

Great Western London to south Wales rail contest scrapped

The competition to run the Great Western rail franchise between south Wales and London is being scrapped.

The UK Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin said he wants to negotiate an interim franchise of at least two years with current operator FirstGroup.

It follows advice from the Chair of Eurostar Richard Brown who has been investigating the collapse of the West Coast Main Line franchise deal.

FirstGroup said it would provide "continuity and consistency".

In a statement to Parliament, Mr McLoughlin said he would undertake "a more fundamental review of the franchise proposition, recognising that this is a large and complex franchise which will need to manage service delivery whilst the route is electrified and new rolling stock is introduced."

Train services

In March last year, FirstGroup, National Express, Stagecoach, and Arriva, a division of Deutsche Bahn, were short-listed for the Great Western franchise.

Mr McLoughlin said that he did not believe it would be appropriate for the UK government to reimburse the bidders for their costs.

He added: "I will also be instructing Directly Operated Railways, a government owned company, to undertake the minimum preparatory measures necessary to operate train services in circumstances where I am unable to agree the terms of an interim agreement with the existing train operator."

FirstGroup Chief Executive Tim O'Toole said the move provided "continuity and consistency for our passengers".

He added that it "enables us to continue to deliver considerable improvements to services."

"Everyone has worked tirelessly to enhance services and we have a record of successfully delivering major projects, working together with government and our industry partners," he said.

"We have also taken significant steps to tackle overcrowding, although there is still much to do on these routes which are among the most congested in the country.

"Today's announcement will also allow us to work closely with the DfT (Department for Transport) and our industry partners to deliver the much needed new capacity as efficiently and effectively as possible," he added.

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