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Virgin Trains expands for Glasgow 2014

Virgin Trains has promised a major expansion in capacity in time for the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games.

It said trains will be lengthened to cope with a surge in demand already experienced by the operator - and an increase in visitor numbers next year.

The company won a two-year extension to its West Coast franchise after a plan to award it to FirstGroup was scrapped.

Virgin said demand on Glasgow to London services has increased by 144% in the past five years.

Virgin Trains Chief Operating Officer Chris Gibb said: "We're just making the trains longer. We're re-shuffling our train fleet around in December this year and having gone up to hourly on Glasgow-London from last December we've seen huge growth on our routes out of Scotland."

Much of the increased capacity will be created by combining Glasgow to Birmingham services with services between London and Birmingham.

This will also create direct services from Glasgow to destinations such as Coventry.

Journey time

Virgin has said it receives no subsidy for its West Coast operation and pays a premium to the government for the franchise.

Mr Gibb told BBC Radio Scotland that he believed further improvements are likely on the west coast route, with a journey time from Glasgow to London of around three hours.

"We believe there's a good 15-20 years worth of capacity left in the West Coast Main Line," he said.

"After that, there are some very difficult questions about where do the trains go, how do we handle the growth in passenger traffic and of course High Speed 2 (HS2) plays a key part in that agenda from 2026-2033 onwards."

Although the HS2 project will link London with the north of England, Mr Gibb believes it will bring significant benefits to Scotland.

He added: "I would go for a little over three hours Glasgow to London. I believe that's achievable with what is currently proposed - a combination of HS2 and an upgraded railway north of Wigan up to Glasgow."