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## West Coast ITT sets out ITSO and station changes

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Bidders for the new Inter City West Coast franchise have been issued with an invitation to tender by the Department for Transport.

Transport minister Theresa Villiers said the ITT will encourage the operator of the new 15 year franchise to invest in improvements at stations and help drive down excessive costs. Passengers travelling between London, Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow will benefit from an extra 28,000 seats, she added, as all 106 Pendolino carriages on order from Alstom are delivered - enabling four new train sets to be introduced and 31 existing trains to be lengthened from nine to 11 carriages.



*Pendolino: Alstom is introducing new and extended 11-car train sets on West Coast route*

The proposed Train Service Specification for the new franchise is said to represent a relaxation from the rigid timetable specification of the past, while retaining obligations that protect the key outcomes for passengers and taxpayers, such as principal first and last trains and minimum numbers of station stops per week and per day. Bidders will have the flexibility to vary timetables on individual days of the week to cater for changes in demand. According to the DfT, these changes mark a significant shift from the micro-management that has prevented operators from maximising capacity and reacting to the changing demands of their passengers in the past.

Bidders are required to plan for the introduction of ITSO compliant ticketing throughout the franchise area on all ticket types no later than February 2017 and for most ticket types by February 2015. They have also been told that Oyster equipment on the Transport for London network will be capable of reading ITSO based products from January 2014. The new operator will be expected to staff and maintain the ITSO compliant gatelines being installed at Birmingham New Street as part of the Gateway project and due to be operational by July 2015.

In an attempt to encourage the new train operator to invest in station facilities, the successful bidder will take full repair responsibilities for the 17 stations for which it will be station facility owner under a 99 year lease from Network Rail at peppercorn rent. The new lease arrangements no longer require the sharing of benefits from commercial activities with Network Rail.

Bidders will also be able to put forward proposals for station upgrade projects as incremental options to be assessed separately from their core bid. Following calls from local stakeholders to rename Birmingham International, the franchisee will be required to submit a priced option to carry out local consultation on whether the station should be renamed and what name should ultimately be used. Any change would be likely to take effect in May 2014.

The new franchise will run from 10 December 2012 to March 2026 with an option for the DfT to extend for up to 20 months. Virgin Trains - a joint venture between Virgin and Stagecoach - currently operates inter-city trains on the West Coast Main Line.

Theresa Villiers said: "Passengers will welcome the 28,000 additional seats this new franchise will deliver every day on what is becoming one of the UK's busiest rail lines. A longer, more flexible franchise will encourage private sector investment, for example in improving stations. It will also promote greater efficiency to enable improvements to be made whilst driving down costs."

Four bidders have been shortlisted for the new franchise - Abellio, First Group, Keolis/SNCF and Virgin. Bids are expected to be received by May 2012

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and the new operator will be announced in August 2012.

The ITT for the Inter City West Coast franchise follows the current agreed regulated fares policy as set out in the 2011 Comprehensive Spending Review - a rise in 2012 of RPI+1% and RPI+3% for 2013 and 2014, returning to RPI+1% thereafter.

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