

News story: The future of the Great Western franchise

- Great Western rail franchise could be split up to ensure best possible experience for passengers
- option put forward in new consultation on future priorities for the franchise

The Great Western rail franchise could be split up to maintain the strongest possible focus on passengers under proposals unveiled today (29 November 2017).

The plans would create a new West of England rail franchise to provide long-distance services between London, Wiltshire, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall together with local and regional services across the south-west.

The proposals were released today in a [consultation asking passengers how they want the Great Western rail service to look in future](#).

Billions of pounds are being spent to upgrade services for passengers on Great Western, which carries 100 million passengers a year and stretches from London to Penzance and from Portsmouth to Worcester.

Improvements include brand-new electric and bi-mode trains to provide more seats and more comfortable journeys, while timetable changes will mean faster and more frequent trips on many routes by 2019.

The Government has decided to extend the franchise for the current operator Great Western Railway (GWR) until March 2020 to make sure passengers get the best possible service while these upgrades are carried out.

And the Department for Transport will also seek to agree terms for them to continue operating until 2022, which will allow the improved services to be in fully before running a competition for a new long-term franchise.

Rail Minister Paul Maynard said:

We are investing in the biggest modernisation of the railways for over a century. Working with GWR, we are bringing the very latest in rail technology to some of the world's oldest lines, putting passengers first so that they benefit from a transformational programme of upgrades as quickly as possible.

The benefits of these improvements will be felt right across the franchise area. But as the franchise continues to grow into the 2020s, we want to ensure every line, station and passenger remains central to the train operator's strategy. This consultation asks passengers how they want their railway to look into the 2020s and

beyond and how it will best deliver for them.

The [consultation opened today and will run for 12 weeks, closing on 21 February 2018](#).

Speech: Secretary of State for International Trade Speech at the GREAT Event in Sydney

Good Evening.

It is a pleasure to be here this evening at the GREAT event, alongside our friends in the Australian British Chamber of Commerce.

Every time I arrive in Australia, I am struck again by how much it feels like home.

This may sound strange to those of you who have experienced both countries. After all, how could the land of golden beaches, 40 degree heat in November, and seven foot tall marsupials ever feel like home to a Scotsman with a constituency in Somerset that looks across the Bristol Channel to Wales?

So I am, obviously not, talking not about the physical similarity of our two nations, but the far deeper connections of culture, language, values and, of course, commerce.

These connections have grown from deep historical roots. Many Australians boast British surnames, and many more have British ancestry somewhere within their family tree, perhaps within living memory.

The windows of my Departmental office in Whitehall overlook the Cenotaph, the foremost war memorial in the United Kingdom.

Every 25th of April, ANZAC Day, I can watch as soldiers from Australia and New Zealand gather to pay their respects to their forebears who fell fighting alongside their British comrades and cousins.

They gave their lives defending the freedom of a land that may have been many thousands of miles from home, but a freedom nonetheless precious and cherished – a global commodity worth defending wherever it is threatened. Such is how unbreakable bonds are forged.

In the years since those conflicts Australia has forged its own proud national identity, distinct from the United Kingdom. But the deep personal connections that bind our two nations have remained, indelible through the

passage of time, and oblivious to distance.

Today, an estimated 125,000 Australians call Britain home. In turn, over 1.2 million British citizens are currently resident here – more than 5% of the whole Australian population.

It is safe to say that few countries share such a deep, profound, and lasting connection as Australia and the United Kingdom.

It is a partnership that I believe will become more vibrant, more effective, and more important in the future.

Following last year's referendum result, there were many in the media, both in the UK and internationally, who condemned our democratic decision as the ultimate act of insularity.

Some of them still do, unable to come to terms with the expressed will of the British people.

They confidently predicted that the UK would be left a diminished figure on the world stage; alone, friendless and isolated, with a broken economy and shattered prospects.

How wrong they have been.

They not only misunderstood the fundamental motivations behind the 'Leave' vote, but also the intrinsic strengths of the UK economy.

We are about to enter our 6th year of growth – far behind Australia's record 26 years, but impressive none the less, steadily recovering from the effects of the financial crash.

