

1,000 extra carriages promised

Rail commuters have been promised a seven-year plan to provide an extra 1,000 train carriages in an attempt to tackle overcrowding.

The commitment was made by Transport Secretary Douglas Alexander in a speech at a rail conference in London in March.

He said the new carriages were "an important first step" in tackling overcrowding on a network, providing more than one billion journeys a year.

Many of the new carriages are expected to go on crowded routes serving London and south-east England.

If they were all delivered in four-car sets it would mean there were 250 new trains.

Passenger Focus and the Association of Train Operating Companies welcomed the announcement.

The Government will pay for the new carriages and then lease them to the train companies at a cost of about £130million a year.

City relief

Crowded cities in the rest of England and Wales are expected to benefit.

Last year, there was a 10% rise in the number of people taking the train and overcrowding has become the greatest problem facing the railways.

Some train companies have warned that in future more passengers will have to stand more often.

An extra 1,000 carriages would make a lot of difference said ATOC director general George Muir but he warned that any extra capacity would quickly be used up.

"The railways are proving enormously successful. There's an enormous growth in passenger numbers and, if we don't put more carriages on, conditions are going to get even more intolerable than they are now.

"It's going to be a little bit neck and neck to keep the capacity and the growth alongside each other."

Work would need to be undertaken on existing platforms to cope with longer trains, he added.

Mr Alexander said: "We are now generating increased revenues from the larger number of people using Britain's railways.

"In the past we had to spend that money on some basic investment dealing with botched privatisation. Now we are able to turn that investment towards the kind of capacity improvements people have been looking for."

This summer the Government will "take a 30-year view" to examine the capacity challenges ahead, he added.

Shadow transport secretary Chris Grayling said he supported longer trains, but said they had been promised five years ago in the



NEW TRAINS FOR DRESDEN: These are the double-deck trains being built for commuters in Dresden, Germany. The 53 new coaches will cost £48million and be built by Bombardier at Gorlitz. The company has already supplied more than 300 similar coaches which have low-floor entry points to make boarding easier for passengers on the German rail network. About 1,400 Bombardier double-deck coaches are operating throughout Germany

Picture: Bombardier

Government's 10-year plan for transport. "The problem is nothing is going to happen for seven more years, at a time when overcrowding is already endemic," he said.

Liberal Democrat transport spokesman Alistair Carmichael said it would be better to allow Network Rail to own the trains and operate as a rolling stock leasing company.

Gerry Doherty, general secretary of the transport union TSSA, also supported a Network Rail leasing plan.

Outside London, the passenger transport authorities for six of Britain's largest city regions welcomed the new trains but called on the Government to ensure that Britain's booming city regions get their fair share of the investment.

"Rail use is growing fastest in the city regions outside London – and on many routes overcrowding is severe," said David Wood of the PTA special interest group.

"Transport investment has soared in London in the past five years and the capital needs and deserves a better public transport system. But if London's economy needs a modern rail network to support it then so do the next tier of Britain's major cities."

West Yorkshire Metro chairman Stanley King said: "I can assure you that Metro will be doing all it can to ensure that some of these carriages are earmarked for the MetroTrain network.

"Some of our plans for new stations rely upon the introduction of new rolling stock to make them viable and although we have recently introduced 12 extra carriages and hope to confirm soon that we have retained the eight 'threatened'

class 333 train cars for the Airedale and Wharfedale lines, we still need more capacity on our trains.

"The Department for Transport has recognised the incredible rise in rail passenger numbers in West Yorkshire, including the doubling of peak time journeys over the past 10 years."

Passenger Focus chief executive, Anthony Smith, said: "People are piling on to the railways and fares income is rising at over 10% each year. Last year passengers contributed around £5billion to the rail industry.

"It's good to see some of this money returned in the form of new trains. We hope this will pave the way for more passengers, more revenue and more investment in turn.

"What next? Write some cheques and get these carriages in to where they are desperately needed as soon as possible.

"In the meantime Government should push ahead with other improvements to the railway and we will watch with interest this summer's announcement regarding projects such as Thameslink and how much investment is put into track and signalling."

ONE Railway, which operates trains from London Liverpool Street said it would be bidding for some of the new trains.

The company also seems to be infected by the new upbeat approach from the DfT.

It is planning to fit Oyster card readers at all West Anglia stations this year and is taking preventative action to ensure that overhead line equipment and points are kept in tip-top working order to avoid delays and cancellations. It also

hopes to fit long-line information equipment at unstaffed Bethnal Green, Cambridge Heath and London Fields to give passengers accurate and up-to-date information when things do go wrong.

Railfuture meanwhile will be renewing its demands for Lea Bridge station to be reopened, so it can serve both the Olympics and local residents. With more ONE trains from the Lea Valley going into Stratford, this would seem an obvious development.

But on the Thameslink route Andrew Long of Bedford Commuters is more circumspect.

He asked: "Will any of the new build of 1,000 carriages actually come to Thameslink?"

"It would be nice to think that at least some of this build could be the 'prototypes' for the Thameslink expansion programme (formerly Thameslink 2000) in both 'outer' and 'inner' variants.

"Some type-testing is essential as well as proving in traffic, to see that they are fit for purpose.

"Suburban-type trains are hardly suitable for the distances to Bedford, Peterborough or King's Lynn."

Andrew is worried that Transport for London will have more influence on new train types than train operator First Capital Connect.

He is also concerned whether enough trains have been ordered.

He fears too many trains will have high-density seating and wider door vestibules.

This will accommodate more standing passengers but is not passenger friendly for anyone, least of all longer distance travellers.