

Dear Colleague,

CONNECTING PEOPLE: A STRATEGIC VISION FOR RAIL

I am writing to inform you that today I have published “Connecting people: a strategic vision for rail”. The document sets out a new vision for our railways, including plans to end the operational divide between track and train and an evolution of the franchising system.

The last few years have seen massive growth on Britain’s railways. This industry has reversed decades of decline under British Rail, delivered new investment and new trains, and doubled the number of passengers. But now we need to build on that success by rolling out a new model for the 2020s and beyond, one more able to deal with the huge rise in passenger numbers and the challenges of an increasingly congested network.

Rail passengers deserve a more reliable, more efficient service – and I will deliver it by ending the one-size-fits-all approach of franchising and bringing closer together the best of the public and private sector.

The plan I am publishing today includes:

- Proposals aimed at creating joined-up teams running track and train to make the railway more reliable for passengers and ensure that it works as one to deliver for its customers.
- Commitments to expand the railway network to boost housing and economic growth, and deliver major passenger benefits, including rolling out improved compensation schemes for passengers.

The reforms follow on from the recommendations of the McNulty and Shaw Reports, and build on Network Rail’s recent devolution of infrastructure management to route-based businesses. The plan includes complementary changes to the franchising system to ensure that the railway is prepared to manage the challenges of the future, while maintaining the railway infrastructure in public ownership.

These include:

- The first of the new generation of long-term regional partnerships on the East Coast Main Line. The East Coast Partnership between the public sector and a private partner will be operated by a single management, under a single brand and overseen by a single leader. Further details about the new East Coast partnership will be set out in the coming months.
- Rolling out joint teams running day-to-day operations across the South Eastern network with plans to introduce a new Alliance Director, responsible for a joint team operating the trains and tracks. The Government is today publishing the invitation to tender for a new franchise on the South Eastern network.
- Introducing a joint team to run the East Midlands franchise following next year’s franchise competition.

- Introducing smaller train companies, ensuring that every line, station and passenger is central to each train operators' strategy. This includes splitting up the Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern franchise in 2021.
- We have also launched a consultation on a new West of England franchise that would provide long-distance services between London, Wiltshire, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall (including the Sleeper) together with regional and local services across the South West, focused around Bristol. To provide a period of stability before the franchise is competed, the Department will be asking FirstGroup, the current operator, for a proposal to continue operating the franchise until 2022.

The Strategic Vision for Rail also commits to explore opportunities to restore capacity lost under the Beeching and British Rail cuts of the 1960s and 1970s by identifying new schemes that unlock new housing or economic growth and offer good value for money.

The Government is already planning to reopen the railway line from Oxford to Cambridge and our new development programme will identify new connections and lines that were closed to passengers by British Rail, as part of finding and funding future rail schemes which offer good value. Other proposals that are in discussion as part of the programme include suburban lines around Bristol, a freight route that runs through Central Birmingham, the line from Okehampton to Exeter and from Blyth to Ashington in County Durham. Proposals will need to demonstrate a strong business case where they are seeking Government funding.

At the heart of the new strategy is a commitment to improve passenger experience across the network and take advantage of new technology to improve services. This includes major changes that will extend passenger rights – including compensation for passengers when trains are more than 15 minutes late. We are supporting the introduction of a Rail Ombudsman to ensure all passengers are treated fairly.

The vision also pledges to introduce digital rail – new technologies that will improve train performance for passengers – across more of the country. This includes funding to develop plans on the Transpennine Route, on the South East Route & East London Line, and on the Moorgate Branch. It also reinforces the important role for freight on the rail network to support the British economy and environment.

I am making copies of the strategic vision document available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT