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Timetables to be more flexible after Olympic success

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THE GOVERNMENT'S micro-management of rail franchises is being eased slightly, after successful trials before and during the Olympics.

Transport minister Norman Baker said the introduction of a 'General Consent Protocol' would affect only English operators, who now have the power to adjust their timetables to some extent during special events, such as matches and concerts.

The DfT said the change would make rail services more convenient by permitting short-term changes to a 'small portion' – up to 30 per cent – of the timetable.

The idea was first tested on Southern between 17 April and 23 June this year and was then extended to all English operators during the Olympic and Paralympic Games, following consultations with ATOC and passenger watchdogs.

Mr Baker said: "The Olympic Games were a massive success and proved our transport system was able to successfully carry record numbers of passengers. We helped train operators cope with the changing demand by giving them more flexibility to give passengers the services they needed.

"This has proved such an unqualified success that we have decided to permanently cut the red tape involved in adjusting small portions of the timetable. The changes give train companies the opportunity to ensure passengers are able to plan ahead to ensure they make it to their football matches and concerts and back home again on time."

ATOC has been campaigning for a relaxation of controls for some time. Its chief executive Michael Roberts said: This is good news for passengers. Train companies have been seeking greater freedom to adapt their timetables to suit the needs of their customers and this move will be a big boost for people wanting to enjoy many special events across the country."

However, the DfT added that the transport secretary would 'retain discretion' over all timetable changes, and that the effects of the more flexible approach would be reviewed within a year.

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John Gilbert, Cradley, Herefordshire

'Eased slightly' indeed. How dictators find it difficult to let go of power!!

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