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Sir John Armitt to take helm at NatEx

By Mark Odell and Rose Jacobs

The man who oversaw the construction of the Olympic Park for the London games will join [National Express](#) as its next chairman.

Sir John Armitt, the former chair of the Olympic Delivery Authority, will take over from incumbent, John Devaney, who announced his intention to step down from the role in July.

Sir John, 66, will join the board of the transport group in January and take over the chairman's job a month later. He will earn £225,000 per year, the same as his predecessor who has held the role since April 2009.

Sir John has extensive experience in the rail industry, having served as chief executive of Network Rail and its predecessor Railtrack between 2001 and 2007.

Sir John was brought in to sort out the mess at Railtrack following successive safety failures, which ultimately resulted in its collapse and its re-emergence as Network Rail, the quasi-private owner of the UK rail network.

Before that he was chief executive of Costain, the engineering group, and head of Union Railways, the original body that oversaw the development of the high-speed rail link between London and the Channel tunnel. He is also deputy chairman of Berkeley Group and is a member of the Transport for London board.

He will have to placate investors nervous about problems at the company's Spanish division, which contributes about 40 per cent of group operating profits.

The performance of the US school bus division also appears to be faltering in the face of austerity-driven government spending cuts. National Express' shares have underperformed those of two of its three UK-listed train and bus peers over the past year.

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