Our financial deficit has been cut by two-thirds. We have record employment levels and have just seen our exports increase by over 13% in the last year. This year will see our national debt fall as a proportion of GDP.

The year since the Referendum has seen the highest levels of inward investment of any year in British history.

We not only have a business-friendly regulatory environment, but a trusted legal system, the world's leading financial sector, a highly skilled workforce turned out by world-class universities and cutting-edge research institutions.

Like you, we speak English, and we are in the right time zone to trade with Asia in the morning and America in the afternoon.

We are members of the G7 and the G20.

Alongside Australia, we are part of Five Eyes, the world's most advanced and integrated intelligence alliance.

We have the world's third-largest defence budget and a permanent seat on the

UN Security Council.

Need I go on?

Does any of this sound to you like an isolated country?

This is not Brexit, but the emergence of Global Britain.

Our decision to leave the European Union will change none of our underlying strengths. But we will have the opportunity to use them to build new, more open horizons.

We also share something else in common. We are both members of the Commonwealth of Nations – an organisation of cooperation and friendship whose members stretch across the globe, covering 2.3 billion people and 30% of the world's population, all of them ready to use the ties of the past to meet the challenges of the future.

The Commonwealth, though, is different to other multinational organisations. The bonds of history, friendship and family have produced an organisation that revels in its social and cultural ties, as much as its political and economic ones.

For example, I cannot mention the Commonwealth without reflecting on one of those cultural ties – our sporting tradition.

The GREAT Campaign is working to shine a light on the UK-Australia sporting relationship – a robust, passionate but friendly rivalry – mostly!

The GREAT Campaign not only celebrates our long shared history, but also promotes all the trade opportunities that it has generated, from tourism to sports science to stadium infrastructure.

With the Ashes well under way, and the Women's series finishing in a diplomatically convenient draw, there is no better time to celebrate our sporting connections.

And I'm very much looking forward to Australia and England fighting it out for the Rugby League World Cup this coming week in Melbourne.

You have been greeted this evening by another sport, as one of the Clipper practice yachts sails in front of this wonderful venue. We're delighted that Clipper Ventures is also supporting the training of veterans in preparation for sailing to be incorporated in the Invictus Games Sydney 2018.

GREAT Britain has a team entry in the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race, and will be in Sydney next month as part of its global race circuit.

And next year's Commonwealth Games, held on the Gold Coast, are an opportunity to further reinforce these strong and enduring bonds between our nations.

After Britain leaves the European Union, we will be able to strengthen these

friendships even further, looking forward to our shared opportunities.

Foremost among our Commonwealth friends is Australia. For many, not least in the business and agricultural sectors, Britain's accession to the EEC in 1973 marked something of a hard break, as barriers to trade were established where none had previously existed.

How did Australia react to this change? Not by retreating, but by forging a new trading role for itself, connecting to new markets in Asia and North America, and casting itself as the economic link between East and West.

And all with a courage and optimism that some people in the UK would do well to understand and emulate.

We have much to learn from your approach. I am here in Sydney because Britain wants to forge a new relationship with Australia, and use our historical legacy to build a partnership for the 21st Century.

We announce today that, as part of that commitment, HMS Sutherland will be visiting Australia in the New Year as part of her Asia Pacific deployment. It is a physical symbol of our strategic partnership in security.

Commercially, we are also starting from a position of great strength.

The Australian British Chamber of Commerce have played a notable role in this success. For over a century, they have identified and supported opportunities for bilateral trade between Australia and the United Kingdom.

In that time, they have seen a vast number of economic shifts, not only in our bilateral relationship, but globally. Globalisation and new technology have diminished the barriers of distance and time. A journey from London to Perth, which took 48 days in 1887, will from next year take just 17 hours, as non-stop flights begin operating between the two cities.

Today, Australia is a larger export market for UK companies than India or Canada.

This global interconnectedness has hailed a wave of investment in each other's economies, disproportionately important to one another given the respective size of our markets.

The UK is the second-largest investor in Australia, and in turn the second-largest destination for Australian investment, after the United States in both cases.

