

First Great Western Franchise Award

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FirstGroup, the leading transport operator in the UK and North America, has signed an agreement with the Department for Transport ('DfT') to operate the First Great Western rail franchise until 1 April 2019, which could also be extended by up to one further year at the DfT's discretion. FirstGroup's experience of managing the route over many years will be crucial to the successful delivery of the major programme of infrastructure upgrades on the network.

First Great Western will see the largest fleet upgrade on the route in a generation, with new or updated trains planned for every area of the network. This will result in additional and more frequent services, using faster and more comfortable trains offering improved amenities such as free Wi-Fi. Journey times from London to Oxford, Bristol, South Wales, and Devon and Cornwall will reduce.

Key commuter markets including Bristol, Exeter, Oxford and Gatwick Airport will benefit from increased capacity, and there will be 16% more peak time seats into and out of London Paddington station. Services between London and Bristol will increase by 70%. By December 2018 there will be 9,000 additional seats every day across the franchise.

Stations will be upgraded with investment in facilities including security, customer information, accessibility and more car parking and bike storage. During the new franchise period a £2.2m community investment fund will enable station and train service improvements around lower income communities. There will also be programmes to address accessibility.

Commenting, Tim O'Toole, Chief Executive said:

"We are delighted to be awarded the contract by the DfT to operate the Great Western franchise to at least 1 April 2019, in a deal that will deliver for passengers and taxpayers. As the proud operators of this important franchise, we will be using our unrivalled knowledge and experience of the network to help deliver significant upgrades over the next few years, in particular the introduction of new trains as the mainline is electrified.

"We are already working closely with the DfT and Network Rail to deliver the initial phases of the £7.5bn Great Western Mainline modernisation programme. This investment is the biggest on the route since Brunel, and will transform a key part of the country's transport infrastructure.

"Under our experienced management, the franchise will see new or refurbished trains on every part of the network, resulting in more frequent and faster journeys and an increase in the number of seats. These, and a range of further passenger benefits, will keep people moving and communities prospering across the Great Western network."

Benefits for customers by the end of the franchise period include:

- Plans for new or updated trains in every area of the network, creating three million additional seats a year across the network
- More direct trains into Devon and Cornwall, doubling the number of trains into and out of Cornwall and reducing journey times between Paddington and Penzance by up to 14 minutes
- Faster trains between South Wales, Bristol and London, delivering journey times between London and Bristol Temple Meads of 79 minutes and cutting journey times into Cardiff by up to 14 minutes
- More seats for commuters in key cities including Bristol (52% increase) and Exeter (58%)
- 100 additional customer-facing employees on long distance trains
- £50 million investment with our partners to improve stations and car parks, introducing 2,000 more car parking spaces
- £2.2 million fund to target station and train service improvements around areas of social need and lower income communities
- Free Wi-Fi introduced across all our fleets
- More funding for Community Rail Partnerships on local branch lines
- A paid work placement programme for the long term unemployed, including community work placements and working with The Prince's Trust to develop a "Get into Railways" mentoring programme.

Notes to editors

- First Great Western provides high speed, commuter, regional and branch line train services, carrying more than 99 million passengers every year across the Great Western rail franchise area, which includes

South Wales, the Westcountry, the Cotswolds, and large parts of Southern England.

- Since 2006, First Great Western has grown passenger volumes by 25 per cent.
- First Great Western is the current Rail Business of the Year, highlighting work done in 2014 in partnership with Network Rail to keep the west moving after the collapse of the sea wall at Dawlish; and for the 'Building a Greater West' marketing campaign.
- The franchise has previously introduced the most high-speed trains operating on the network since it was built with increased frequencies including half-hourly service to Cardiff and trains every 15 minutes to Bristol.
- More than 170 new rolling stock vehicles have been introduced on the route since 1996, including 48 additional carriages secured after negotiations with the DfT in 2011 to benefit passengers.
- Performance has improved by more than six percentage points since the franchise began with reliability/punctuality score now at 89.6% (Period 11 2014/15) compared with 83% in 2007.
- Passenger satisfaction has also increased since 2006 to 81% (Autumn 2014 National Passenger Survey).

FirstGroup plc (LSE: FGP.L) is the leading transport operator in the UK and North America. With revenues of more than £6.7 billion in 2013/14 and around 110,000 employees, we transported around 2.5 billion passengers last year. Each of our five divisions is a leader in its field: First Student is the largest provider of student transportation in North America with a fleet of around 49,000 yellow school buses, First Transit is one of the largest providers of outsourced transit management and contracting services in the US, while Greyhound is the only national operator of scheduled intercity coach services across North America. In the UK, FirstGroup is one of Britain's largest bus operators running a fleet of some 6,400 buses, and we are one of the largest operators of passenger rail services in the UK, carrying more than 330 million passengers last year, with experience of running all types of rail network.

Our vision is to provide solutions for an increasingly congested world... keeping people moving and communities prospering.

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