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## Rail firms push for faster franchising reforms

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Train operators have called on the government to speed up changes to rail franchise arrangements.

Speaking at a lecture at the Institution of Civil Engineers in central London on Monday (16 April), the chairman of the Association of Train Operating Companies urged ministers to provide tangible evidence that it will deliver on pledges to implement less prescriptive franchises. Tom Smith warned that unless the government steps back from the day to day running of the railways, train companies' efforts to attract more passengers and reduce industry costs will be hindered.

The ATOC chairman spoke of there being a narrow window of opportunity to implement genuine reform with franchises accounting for almost 70% of rail industry revenue due to be let within the next few years. He said that for the next three rail franchises, the bidders for which were announced at the end of last month (TB 8389), the government must shift from telling train companies what they must do in every last detail, to drawing out what they will do over and above a minimum set of requirements.

Tom Smith said: "Over the two year period since the coalition government came to power we have heard a lot about their commitment to reforming franchises along these lines - to be longer, less prescriptive, more output based and giving incentives to train companies to be innovative to grow their businesses in ways that meet the needs of their customers."

He added: "Sadly that commitment has barely begun to be turned into reality, and we need tangible evidence that it will be. I call on the government to live up to its promises and make franchise reform a reality. The moment is now - there is an unprecedented series of franchises to be let and the time is opportune to introduce meaningful change to the terms of this contract."

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