



Historic England

## Department for Transport

### Great Western Rail Franchise Public Consultation

#### Historic England Response

Historic England is the Government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England. We are a non-departmental public body established under the National Heritage Act 1983 and sponsored by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). We champion and protect England's historic places, providing expert advice to local planning authorities, developers, owners and communities, to help ensure our historic environment is properly understood, enjoyed and cared for.

Our railways are of major international importance: first developed in the United Kingdom, the concept was then exported worldwide. Their heritage is widely valued by the general public and they often act as important gateways to cities, towns and local areas, helping to create a strong sense of place. This historic significance is nationally recognised by many of the buildings and structures being afforded statutory protection by listing and scheduling, whilst many others are of local interest.

Historic England is involved in commenting on major development proposals and works to designated structures across the railway network, and providing strategic listing advice, particularly to those routes affected by electrification. We are in regular contact with Network Rail and are working with them on a number of projects and proposals.

The majority of the consultation questions lie beyond the scope of Historic England's remit and expertise, and our response therefore focusses on Questions 13 and 14.

#### Q. 13

**a) Which stations do you think should be a priority for improving accessibility?**

**b) Why?**

**c) What other improvements could help to make rail services easier to access and use for all passengers?**

#### Q. 14

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- a) Do you think these are the right priorities for stations in the new franchise?
- b) Which priorities would you change or add, any why?
- c) At which stations do you think co-ordination between transport modes could be improved?
- d) How do you believe these areas could be improved, e.g. through timetabling or through physical works at the location?
- e) What do you believe are examples of best practice elsewhere which could be relevant for stations on the Great Western franchise network?

Stations lie at the heart of local interaction with the railway, and are central to how the train operator engages with customers and communities. There are many examples where the successful upgrading and regeneration of railway stations has acted as the catalyst to enhancing the wider area, providing new and enhanced commercial opportunities, together with services which help to support and service the local community, including improved accessibility. Where this is based on a full and informed understanding of the heritage asset and its significance, the blend of the new and the old can be visually very powerful and enhance the passenger experience.

This can be seen at King's Cross and St. Pancras which exemplify our approach to 'Constructive Conservation', as illustrated in *Constructive Conservation Sustainable Growth for Historic Places* (<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/constructive-conservation/sustainable-growth-for-historic-places/>), and further examples can be found in the Railway Heritage Trust's Annual Report (<http://railwayheritagetrust.co.uk/annual-report-and-accounts/>). We have also prepared *Easy Access to Historic Buildings*, which provides advice on physical access issues with regard to historic buildings (<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/easy-access-to-historic-buildings/>).

The consultation document notes that 205 stations are directly managed and operated by the franchise holder with future priorities identified including station improvements, accessibility, bringing discussed station buildings back into community use and the development of 'master plans' for some stations. For those that are of historic significance early consultation with the relevant authorities (including Historic England and local authority conservation advisors) is the key to success and can avoid potential delays later in the process. Current experience has demonstrated the need for a joined-up approach by all parties to station/rail-related development proposals to avoid incremental change that erodes significance, informed by the use of management plans, where appropriate.

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The introduction of new tools such as Listed Building Heritage Partnership Agreements can also help in the management of listed stations where work is required on a regular basis, whilst our Enhanced Advisory Services can speed up projects and reduce possible risk. The value of the latter has been demonstrated by our work with Network Rail in advance of planned major upgrade works on the Dawlish coastal line.

As it is now part of government, Historic England wishes to see Network Rail and its franchise operators adhere to the *Protocol for the Care of the Government Historic Estate*, which has been developed by Historic England and government (<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/protocol-for-the-care-of-the-government-historic-estate/>). This sets out best practice for the management of heritage assets in public ownership and includes, amongst other things:

- to ensure the significance of any heritage asset is taken into account when planning change
- commission regular condition surveys
- implement a programme of repairs and maintenance
- ensure that the design quality of new work enhances the historic environment
- nominate a heritage office. Network Rail was exploring the possibility of such a position a number of years ago, but unfortunately this has yet to be taken forward

The need to adhere to the *Protocol* has been recognised by Highways England in its *Delivery Plan 2015 – 2020* (2015, para 6.1.7) and we urge the Department for Transport to adopt a similar approach by ensuring both the *Protocol*, and the need to meet its requirements, are specified in the invitation to tender and the new Great Western Rail Franchise.

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