There is a strong mobilisation of institutional investment funds into major projects in each other's countries. In one notable example, the Australian Super pension fund has invested £1 billion into the Kings Cross development project in London, one of the most significant regenerations in Europe.

The area has been transformed, and not only comprises housing and businesses, but also Google's new UK Headquarters, and the Crick Institute for Biomedical Research.

This means that the savings of ordinary Australians are creating jobs, housing and growth in the United Kingdom, an indicator of our shared economic destiny.

Similarly, the UK-owned Liberty House Group recently acquired the Arrium Steelworks in Whyalla, bringing it back from the brink of collapse and saving over 5,500 Australian jobs in the process.

Our common story is one of open, successful mutual investment, with companies like BP, Macquarie Bank, and Westfield becoming household names in each other's countries.

And yet, despite such obvious success stories, there remains a vast amount of untapped potential between Australia and the United Kingdom.

If we are to strengthen our relationship, and build a prosperous future, then we must expand those industries that will be the foundations of future growth.

The UK's world-leading digital, infrastructure, and financial services industries will be the partners for growth, driving future economic integration and helping to realise many of Australia's most ambitious projects, from Smart Cities to the Melbourne Metro.

The digital sector, though it may present a logistical challenge for trade legislators, is one of the most exciting areas of growth between our two countries.

The United Kingdom is globally recognised for the strength of its technology sector.

As the technology Capital of Europe, we are a hub of research and innovation. Since 2011, the UK tech sector has attracted more investment than Germany, France and the Netherlands put together.

Currently, the UK provides around 10% of Australia's technology imports, yet more and more UK tech companies are looking to expand into the Australian market, or tap into your own pool of expertise.

My Department is already supporting BT with the launch of their first Cybersecurity R&D facility outside the UK, here in Sydney.

And early next year, Innovate UK will lead a Smart Cities trade delegation to Australia, followed up by a DIT mega-tech mission in 2018.

This, of course, is only one industry. But when you combine its potential with that of other industries, such as the £60 billion Australian Infrastructure Pipeline, or the MOU signed last year to facilitate a comprehensive Financial Technology bridge, then you can begin to see the range and scale of the opportunities we share.

Success, of course, will only come when we are willing to boldly meet the challenges of the future.

Services, for example, represent over 50% of the value of UK exports to Australia, and must be a priority for liberalisation.

We must work together to see the revitalisation of ambitious projects such as the Trade in Services Agreement, currently becalmed in Geneva.

If Britain and Australia are to work together to champion free and open world trade, then we must lead by example, removing barriers and facilitating bilateral and multilateral trade.

Britain's ambitions, once we leave the EU, for a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with Australia are well known.

We will have the opportunity to design an agreement that can be a global blueprint for the future, encompassing cutting-edge industries, and showcasing the benefits of unimpeded bilateral trade to the wider world.

Following last year's referendum, the Prime Minister created my Department for International Trade to make Britain a global defender of commercial freedoms, and to work with old friends and new allies across the world to realise our post-Brexit economic potential.

I am proud that Australia was the first country in the world with which we established a trade working group, laying the ground work for that future FTA.

Such an agreement can, of course, only come into effect once we have left the EU.

We want an open, liberal, and comprehensive trade agreement with the EU, in the mutual interest and for the prosperity of our people. We need an economic Brexit designed for the people of Europe, not a political Brexit designed for the Bureaucrats.

I am confident that such an agreement can be reached.

Throughout the process, my Department and the whole of the British Government will work to ensure maximum continuity and stability for companies operating in the UK, ensuring that trade and investment continues unhindered.

Yet I am here in Sydney because the UK's economic future lies beyond the borders of Europe, with countries like Australia who should be, and will be, our natural trading partners.

Last year's referendum result was not a vote for insularity, but for ambition – an acknowledgement by the British people that our destiny lay not within Europe, but with the wider world.

The Government was elected in June this year on an unashamedly free-trade mandate, and my Department for International Trade is delivering on that promise.

This not only means Trade Working Groups and FTA planning with countries like

Australia, but implementing clear manifesto promises, such as the creation of a global network of HM Trade Commissioners.

