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South west alliance pushes for extra investment

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Network Rail and South West Trains this week teamed up to push a package of rail enhancements which could increase capacity at Waterloo station by 15% by 2019.

The South West Trains-Network Rail Alliance wants to extend platforms 1-4 to accommodate 10-car suburban trains; upgrade signalling, track and power supplies; and reopen Waterloo International platforms 21-24. Platform 20 is due to be used by regular passenger services by April 2014.

However, the plans appear to hinge on getting approval from the Department for Transport with discussions said to be ongoing. In advance of getting a green light South West Trains has begun procurement for a fleet of suburban trains which it says could be delivered by 2016 (TB 9528). This week the company said it would consider options for new or refurbished rolling stock including trains cascaded as part of the government's rail electrification programme.

Although the alliance claims to have a blueprint for delivering capacity for nearly 10,000 extra peak time passengers into and out of London Waterloo by 2019, the partners have yet to give details of how and when the required infrastructure improvements will be delivered.

Both Network Rail and South West Trains want to bring the former Waterloo International platforms into use for domestic trains. But despite the platforms lying idle since 2007 there are still no firm plans for the work (TB 9540). A spokesman for Network Rail said he was hopeful that at least some of the international platforms could be in use by domestic trains by 2019.

At least there are concrete plans for reopening platform 20 (TB 9298) as part of an HLOS package which will bring 108 additional carriages into service with South West Trains by the end of 2014 (TB 8171) (TB 9234). These will be used to lengthen peak-time services; platforms at more than 60 stations have already been lengthened in readiness for the introduction of 10-car trains.

While there remain many questions about how and when the plans highlighted this week will be achieved the alliance, formed on 29 April 2012 and the first of its kind in the UK, is taking the opportunity to use its collective clout as both train and infrastructure operator to lobby for government investment.

Tim Shoveller, Managing Director of the South West Trains-Network Rail Alliance, said: "Our network is currently one of the busiest in Europe carrying almost 210 million passengers a year. We already have confirmed plans in place to deliver improvements in capacity over the next two years. However, the huge success of the railway in the UK means it will get significantly busier in the next two decades and beyond. There is also a need to invest in the infrastructure to improve the daily reliability for today's customers."


Waterloo: work planned on station approaches and former international platforms (on left)



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He added: "The alliance between South West Trains and Network Rail means we are working more closely together, thinking big and creating plans for the long-term to deliver significant improvements for passengers. The blueprint we are developing in partnership with the Department for Transport is a massive programme of work and requires significant investment. These plans will greatly improve what is a key part of the country's transport infrastructure and ensure our rail network continues to support economic growth."

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