

WEST SUSSEX RAIL USERS ASSOCIATION

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The end for Rail franchising

On 21 September the Government announced a new system that ends franchising after 24 years and replaces it with what is claimed to a simpler, effective model through high performance targets and simplified journeys. This model aims new 'recovery' contracts deliver government commitment to end the complicated franchising model and deliver a simpler, effective model to reform our railways. It will feature agreements focused on high performance targets and simplifying journeys are first steps to a network that puts passengers back in control

The new system will create a simpler, more effective structure and will take shape over the coming months. The first stage has been to move operators onto transitional contracts to prepare the ground for the new railway. Franchising has been replaced with more demanding Emergency Recovery Measures Agreements (ERMAs). These address the continuing impact of the pandemic on the railway and delivers on a government commitment to replace the current franchising system. These management agreements have tougher performance targets and lower management fees. The ERMAs are a transitional stage to the new system, the biggest change to the railways in a quarter of a century. Under current public health guidance, the intention is also for operators to run an almost full service to ensure there is space to help passengers travel safely.

ERMAs pave the way for wider rail industry reform that prioritises the passenger. In 2018 Keith Williams, the chairman of Royal Mail, was asked to review the railways after a chaotic timetable change and the failure of some franchises. He supports the 21 September announcement, which is the prelude to a white paper which will respond to his recommendations. The white paper will be published when the course of the pandemic becomes clearer.

How does it affect our operator Govia Thameslink Railway – GTR?

I have received the following statement from GTR

The Department for Transport (DfT) has announced that GTR's Emergency Measures Agreement (EMA), which ended on 20 September 2020, has been replaced by an Emergency Recovery Measures Agreement (ERMA). GTR will operate under its ERMA until the end of its contract term in September 2021, with the potential for a further extension. The signing of the ERMA is good news for our passengers and our staff. It brings stability which means we can focus on our response to the pandemic and delivering our customers' needs.

The pandemic has changed the way we work and changed what customers need from our service. Over the past six months, during phase one of the EMA, we have built new relationships with hospitals, schools and business, asking for their input and feedback on our services so we can develop them with their needs in mind. We will continue to do this, working with our MPs and user groups make sure that our plans are clear and continue to focus on the local needs of communities, whether it is train services or simpler ticketing for a post-Covid world and your continuing support in this regard is greatly appreciated.

Our CEO Patrick Verwer is pleased with the news: "We welcome today's announcement and the stability this new agreement brings for our colleagues, who continue to focus on providing a safe and reliable service as we welcome back more customers. "We will continue to work with our partners and stakeholders across the industry to help reconnect communities, improve our performance and ensure high levels of customer satisfaction." David Brown, CEO of GTR's parent company Go-Ahead, said: "This contract reaffirms the Government's recognition of the important role rail plays in driving economic growth and in connecting communities. Independent passenger surveys have found that people who have recently travelled on our services found them to be clean, safe and reliable. We look forward to welcoming more passengers back onto our trains."

Timetable changes

The current weekday timetable introduced on 7 September showed few changes to the July services. We still have basically a Saturday service and this seems quite adequate for the number of passengers travelling. The late additions to the July timetable of the 06.18 Bognor to London Bridge and the 17.12 London Bridge to Chichester continue to run. These services are formed of 12 coaches of Gatwick Express stock..

Passenger Benefit Fund

Southern has now restarted work in earnest on the station schemes including those from the passenger benefit fund so many of the planned improvements are now beginning to appear. They include: waiting shelters, refurbished toilets, more seats, information screens, automatic doors, more cycle parking, refurbished waiting rooms, station planters, LED lighting. To find out about the improvements being made at each station over the coming year, including the schemes asked for by us, passengers and stakeholders through the Passenger Benefit Fund, have a look at - <https://www.southernrailway.com/improvingyourstations>. This list includes all the proposals made by WSRUA last year. Southern has indicated the work has already started or is about to start on the following 7 stations

- Angmering – install more seating, a new shelter, new stair nosings & a water butt, and making improvements to the toilet (already started).
- Ford – redecorate the booking hall, refurbish the toilets on platform 1, and add seating to both platforms (due to start a little later in Nov).
- Littlehampton – refurbish the waiting room, add seating on platforms 1 and 2, and making improvements to all the toilets (due to start Sep).
- Faygate – ‘re-wild’ the verges on the platforms, add cycle parking and seating on the platforms and put in new waiting shelters (due to start Oct).
- Horsham – add seating and extend the PA system to cover the overbridge and back of the station (due to start late Oct). A waiting shelter is planned for a later date.
- Littlehaven – install additional seating and a canopy over the ticket machine, and refurbishing and expanding the cycle parking. (already started). A waiting shelter is expected at a later date.
- Warnham – install a waiting shelter, cycle parking, seating and a canopy over the ticket machine

Upgrading of Class 377 trains

Southern has confirmed the £55 million train modernisation programme for GTR’s Electrostar - the Southern Class 377 as well as the Class 387 used by Gatwick Express and Great Northern. These include USB/power sockets and on-board real-time information through media screens. The trains will also be fitted with new energy-saving LED lighting to make them more environmentally friendly. To improve reliability, the trains will be fitted with an upgraded On-Train Data Recorder that will help predict and diagnose faults and streamline maintenance. More about this in our next Newsletter.

Membership Renewal

If you have not paid your £2 subscription for 2020, a renewal form is enclosed and it can be paid by cheque through the post or by direct bank credit, the renewal form gives details of these options. If you did not pay for 2019 the payment slip shows £4. If you no longer wish to remain a member, please let me know by e-mail, post or telephone.

Trevor Tupper
Secretary/Treasurer