



ENGLAND

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Dutch firm takes on East Anglia trains from National Express

A new operator has started running train services across the eastern counties.

The British branch of Dutch train firm Abellio took over the Greater Anglia train franchise from National Express East Anglia just after 02:00 GMT.

For the next 29 months, the company will provide train services across Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and links to London.

Abellio said its first priority was to improve customer service.

The firm is now responsible for 3,000 employees and 43,000 individual train services per month, carrying 2 million passengers a week, a spokesman said.

"The first priority was to ensure the seamless transition of operations to Abellio," he said.

The firm has also committed to improvements to station condition and operational performance.

The Greater Anglia franchise award also takes in the 2012 Olympic Games when transport into London will become a major focus.

Training priority

Over the past few months Abellio managers have been working closely with National Express East Anglia, the Department for Transport, Transport for London, employees and customers to ensure a smooth transfer, the spokesman said.

Abellio managing director Ruud Hackett said that after three or four months of preparation he was delighted to start operations for real.

"Our first main priority is to improve the customer experience. At day one we have more people on platforms and in trains to assist passengers and provide more information."

The attitude of staff would change as they would be put through a programme of customer service training, he said.

"All front-line staff will be equipped with Blackberries over the next few months to ensure they have up-to-date information at hand."

There will be no new investment in trains as the firm will inherit the existing fleet, but this was boosted in December by new trains on the Stansted Express service from Cambridge.

"We're investing a lot of money in cleaning and maintenance of trains to make the travelling experience with us more pleasant.

"We don't believe repainting all the trains makes a lot of difference but making sure they're clean and safe does," he said.

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