The nine HM Trade Commissioners will each oversee an area of the world, providing regional expertise and greater responsibility, and accountability, for boosting Britain's overseas trading relationships.

Since DIT's creation in July 2016, I and my ministerial team have conducted almost 130 overseas visits, to markets across the globe.

What has struck me most firmly is the sheer anticipation that is felt in many quarters for Britain's re-emergence as an unambiguously free-trading nation – fully committed to a global, rules-based system.

Commercial freedoms cannot be taken for granted.

Today, the global trading system that has brought wealth and prosperity to our advanced economies is under threat, as a slowdown in international trade is compounded by a rising tide of protectionist practices.

As the WTO has highlighted, the nations of the G20 are some of the worst culprits, silting up the global system with an abundance of non-tariff barriers.

If the benefits of free trade are to spread to a new generation, and bring prosperity to the poorest regions of the world, then the UK and Australia must be unafraid to defend, and extend, trading freedoms.

I spoke earlier about how the UK has much to learn from Australia, and from our Commonwealth cousins. For the first time in more than four decades, the UK will soon have a fully independent trade policy.

DIT is recruiting the right individuals, and already boasts a vast pool of talent, yet in Australia we have a friend and ally that has successfully negotiated FTAs from the US to Singapore.

As we look to the future, I hope to see our two nations forming a strong and united front in defence of free trade. Whether it is in Buenos Aires, at the WTO's Ministerial Conference, in Davos at the World Economic Forum, or at the G20 summit, the UK and Australia must work together to uphold and defend our hard-won commercial freedoms.

For all the long history that our two countries share, it is how we meet the challenges of the future that will define our friendship.

We have the means, we have the values, and we have the expertise – all we need is the will, and we can secure a brighter, more prosperous future for Britain, Australia, and the world.

Thank you.

News story: Government and industry cement deal to give UK construction the edge

- Business Secretary announces flagship deal that could add billions of pounds in value to the UK economy through delivering better homes and infrastructure
- government will invest £170 million in the Transforming Construction programme with industry committed to match-funding with a £250 million investment
- the transformative [Sector Deal](#) will help modernise the industry and recruit and train the next generation of high-skilled construction workers
- deal will look to deliver a substantial boost to the skills of current workers and help retrain workers, alongside a new National Retraining Scheme

A transformative deal between government and the construction industry which could add billions of pounds to the economy has been announced by Business and Energy Secretary Greg Clark today (29 November 2017).

Government and industry have worked extensively since the launch of the Industrial Strategy green paper to agree the Sector Deal, developing a joint strategic direction for the sector that reflects shared ambition to modernise the industry and to respond to the challenges of demographic change and Brexit.

The deal, announced in the [Industrial Strategy white paper](#) on Monday (27 November), will prepare the UK construction sector for the future, helping companies build better performing buildings and infrastructure at a greater speed and reduced cost, while supporting the government's ambitious programmes in both infrastructure and housing.

By transforming the sector through better adoption of digital and manufacturing technologies the Construction Sector Deal aims to deliver quality infrastructure and housing more quickly, and at reduced cost to the taxpayer, while boosting the skills of construction workers and training the next generation of workers.

Supported by £170 million of government investment over three years through the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, and £250 million of match funding from industry, the deal will bring together the construction, manufacturing, energy and digital sectors in a new hub to commercialise technologies capable of building assets which are both cost effective and energy efficient.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

Our construction industry makes a vital contribution to the UK economy and is one of our most important sectors, with businesses that add £138 billion a year to the economy, contribute 8% of our GDP, and employ over 3.1 million workers.

The Sector Deal we have announced today will see government and industry working together to support, invest and transform the construction sector, creating high-skilled and well-paying jobs, while delivering more housing for people across the country.

The agreement embodies our vision for a modern Industrial Strategy, with government and industry working together in a strategic partnership towards the common goal of higher productivity, and a more skilled construction workforce with more earning power.

Andrew Wolstenholme, Chair of the [Construction Leadership Council](#), said:

I am delighted that construction has been included in the first wave of sector deals. It presents a huge opportunity for one of the UK's largest industries and the broader economy.

With a projected £600 billion pipeline of infrastructure projects to be delivered over the coming decades, it is vital that the industry and government work together to realise the full potential of the deal.

