

# Avanti West Coast Service Update

As you know, Avanti West Coast is running a reduced timetable at the moment for which we're sorry. We know we're not delivering the service our customers rightly expect and we apologise for the enormous frustration and inconvenience this is causing.

This note is to update stakeholders on how we plan to improve this situation by increasing our services over the coming months.

## **From now to December 11<sup>th</sup> 2022**

Our customers and communities deserve a dependable train service, so we've been working hard to rebuild our timetable in a resilient and sustainable way.

We have more than enough staff within the business but delays to driver training as a result of the pandemic meant we needed a number of staff to volunteer to work additional shifts.

We're working with our people, their union representatives, and industry partners to match the resources we have to demand, so we can deliver reliable services across our network to all our customers.

Whilst the current timetable is indeed heavily reduced, we did not make those reductions in a blanket fashion. We included additional services where they were most needed and where resource allowed. For example, on weekdays between 6am and 8am we run seven trains from Manchester to London which is almost the same as pre-covid, and from 7am to 9am we have six trains from Birmingham to London which is the same as pre-covid.

We have now completed the work required to analyse the additional services that can be provided in a reliable and sustainable fashion above and beyond those we are already running. We have targeted these services at our busiest routes and times. This will see up to a further ten trains a day running between London and Manchester on both weekdays and weekends. The weekday timings are as follows below; the weekend services are subject to engineering work which is taking place on most weekends over the coming months.

Northbound	Southbound
06:16 EUS - MAN	09:35 MAN - EUS
10:40 EUS - MAN	09:55 MAN - EUS
12:40 EUS - MAN	11:55 MAN - EUS
14:40 EUS - MAN	13:55 MAN - EUS
16:40 EUS - MAN	17:55 MAN - EUS

These services will begin to be introduced on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> September, from when we will run an additional ten trains on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays and six additional trains on Wednesdays.

On our Birmingham route, also from Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> September, we will introduce four additional trains a day (two in each direction) on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays.

Tickets for these services will be available for purchase over the coming days. The remaining additional services will be introduced as soon as possible, once we are confident they can be run robustly.

We recognise this still isn't good enough or the level of service our communities expect. For now though, it is what we are able to run in a robust and sustainable fashion, and we do have plans to add more trains into the timetable as more drivers become available.

### **11<sup>th</sup> December 2022 to 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023**

In December we will continue our recovery with a significant step-up of the timetable.

#### **Manchester**

A full timetable will operate, this includes 3 trains an hour to / from Manchester at 20 minute intervals.

- 1 train calling at Nuneaton, Stoke-on-Trent, Stockport
- 1 train calling at Stafford, Crewe, Wilmslow, Stockport
- 1 train calling at Milton Keynes, Rugby, Stoke-on-Trent, Macclesfield, Stockport

#### **Liverpool**

A full timetable will operate, providing 1 train an hour direct to Liverpool and calling at Milton Keynes, Crewe, and Runcorn.

#### **Birmingham**

On the Birmingham route we will improve our current offering to 2 trains an hour between the city and London:

- 1 train an hour to Preston calling at Watford Junction, Milton Keynes, Rugby, Coventry, Birmingham International, Birmingham New Street, Sandwell and Dudley, Wolverhampton, Stafford, Crewe, Warrington, Wigan. This will extend to Edinburgh

every two hours. In alternate hours, five trains will continue to Glasgow (one starting in Birmingham), with the remainder terminating at Blackpool.

- 1 train an hour to Birmingham New Street calling at Coventry and Birmingham International.

In the busiest periods, a third train per hour will run. In these hours, there will be a half-hourly fast service between London Euston and the West Midlands in addition to the Birmingham service calling at Watford Junction, Milton Keynes and Rugby.

### **North Wales/Shrewsbury/Wrexham**

There will be a significantly improved service to the North Wales Coast and Chester, with the majority of services restored. New weekend services will be introduced at Wrexham, and service provision to Shrewsbury will remain as planned in the original December '22 timetable.

### **Scotland**

Service levels to Scotland will remain broadly the same as the pre-Covid, December 2019 timetable, with some minor changes to timings to support operational reliability.

### **Summary**

Overall, the December '22 timetable change will see 264 daily train services on weekdays, a significant step-up from the circa. 180 daily services before December, and more than the 245 services a day in May '22.

Crucially, these increases will not be dependent on rest day working (overtime) and are based on a robust and sustainable roster. They are also in line with our consultation with industry partners and designed to make better use of the limited capacity on the West Coast Main Line as well as maximise connectivity in line with the introduction of our new fleet.

### **May 2023**

The next scheduled change to the timetable after December is May 2023. Our intention, subject to ongoing analysis of resource and having sufficient levels of passenger demand, is to step up the timetable further at this point and we will confirm this in due course.

All of the improvements above are subject to the effects of any industrial action.

### **Drivers**

We do have enough drivers to run our services. However, it takes 18 months to train a driver and training (which requires multiple people in a driving cab) had to be stopped during the pandemic due to social distancing rules. In addition, we have some drivers who were clinically extremely vulnerable and who couldn't work during the pandemic – they needed refresher training. We now have significant numbers of additional drivers coming into service following recruitment and training, and this will continue over the coming months; nearly 100 drivers will have entered formal service this year between April and December.

And we have more drivers on the books than the previous franchise – nearly 600 in total. This is a key part of our plan to build a robust timetable which isn't reliant on overtime.

## **Tickets**

As a result of making these timetable changes, we have had to update our ticketing systems. Whilst weekday tickets are available several weeks out, weekend tickets are currently only available a few days out. This is because most weekends over the coming months have engineering work which means they need a bespoke timetable specific to that work. In turn, this increases the workload on our timetable planners who are also redrawing the overall timetable, adding extra services and dealing with strike announcements. We are working hard on this situation and to make weekend tickets available as early as possible, together with the full range of fares.

## **We'll continue to make sure our customers stay updated**

The latest timetable, ticket information and travel advice are on our website, social media, and app. We'll also keep reviewing our messages to make sure they're as informative as possible and Transport Focus have agreed to help in this regard. We want our customers to book with confidence and be fully aware of their rights to compensation.

We face acute challenges, and we are not promising to fix this overnight. We know the current service isn't good enough and apologise once again. We are taking the steps needed to return to providing a frequent and welcoming service which is more reliable and dependable than ever before. We thank customers for their patience.