

# West Coast Partnership Annual Business Plan

Financial Year 2025

May 2024

WEST COAST  
PARTNERSHIP



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# 01 Introduction

The UK rail network connects people and places with opportunity, as well as bringing together families and friends, businesses and communities.

The West Coast Partnership is the backbone of the network – with Avanti West Coast running intercity trains on the West Coast Main Line and West Coast Partnership Development, as the HS2 Shadow Operator, designing and delivering high speed services for the future.

Avanti West Coast runs long-distance services that connect major cities and towns across England, Scotland and Wales. We provide around 1,700 services per week using a fleet which includes industry-leading trains. We employ over 3,500 colleagues across the network with eight traincrew depots. We operate 16 stations in England, as well as being the lead retailer at four Network Rail managed stations (Euston, Birmingham New Street, Manchester Piccadilly and Glasgow Central).



Our passion and priority are to give our customers the best possible experience when they choose to travel with us. We know the vital role our service plays in connecting the regions that we serve and we recognise that our performance in 2023/24, particularly on some days during the winter, was unacceptable for many customers. We're working hard to establish a more reliable and consistent service.

The commitments we've made here in our Annual Business Plan (ABP) are part of ongoing investment and improvements, which have helped us to make savings against our costs. However, both Avanti and West Coast Partnership Development face considerable challenges, as the economic climate continues to impact public funding and industrial action enters a third year. We're determined to find solutions to these challenges so we can continue to return money to the taxpayer and minimise the disruption of industrial action, as well as continuing to design the high-speed service of the future.

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The government's decision to award us a long-term contract recognises that we have made some of the improvements needed. We're delighted to have this opportunity to continue to focus on delivering the consistent service our customers deserve.



**Shamit Gaiger**  
Managing Director,  
West Coast Partnership Development



**Andy Mellors**  
Managing Director,  
Avanti West Coast



## 02

# Delivering our strategic priorities

This plan outlines how Avanti West Coast will deliver our strategic priorities over the next year. These are:

- To deliver the best possible customer experience
- To help grow regional economies and make a positive difference in communities
- To continue to grow a diverse and inclusive workforce

These are all underpinned by our commitment to being a sustainable business and a good corporate citizen, as outlined in "Our Responsible Plan".

Our ultimate goal is to deliver a **robust day-to-day train service operation** that consistently provides customers with **frequent and reliable services**. We're pleased to say that we are delivering significant and measurable improvements – with more trains, fewer cancellations and improved punctuality. We'll build on the changes we've already made to make our timetable even more robust and sustainable, introducing **more services where possible**.

We will continue to **work collaboratively with Network Rail** and other operators to plan for major events, reduce the impact of engineering work – especially in light of changing customer travel patterns – and respond better to, and recover from, disruption. We'll continue to **improve traincrew availability** in line with our long-term Driver Strategy and People Plan, all the while introducing more efficient train planning systems and new technology to support efficient rostering processes. All these measures are helping to ensure we have the right people, in the right place, at the right time, with the right skills.

## 03

## Improving our service and customer experience

We will explore opportunities to gradually reinstate and add services where possible and sustainable, to provide more services on our routes to Liverpool, North Wales and the Midlands.

We'll also continue to transform journeys with the **introduction of our new Evero Class 805 and Class 807 fleet**, which will deliver more modern, comfortable and greener services. We also plan to complete our award-winning **refurbishment of the Pendolino Class 390 fleet**, to give customers the best possible experience.

We will continue to focus on our customer proposition to attract people to rail, grow demand and revenue, and improve perceptions and our reputation. We're proud to be leading industry innovation and will promote our popular **low fare ticket options**, with more low Advance fares for our key routes, our unique 'Superfare' ticket and 'Family' products, and our three class propositions – all supported by our iconic 'Feel Good Travel' marketing. We'll keep using our data and

unique customer insight, working with the Rail Delivery Group and Great British Railways Transition Team, to explore opportunities for improvement, such as new customer initiatives, efficient ways of working and ticket simplification.

