



Photo: Jürg D. Lüthard

West Coast Partnership Won By First Trenitalia

On 14 August 2019 a consortium formed of Trenitalia (30 %) and First Group (70 %) was announced as winner of the West Coast Partnership franchise. Taking over from Virgin West Coast on 8 December 2019, First Trenitalia is to run this franchise until March 2031. Virgin Trains is thus left, for the moment, without any rail operating activities in Britain. It was disqualified from the West Coast Partnership bidding in June, having submitted a joint bid with Stagecoach and SNCF, this bid being dismissed as non-compliant following disagreements over pension payments liabilities (see R 3/19, p. 25). After that, the only other bidder left in the running was the MTR West Coast Partnership consortium formed of the MTR Corporation (UK), the Guangshen Railway Company and Renfe.

Under the new franchise, the operator is committed to increasing the number of services provided by 263 each week, starting in December 2022. New direct services are to be introduced from London Euston to Gobowen and Llandudno, and London Euston and Walsall. Motherwell, in the southern suburbs of Glasgow, will be served by many more Anglo-Scottish long distance trains. A half-hourly service is envisaged between London Euston and Liverpool. Under a 20 million GBP investment programme improvements are to be made in incident planning, on-train and wayside infrastructure monitoring equipment, and digitalised staff rostering systems.

The 20 **Class 221** Super Voyager DMUs, used on West Coast Main Line services, are to be phased out by 2022. These five-car DMUs, which often operate in ten-car formations on account of

demand, are deemed unpopular among passengers, are frequently overcrowded, and cover long stretches of their services on electrified lines. They are to be subjected to a minor refurbishment in 2020, and may eventually be transferred to the Cross Country group of long distance services. The new franchisee plans to acquire 13 new EDMUs and ten new EMUs, resulting in an anticipated reduction of 61 % in CO₂ emissions. Tenders are scheduled to be invited during autumn 2019.

The 56 **Class 390** Pendolino EMUs are to be subjected to a major refurbishment programme, costed at 117 million GBP, by December 2022. More luggage space will be provided, WC facilities improved, and new information screens installed. The Standard class seat units are to be replaced. Free 5G WiFi reception will be available, and wireless charging facilities will be provided. **This photo shows two Class 390 Pendolinos together with a Class 221 Super Voyager DMU at London Euston on 20 June 2015.**

Station upgrades, involving the provision of safe bike storage facilities, 900 more car parking spaces and 100 more e-vehicle charging points, are to take place. New **ticket** vending machines are to be installed, and waiting rooms refurbished. Significantly, there are no trains in service in Britain which have on-board ticket vending machines, even though some designs (see for example those on GW Train Regio DMUs in the Czech Republic) take up a minimum amount of space and would solve the problem of passengers being faced, wrongly, with having to pay excess fares when finding that the vending facilities at stations are out of action.



Image: HS2

All rolling stock is to be fitted with LED lighting and Driver Advisory Systems, to reduce energy expenditure, while stations and depots are to be equipped with solar panels and energy-efficient boilers, heaters and air conditioning. Efforts will be made to reduce by around 80 % the amount of non-recyclable material in products (such as food and drink) sold on board trains.

HS2 At The Crossroads

Another aspect of the new West Coast Partnership franchise is that the new franchisee will, from March 2026, act for five years as „shadow operator“ of HS2 between London and Birmingham. But the future of the HS2 project now hangs in the balance, following a decision by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps, on 21 August, to hold a thorough review of the project, whose costs are escalating, chaired by Douglas Oakervee, a retired engineer who was for a short period the chairman of HS2 Ltd., and deputised by Lord Berkeley, a Labour peer, champion of promoting railfreight, and a known critic of HS2. The review panel also consists of business, academic and transport sector rail specialists.

So far preparatory planning and work has consumed 7.4 billion GBP, and final **costs** are estimated at anything between the existing budgeted 55.6 billion GBP (the original budget was for 32.7 billion GBP), a currently cited 88 billion GBP and a feared over 100 million GBP (around 1 billion GBP per mile!). A „go, or no-go“ decision on the project is expected later in the year. Should the findings of the review indicate that construction of the railway proceed, inauguration is now not likely to take place until sometime between 2028 and 2031, 2026 having been the original completion date.

On 16 September the Government ordered the halting of clearance of ancient **woodlands** on 34 sites to be tra-

versed by the new railway until the outcome of the review has been made known. It is estimated that no fewer than 108 patches of ancient woodland could be affected adversely by the construction of the railway, with 63 of these suffering increased noise, vibration, lighting and dust. Clearance work was about to start in September on eight small woods in Warwickshire and three in Staffordshire.

Work is at present in progress to rebuild and expand the existing station facilities at London **Euston**, which date from the early 1960s, and which although designed then to handle a throughput of 20 million passengers annually, now have to cope with over double that number, resulting in considerable overcrowding. **The upper right-hand image shows what the street-level entrance to the rebuilt and enlarged station will look like.**

In 1971, three years after the rest of the existing station was completed, two tower blocks, **One Euston Square and Grant Thornton House, 60 m and 40 m high respectively, were built to a design by the modernist architect Richard Seifert. These were located on the east and west sides of the main entrance hall - see photo below left.** Demolition, as part of the project to provide 11 new platforms for high speed services, is to result in around 28,000 t of crushed concrete, which is to be re-used during the re-building of the station. **Demolition, shown in the lower right-hand photo taken on 20 September 2019, at the rate of around one floor every nine days, is expected to be completed in early 2020.**

Even if HS2 is not built, the expanded facilities at London Euston will be necessary to handle the increasing volume of local and long distance passenger traffic on the West Coast Main Line.

Mike Bent



Photo: HS2



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