

Critical rail services protected in new deals for GWR and Southeastern

- government signs new contracts with Southeastern and GWR to ensure vital train services continue to connect the South of England and Wales during COVID-19 outbreak
- new agreements with Govia and First will ensure that those who need to can continue to travel and will provide certainty for staff working on the railways
- long-term capacity improvements have also been agreed as part of the contracts

Vital rail services that people across the South East, South West and South Wales depend on will continue to run thanks to new contracts signed between the government and rail operators GWR and Southeastern.

The new agreements with Govia and FirstGroup will also ensure that jobs are protected in the unprecedented circumstances brought about by the coronavirus pandemic, providing those who cannot work from home with the connections they need to get to where they need to and keep the country running.

In the longer-term, tens of thousands of passengers are set to benefit from improvements including increased capacity at peak times, more front-line staff and more fares trials for passengers. The direct awards will allow services to be stepped up when the rail network returns to normal following disruption from COVID-19.

Major improvements to be delivered by GWR include the planned introduction of additional new capacity in the Bristol and Exeter areas.

Southeastern passengers will see space for thousands of extra passengers during the morning and evening peak times, while more front-line staff will be recruited to help passengers with their journeys.

Rail Minister, Chris Heaton-Harris, said:

We are taking decisive action across the board to ensure vital rail services continue, allowing those people who cannot work at home to get to work – particularly our NHS, emergency services and other vital industries.

These contracts will keep services running in the short-term but also are positive news for passengers in the future, focusing on more reliable services, extra capacity and improvements to the stations they use every day.

These are unprecedented times and the rail network is central to our national resilience.

The deals announced today (30 March 2020) guarantee vital services in the short term and tangible improvements in the long term.

These agreements will run concurrently with the [emergency measures agreements](#) announced earlier this week which will see the government temporarily take on the revenue and cost risk associated with individual franchises. These measures ensure that key services will keep running across the UK.

Great Western Railway, owned by FirstGroup, has been awarded a direct award for 3 years, extendable to 4. Southeastern, owned by Govia, has also been awarded a direct award for up to 2 years.

Running since 2005, the Great Western franchise provides services from London to the West and South West of England and South Wales, local/regional services in South West of England and commuter services in the Thames Valley. It is one of the largest and most diverse franchises in the UK, with major commuter, business and leisure markets.

Southeastern has been running the train service between London and Kent and parts of East Sussex since 2006. It operates one of the busiest networks in the country including the UK's first domestic high-speed service with Javelin trains.