meet the high standard, best practice seen across the rail industry.

The contract also has a renewed focus on tackling environmental impacts. To reduce diesel emissions, Arriva CrossCountry will trial the use of electrical shore supplies when their Turbostar fleet are in depots for cleaning, which will reduce the use of diesel engines.

The Department will also continue to work with the owners of the Voyager trains to trial the use of on-train batteries when they enter and leave stations, so that engines are turned off when they're at platforms further improving air quality.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris said: "This agreement ensures that vital train services will continue across the UK's most extensive rail network, as the country continues to fight and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The deal announced today reaffirms our commitment to ending the complicated franchise system, and is focused on the best interests of passengers, delivering better services and helping create a new kind of railway.

"With a real focus on boosting capacity and seizing the opportunity to create more environmentally sustainable services, this new contract will benefit passengers in the long term, improving their experience when travelling on our railways."

This new contract complements the Emergency Recovery Measures Agreements (ERMAs) announced in September, in place for up to 18 months, where the Government pays train companies a small management fee to keep services running through the pandemic.

The contract will see the Government take on the revenue and cost risk associated with the franchise and pay Arriva a performance-linked fee to run the service. This will incentivise the company to deliver improvements to operational performance, passenger experience and service quality.

Stretching from Aberdeen to Penzance and from Stansted Airport to Cardiff, CrossCountry's network is the most geographically extensive passenger rail franchise in Britain. Calling at over 100 stations, it connects seven of Britain's ten largest cities.

Welcoming the DfT announcement, CrossCountry's Managing Director, Tom Joyner, said: "This is great news for our customers and stakeholders and recognises the importance of our continuing to deliver long-distance business and leisure services across England, Scotland and Wales.

"Our trains connect towns and cities, people and communities across Great Britain, and this will be essential as we rebuild our national and local economies. We will continue to focus on highlighting the benefits of rail travel and ensuring our customers can travel with confidence. "

Photo credit: CrossCountry

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