

West Midlands Trains must invest £20 million after poor performance and delays

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In a stark warning to train operators across the country, West Midlands Trains (WMT) will be required to spend an extra £20 million on improving services for passengers after badly breaching its performance targets, the Transport Secretary Grant Shapps set out on Sunday.

Passengers across the West Midlands, who use West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern services, will benefit from the additional funding, which will be invested in delivering timetable improvements and recruiting new train drivers to tackle staff shortages. They will also continue to be offered compensation for poor service with discounts on season tickets and off-peak fares.

The Department for Transport has made clear that operators should consider this step a warning that poor performance impacting on passengers and the failure to meet contractual obligations will be met with a firm response.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said: "One of my priorities is getting the trains to run on time, and as a commuter myself I understand all too well the frustration caused by endless delays and cancellations.

“West Midlands Trains have failed to fulfil their obligations – to their franchise agreement and, most importantly, to their passengers.

“The action we’re taking means they must invest in rapidly improving services, so that passengers have reliable, punctual trains they can rely on.”

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris said: “Having monitored the poor performance of West Midlands Trains with great concern, we’re taking action to ensure they fulfil their contractual commitments and deliver the service passengers deserve.

“Every minute of delay adds up, and for far too long passengers have been left stuck on train platforms at the mercy of a fickle live departure board.

“Having our country’s trains run on time must be the rule, not the exception. This is a warning that operators simply must do better for their passengers.”

Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands, said: “West Midlands Trains’ performance at the back end of last year was absolutely woeful and it is only right – as I requested – that the firm must pay the price financially. I am also pleased to see this money will be re-invested locally to help restore the reliable service that passengers want and deserve.

“Since I issued my ultimatum in December of improve or lose the franchise, WMT has got better and performance is statistically on the up. But I still have very serious concerns and, alongside the DfT, will be keeping the firm under strict review. I will not hesitate to ask for the franchise to be stripped if performance slips again.”

The additional £20 million funding will be used for a variety of measures including:

- compensating passengers for the poor service by offering a 3% discount on season ticket renewals and offering a 10% reduction in off peak fares during July and August 2020
- series of timetable improvements, with wide-ranging changes planned for May 2020 and December 2020
- recruitment of additional drivers and senior conductors to combat staffing shortages
- investment in day to day operations, to make services more reliable

Since their May 2019 timetable change WMT’s performance has deteriorated to such an extent that they have exceeded breach level on delay minutes and cancellations franchise agreement targets. Under the terms of their contract, WMT are required to agree a ‘remedial plan’ to ensure that performance recovers.

The department will continue to closely monitor the performance of the operator and ensure they meet their contractual obligations.