On top of these, we'll continue our work to meet our customers' priorities. We're delivering enhanced onboard connectivity, providing **better information** online, onboard and at stations in times of disruption, offering more benefits through our successful Club Avanti loyalty scheme and making it easier to buy great value tickets on our website, app and ticket machines. **Our onboard shops offer great food and drinks, with new coffee machines, and a new, more reliable, electronic payment system.** We'll keep working hard with our industry partners to make stations welcoming



We believe everyone should be able to travel independently on the railway.

spaces, with the clean, well-maintained facilities our customers expect. To reduce the taxpayer subsidy, we'll explore new ways to increase income from other sources, including better use of car parks, advertising and under-utilised spaces in stations.

And, to improve journeys all the way from A to B, we'll continue to work with other transport operators (including bike and car sharing schemes) to install interchange hubs local at stations and upgrade car parks.

We believe everyone should be able to travel independently on the railway and we are taking significant steps to make this a reality. Using customer insight

and consulting with our Accessibility Panels, we're working to make sure that, as far as possible, all parts of a journey with us are accessible. We've installed **new Changing Places toilets, digital wayfinding and Passenger Assist areas at all stations.** We're also providing enhanced training to our staff. And we'll continue to promote Travel Champion and Be My Eyes, to help disabled people access support enroute and so travel with confidence.

It's vital we raise awareness of the support available. So, as part of our investment in our stations we will be adding Passenger Assist at a minimum of six of them.

## 04

## Keeping communities and sustainability at our heart

"Our Responsible Plan" sets out how we will protect our planet, with people at its heart, doing what's right for our customers and improving life in our communities. We are determined to help grow regional economies and make a positive difference in the communities that we are proud to serve.

We'll collaborate with our partners, draw on customer insights and use a range of funds to invest in local developments that matter most to our communities and customers and deliver significant social value. This includes Customer & Communities Investment (CCI) funding for the development and implementation of **local as well as rail improvement schemes** which provide community benefits.

Through our **Feel Good Field Trips programme**, we'll give more schoolchildren from disadvantaged areas a cultural, educational and fun rail-based free day out they otherwise would not experience. We know that rail supports tourism and business travel, so we'll work with existing and new commercial partners,



destination organisations and event organisers to inspire more people to travel across our network for both business and leisure.

Furthermore, we're helping to provide skills training and work experience **courses for young people** in partnership with local organisations.

All our work continues to be underpinned by our commitment towards decarbonisation, and doing our bit for the planet. This includes our sustainability target: to be **net zero carbon by 2031**. To reach this goal, our

focus this year is to reduce energy use on both our trains and at stations, as well as reducing our water use. The introduction of a bi-mode and electric Evero fleet to replace diesel Voyagers will reduce carbon emissions by 68% and improve air quality in stations. We will also build on initiatives already launched to **increase recycling rates, reduce waste, noise and air pollution and support biodiversity across our network**. This will all help to provide a greener railway for our colleagues, customers and communities.

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We'll implement cost-efficient improvements to make the most of our award-winning refurbished Pendolinos and new state-of-the-art Evero fleet, to not only win customers back and attract new customers, but also keep them travelling by train. At the same time, we'll focus on **revenue protection measures**, collaborating with industry partners to combat fraud and ticketless travel, and to ensure fairness for customers and taxpayers. The implementation of our **Safeguarding Strategy** means we'll continue to liaise with the British Transport Police, Network Rail and other operators to ensure a consistently safe environment across the railway, supported by a security conscious culture. As part of this, we'll make continuous improvements to all areas of safeguarding to help our customers feel safer and more secure on our network, and we'll carry out surveys to track our progress. We're also enhancing cyber security to prevent attacks on business-critical systems.

# 05

## Working with our partners

We'll continue to **foster a 'One Railway' approach**, where we work with our partners to drive costs down and benefits up in the best interests of customers and taxpayers. We will support key agendas including levelling up, integrated transport and housing growth.

We'll continue to collaborate with Scottish and Welsh governments, GBR Transition Team, other Train Operating Companies, London and Continental Railways Ltd. (LCR), companies across our supply chain, regional and local authorities, Parliamentarians, third parties such as Trainline, and passenger and industry groups. We'll proactively provide transparency and accountability. Plus, to build confidence and trust, we'll use their insight and feedback to shape our decision making.

With Network Rail, we'll continue our efforts to ensure we work together for the benefit of our customers. This includes collaborating to protect safety and performance in the face of an aging railway. To minimise disruption to our customers, we'll target renewals where they are most needed and adapt to how Network Rail maintain and renew the network.



