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New £4.5bn generation of intercity trains approved



The new carriages will have more seats and space and will accelerate faster than existing rolling stock

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Plans for a new fleet of intercity express trains that will provide 21st-century travel for rail passengers, as well as create up to 900 jobs, have finally been announced by the Government after years of delays.

The £4.5 billion contract will involve Agility Trains, a consortium led by Japan's Hitachi, building 596 rail carriages at a new factory in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham.

The first trains will enter service on the Great Western Main Line in 2017 and on the

East Coast Main Line by 2018.

Combined with improved infrastructure they will shave 15 minutes off a journey from Swansea to London and 21 minutes from a Bristol to London trip.

Passengers travelling on the East Coast line will also enjoy faster travel, with journeys between London and Newcastle reduced by 13 minutes.

A total of 730 skilled jobs will be created at Newton Aycliffe with a further 200 created during construction of the factory itself, where Hitachi will assemble a fleet of 92 complete trains.

The new carriages will have more seats and space and will accelerate faster than existing rolling stock.

As well as building the new factory, Hitachi will construct maintenance depots in Bristol, Swansea, west London and Doncaster, and upgrade existing maintenance depots throughout Britain.

The company will also locate its European R&D research and development operations at the main factory to enhance its chances of winning rail contracts across Europe.

Agility was announced as preferred bidder for the Intercity Express Programme (IEP) in early 2009, but after a series of delays it has taken more than three years for the deal to be finalised.

In 2010 Lord Adonis, the former Transport Secretary, cancelled the plan and blamed the City for not backing the plan financially.

In naming Hitachi as preferred bidder in 2009, Geoff Hoon, Lord Adonis's predecessor, sparked controversy because it snubbed Bombardier, the Canadian engineering group that was the only British-based train manufacturer.

Unions were mollified when Mr Hoon said that he expected a new train manufacturing plant to be built in the North East.

Justine Greening, Transport Secretary, said: "A new train factory is fantastic news for Britain and will be welcomed by everyone who wants to see a thriving UK manufacturing sector.

"The decision to build almost 600 new intercity train carriages is great for rail passengers who will experience faster and more comfortable journeys when travelling across Britain on the East Coast and Great Western main lines."

Construction at the Newton Aycliffe site is expected to begin in 2013 and it will be fully operational by 2015.

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