We have a golden opportunity to reap economic gains from improved productivity and the more efficient construction of assets, creating high-skilled, well-paid jobs in all parts of the UK and driving up exports to the global infrastructure market.

Tony Meggs, Chief Executive of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) said:

This government has ambitious plans for infrastructure over the next decade. It is vital that the construction sector is modern and efficient in the way it delivers these plans. Only then will we see future investment continue to flow and make progress in closing the UK's productivity gap.

The IPA very much supports this Construction Sector Deal; we will support and align with industry as it implements the programme.

Approach to skills

The announcement follows the launch of the Industrial Strategy white paper yesterday by the Business Secretary, setting out a long-term plan for how Britain can build on its economic strengths, address its productivity challenge, positively embrace technological change, and support businesses and its workers.

With a clear emphasis on building skills for the future, the deal commits the sector to adopting a new strategic approach to skills development, ensuring that standards and qualifications for the skills needed, now and in the future, are developed, and industry is able to use all sources of funding effectively. This will deliver:

- a reformed [Construction Industry Training Board](#), with greater industry leadership and engagement, focused on delivering future skills needs – particularly amongst SMEs
- a co-ordinated approach to maximising the benefits of the [Apprenticeship Levy](#) – creating new apprenticeship trailblazers, and increasing the number of construction apprentices
- a unified and more effective industry approach to promoting construction careers, and removing barriers to employment in the industry; this help the sector to recruit, train and retain a more diverse workforce, with higher levels of professional and technical levels, and management skills

Through the Sector Deal the industry will also be working with government to produce a Construction Skills Strategy aimed at retaining and retraining a workforce that is fit for the future and able to deliver on the government's infrastructure and housing ambitions.

To help upskill construction workers and retrain them in new valuable skills, the government announced in its Industrial Strategy white paper that it would be launching a new National Retraining Scheme that will help make sure workers have the right skills to match employer's needs, beginning with a £64 million investment for digital and construction training.

Government has also set out its ambition to make the UK's technical education system as prestigious as its higher education. In the recently published T level action plan, government announced that construction will be one of the first of 4 T levels to be taught from 2020.

Sector Deal objectives

With the sector focused on delivering on these 3 key themes, the deal has 4 clear objectives that it is committed to achieving by 2025:

- 33% reduction in the cost of construction and the whole life cost of assets
- 50% reduction in the time taken from beginning-to-end of new build and refurbished assets

- 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in the built environment
- 50% reduction in the trade gap between total exports and total imports of construction products and materials

Centre for Digital Built Britain Programme

Government has also today announced the launch of the Centre for Digital Built Britain at the University of Cambridge. The new centre, which forms part of the 'Transforming Construction' Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund investment, will develop Building Information Modelling (BIM), sensors, data analytics and smart systems technologies that can be embedded in new building projects.

The Centre for Digital Built Britain Programme, first announced in the 2016 budget, will deliver reductions in whole-life costs and carbon emissions of buildings, whilst improving construction productivity and capacity by using intelligent building information models, sensing technology and secure data and information infrastructure.

Building for 2050

Government is also investing £1.4 million in a research project called 'Building for 2050'. Led by AECOM, this project is gathering evidence from 3 housing developments located in Swansea, Bristol and Manchester with the aim of uncovering the barriers to developing low cost, low carbon housing.

The project will test innovative methods of construction and will involve working closely with households throughout the project to track their views, and to report on progress as we seek to reduce the environmental impact of UK homes by 2050.

Full details of the Sector Deal agreement between industry and government will be published on GOV.UK in the coming weeks.

[Press release: 'Names' top the list for those wishing for a personalised registration this Christmas](#)

The DVLA spoke to around 1,000 motorists to get their thoughts on personalised registrations for cars. Whilst names or nicknames topped the list, registrations that represented a business were also a popular choice. This was followed by registrations that represented a favourite sports team or pet.

1 in 10 of those surveyed who had a personalised registration had received it as a gift.

Currently, the top most wanted registrations searched for on the [DVLA Personalised Registrations](#) website include BE11 CKY and SB51 MON.