We will continue to collaborate with stakeholders right across the West Coast Main Line to identify and develop a pipeline of short, medium and long-term station investment plans. This entails producing a station-by-station development plan with Network Rail and LCR to look at opportunities for **housing and mixed-use developments around stations**.

We still face challenges, some of which are outside our direct control. Overall, passenger and revenue levels remain below pre-pandemic levels, with travel patterns continue to change (with more weekend leisure travel and less daily commuting and business travel). There are continuing financial challenges related to the government's ongoing industry subsidy, as well as inflation, utility prices and the cost of living.

In addition, there are industry challenges related to Network Rail's plans for the next five years, while policymakers face critical choices on industry reform and industrial action continues. We are working hard with our partners to find solutions, negotiate resolutions and innovate and adapt as best we can to stay on track and deliver for our customers and the taxpayer.

## 06

## Engaging with our people

We have been on a significant journey of recovery, change and growth, marking a pivotal period of transformation and progress.

The difficulties we faced during the last few years, including the pandemic, a tough financial climate and industrial disputes, have placed significant strain on our staff. We recognise the challenge ahead as we seek to improve internal engagement rates. And we understand and appreciate that colleagues need to feel that we are listening to them and addressing their needs.

We believe this makes this year an ideal time to invest in our people and shape a skilled and motivated workforce that delivers an excellent service to customers. To do this, we will provide a **wide range of training tools** and opportunities across the business to **help our people develop** our and equip them with the skills they need to perform. We're committed to growing a sustainable workforce for the future; as outlined in the Leadership, Management & Resource Plan.

Building on initiatives already in place, we will also attract and recruit further talent. We'll also use apprenticeships where appropriate to add value to development plans, including working with the **Prince's Trust 'Get Into Rail' Programme**.

We will nurture our top talent through a Leadership Framework. We'll use our new assessment centres to tailor skills development to individual needs and so enable managers to lead and engage effectively and inspire their teams with the exciting journey that lies ahead on the West Coast. To underpin this, we continue to work towards our targets to increase the representation of women and ethnically diverse colleagues and drive a more inclusive culture.

We're committed to growing a sustainable workforce for the future.





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Through integrated, low-carbon, high-speed journeys we'll bring people and communities closer together.

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## 07

### Continuing to design future train services

Through the West Coast Partnership Development (WCPD), we'll keep focused on **delivering integrated high-speed services that meet the needs of future customers** and offer the best travel experience in Britain – one that is easy, comfortable and convenient.

We're working closely with strategic partners such as Network Rail, High Speed Two Ltd. and the Department of Transport to understand the full implications of the changes to the HS2 route. We'll ensure that high-speed rail investment decisions maximise benefits for the customer and economic growth and set a benchmark for future high-speed rail in the UK.

With High Speed Two Ltd., we'll enhance ways of working so the organisations are closer than ever before and benefit continuously from each other's input. We'll also support industry efforts on the initial designwork of digital signalling (ETCS).

Above all, we'll continue working on the customer proposition, new fleet and timetable to deliver our vision of a service that sets new standards for customer experience in rail. Through integrated, low-carbon, high-speed journeys we'll bring people and communities closer together and continue to build rail that's becoming central to the country's economy. We'll continue to use our expertise, and draw on First Group and Trenitalia experience, to exceed expectations and bring new thinking focused on solutions.

## 08

## Our commitment

We want to grow rail and **deliver a better railway for the benefit of customers**, and we recognise that there is still work to be done. Our customers' needs will always be at the heart of everything we do.

We'll continue to strive towards delivering a travel experience that continually exceeds all of our customer expectations and meets our net-zero goals. We will collaborate with key partners and add social value to the communities we serve. We will create an inclusive culture that values colleagues and inspires them to be their best. We anticipate remaining a premium paying train company with a forecast year-on-year increase in premium to the Departments – our FY25 ABP is based on this. As an efficient operator, we will drive down costs where possible to deliver on our obligation to provide the taxpayer value for money. We will support delivery of reform to improve the outcomes for our customers, our people, our stakeholders and taxpayers as well as attract more people back to the railway. The National Rail Contract, and this plan, gives us the platform to grow rail on a sustained, long-term basis.



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