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DfT and Hitachi defend the Intercity express programme

In response to a anonymous blog, the Department for Transport and Hitachi defend a project to replace older trains

• [Read the anonymous blog here](#)

Stephen Hammond and Alistair Dormer

Guardian Professional, Friday 20 December 2013 12.54 GMT



Hitachi Intercity express trains will be built by Agility at a factory in Newton Aycliffe.

The government's Intercity express programme is a multi-billion pound project that must be delivered if we are serious about rolling out a rail network fit for the 21st century.

When complete by 2020, the programme will have transformed rail travel on the East Coast and Great Western mainlines, providing significant benefits to passengers, communities and local businesses.

The programme will deliver 122 new trains, increasing capacity up to 28% and 40% at peak time for trains into King's Cross and Paddington respectively. In addition, it will cut average journey times by up to 23 minutes to our major cities, including Bristol, Cardiff, Swansea, Leeds, Newcastle, York and Edinburgh.

These trains will provide greater reliability for passengers and a step change in customer experience, offering more leg and luggage space and better connectivity for commuters using mobile phones and laptops.

In short, the Intercity express programme is good news for passengers, the rail industry and UK manufacturing.

However, [an anonymous contributor to the Guardian recently questioned the necessity of the programme](#), arguing that buying new trains is more expensive than leasing older rolling stock.

The simple answer is that the current fleet would require significant life extension work to address their increasing reliability issues. Leasing older trains would not meet

customer demands and would certainly not address those concerns for the next 30 years.

In addition, introducing the Intercity express programme will release existing rolling stock that could be used elsewhere on the rail network to replace older trains. You would be hard pushed to find anyone who believes replacing older trains is a nonsense. Anonymous clearly does not speak to passengers and train operators.

The new trains will enter service on the Great Western mainline in 2017 and on the East Coast mainline in 2018, taking advantage of the significant infrastructure work Network Rail has planned for the routes.

It is nonsense to suggest that a programme that has been the subject of multiple reviews has been slipped through without scrutiny.

Furthermore, the claim that there is a limited industry awareness surrounding the project is completely unfounded. Train operating companies and passenger groups have provided significant input into the designs of the trains. There is also wider input from the industry's supply chain with 27 British-based companies to date having signed contracts related to the construction of the trains.

The overall programme is worth in the region of £5.8bn with costs borne by Agility Trains – a consortium of Hitachi Rail Europe and John Laing. Agility will only receive income from train operating companies once clean, safe and reliable trains are delivered into daily service.

The article also referred to Hitachi Rail Europe's decision to open a factory in Newton Aycliffe – which will create thousands of jobs – claiming it was destined to fail once the contract for the express trains was complete. This decision to invest in a manufacturing plant in the UK was not a requirement of the procurement process and was based on Hitachi Rail Europe's evaluation of the growth potential in the UK and the rest of Europe over the coming years.

Hitachi Rail Europe will continue to bid for contracts that can be carried by its skilled staff at Newton Aycliffe. The investment of £82m is not a decision that it has taken lightly, and is an expression of Hitachi's confidence in the quality and reliability of its products, which will secure the long-term future of this UK factory.

The programme is a long-term project that will improve rail services for passengers and boost UK manufacturing for years to come. We look forward to its successful roll out.

Stephen Hammond MP is the parliamentary undersecretary of state at the Department for Transport and Alistair Dormer is the executive chairman and CEO of Hitachi Rail Europe.

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