[DVLA's Personalised Registrations](#) has over 50 million registrations available to buy online and if customers purchase by 15 December the registration will arrive in time for Christmas.

Whilst some personalised registration numbers can sell at auction for hundreds of thousands of pounds, those looking for gifts on a smaller budget will find registrations starting at just £250.

Jody Davies, DVLA Personalised Registrations' Senior Sales Manager, said:

With names topping the list of preferred personalised registrations we know that people value the thought that goes into the gift. Using our website's search facility customers can try different combinations to find the perfect gift for the motorist.

And with over 50 million registrations available there's plenty of opportunity to be creative and snap up a plate in time for Christmas.

Personalised registrations can be bought [online](#) 24 hours a day. A dedicated team can also help customers find the registration they want over the phone by ringing 0300 123 0883. Lines are open Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 4.30pm.

[Speech: "The UK stands ready to support the region's work to bring an end to the conflict and suffering in South Sudan"](#)

Mr President, time and time again, we have voiced our despair at the depths of the suffering of the people of South Sudan. The scale of the numbers is deeply shocking: one third of the population have been forced to flee their homes and more than half the population lack enough food to feed themselves and their families. And yet, the parties to the conflict, including the Government, continue to mount offensives on innocent civilians. They are deaf to the misery of their own people. It is more important than ever that the international community shows the people of South Sudan that we will act

together to work for peace, even if South Sudan's leaders will not.

Innocent civilians continue to pay the price for the failures of the political elite, but President Kiir's long overdue decree ordering safe passage for humanitarian agencies is welcome. We hope that this will result in real improvements in getting assistance to those that so desperately need it. Because physical restrictions, whether resolved or not, represent just the tip of the iceberg, as bureaucratic impediments including costly registration fees, and delays in receiving permits, prevent humanitarians from reaching those most in need.

Like others, we are extremely concerned that UNMISS continues to face significant restrictions of movement, including restrictions imposed by Government forces. We are particularly troubled by a disturbing trend of harassment, threats and physical assault of UN staff. This must stop immediately. Those responsible will be judged by their actions, not their words.

Mr President, South Sudan is at a cross roads. Its leaders are being offered a last chance to commit to peace and demonstrate that they care for their people and their country. They have repeatedly failed to do so. Too many times ceasefires have been declared while gunshots continue to ring out. But IGAD's Revitalisation Forum offers hope for the people of South Sudan, and I would like to reiterate the UK's full support for this process and to thank both IGAD and the African Union for their hard work over recent months. IGAD foreign ministers and the Special Envoy have actively reached out to both the elites and civil society across the region as part of their revitalization process. The UK stands ready to support the region's work to bring an end to the conflict and suffering in South Sudan, and we welcome the African Union Peace and Security Council's clearly worded communiqué of the 22 of September 2017.

The international community must use the full range of options to ensure that all parties meaningfully and constructively engage. This cannot be an open-ended process that allows more delays, leading to more suffering for the people of South Sudan. As the African Union communiqué says, it must be clear that this is a final chance and that there will be consequences for not engaging. As a Council, we should commit to return to this issue early in the new year in order to consider whether we have seen enough progress, whether there are individuals or parties who are blocking peace, and be ready to take appropriate action if so.

Given the fragile situation in South Sudan, we are concerned that the Government is considering running elections next year. There is no possibility that the conditions for good elections will be in place next year. Seeking to hold them when the conditions are not right is likely to drive further conflict. As the African Union and IGAD have set out, the timelines in the Peace Agreement must be revised to allow for a conducive environment for holding elections. The National Dialogue must be held in support of the Revitalisation of the Peace Agreement; it cannot provide a solution in itself.

Mr President, I want to conclude by reiterating our plea to the leaders of South Sudan: Stop the violence and engage meaningfully in the revitalisation process. Stop blocking and impeding UNMISS and the Regional Protection Force. Stop attacks against UN and humanitarian workers. And stop denying humanitarian aid from reaching your people. You are starving them to death.

Mr President, South Sudan is at a cross roads. We should do all that we can to support the region's efforts to ensure its leaders choose the right path.

Thank you.