

APPLICATION TO THE OFFICE OF RAIL AND ROAD FOR A PASSENGER TRACK ACCESS CONTRACT, OR AN AMENDMENT TO AN EXISTING CONTRACT

ORR ensures that train operating companies have fair access to the rail network and that best use is made of capacity. If a train operator wants to access the national railway network, it will need a track access agreement with Network Rail which requires ORR's approval under the Railways Act 1993. When determining access to the network, we must have regard to our [statutory duties](#), most of which are set out in section 4 of the Act. We must exercise our functions (which include the approval of access contracts) in a way that we consider best achieves those duties.

Use this form to apply to the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) for a passenger track access contract, or an amendment to an existing contract by a supplemental agreement, under sections 17-22A or the Railways Act 1993.

It sets out ORR's standard information requirements for considering applications. Our [track access guidance](#) (and our [making an application](#) guidance in particular) explains the process, timescales and the issues we will consider. Please read the guidance before completing the contract and this form.

If the facility owner and beneficiary have agreed terms, the facility owner should fill in the form. If not, the beneficiary should fill in the form.

A pre-application industry consultation is usually required before submitting an application. Please see the industry [code of practice for track access application consultations](#) for more information.

This form should be completed up to section 10 and sent to consultees along with a copy of the proposed contract or supplemental agreement. Sections 10 and 11 should be filled in after the consultation and before applying to ORR.

We are happy to talk to you informally before you apply. Please contact us [here](#). You can download a copy of this form, and of our model track access contract, from our [website](#). Please ensure that you are using the latest version of this form as published on our website. We may ask for applications which have not used the latest version to be resubmitted.

You may also use and adapt this form if necessary to apply to use railway facilities other than those of Network Rail. Do not use this form for HS1, for which a separate form is available on our [website](#).

1. Application Summary

1.1 Beneficiary company name:

Grand Central Railway Company (GC)

1.2 Facility owner details:

Network Rail:	☒				
Region:	Southern ☒	Eastern ☒	North West & Central ☐	Wales & Western ☐	Scotland's Railway ☐
Other Facility Owner:	☐		Please state:		

1.3 Application under the Railways Act 1993 section:

17	☒	18	☐	22	☐	22A	☐
				Supplemental Number:		New Contract	
				Current contract date:			
				Current contract expiry date:			

1.4 Applicant status:

Public Service Operator ☐	Public service contract start date:	
	Public service contract end date:	
	Name of funder (e.g. DfT, Local Authority):	
	Does the funder support this application?	Yes ☐ No ☐
Open Access ☒		
Charter Operator ☐		

1.5 Executive summary of the proposed contract or amendment:

Grand Central (GC) is seeking new access rights by way of a new Track Access Contract with Network Rail (NR), to operate up to 6 return services per day between Newcastle and Brighton via London Gatwick. GC is seeking a 7-year contract and will operate the services using Class 180 or Class 22x rolling stock.

Services are planned to commence at Dec-26 PCD calling at Newcastle and Brighton, with intermediate station calls at Durham, Darlington, Northallerton, York, Doncaster, Sheffield, Derby, Burton-on-Trent, Birmingham New Street, Warwick Parkway, Banbury, Oxford, Reading, Wokingham, Guildford, Redhill, Gatwick Airport and Haywards Heath.

Introduction of these services will allow for new direct rail connectivity between the South Coast, in particular London Gatwick and the Midlands and Northeast of England. This will remove the need for passengers to transit through London, offering a transformational benefit to passengers travelling between these regions. The services will also allow for a greater variety of environmentally friendly options for travel to Gatwick Airport. Where the proposed GC service runs in parallel with existing CrossCountry services, new station stops add to the passenger offering, providing new connectivity and to bring passengers the benefits of excellent customer service and value for money associated with existing GC services.

Proposed commencement date:	Principal Change Date (PCD) December 2026
End date:	PCD December 2033
Date approval or directions wanted by:	30/11/2025

1.6 Industry consultation:

Who carried out the consultation?	Network Rail – due to commence		
Consultation start date:	28/04/2025	Consultation end date:	28/05/2025
Not carried out ☐			

1.7 Applicant details

Facility Owner Company: Network Rail Contact name: Gianmaria Cutrupi Job title: Aspirant Open Access Operators Manager Address: Floor 4B George Stephenson House, Toft Green, York, YO1 6JT Phone: 07730 355911 E-mail: gianmaria.cutrupi@networkrail.co.uk	Beneficiary Company: Grand Central (Arriva) Contact name: Craig Nicolson Job title: Head of Business Growth Address: Suite 2A, 20 George Hudson Street, York YO1 6WR Phone: 07583 059938 E-mail: nicolsonc@arriva.co.uk
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1.7 Date of application to ORR:

25/04/2025

1.8 Checklist of documents attached to the application form:

- Proposed new contract (S17 or S18) or supplemental agreement (S22 or S22A) ☒
- Marked up Schedule 5 (where applicable) ☐
- Marked up comparison to model contract (where applicable) ☒
- All consultation correspondence ☐
- Supporting documentation required for competing services (see section 6.2) ☐
- Other supporting documents, side letters or collateral agreements (please list):

Draft SX timetable information provided.

2. Licence and railway safety certificate

2.1 Please state whether:

- you intend to operate the services yourself; or ☒
- have them operated on your behalf. ☐
 - if so, please name the proposed operating company:

2.2 Does the proposed operator of the services:

- (a) hold a valid train operating licence under section 8 of the Railways Act 1993 or an exemption under section 7, **and** ☒
- (b) hold a valid safety certificate under the Railways and Other Guided Transport Systems (Safety) Regulations 2006. ☒

If the answer to (a) **or** (b) is no, please state the point reached in obtaining a licence, exemption and/or safety certificate.

N/A

3. The proposed contract or amendment

3.1 Application overview: Please detail the proposed contract or amendment. This should cover the services, the commercial terms, and the reasons for making the application in the terms proposed. This information should be laid out clearly and concisely, and fully highlight the changes from the previous version of the contract (in the case of an amendment).

Overview and Rationale

Through this application, GC is seeking to provide more direct rail connectivity to areas which we consider underserved, and provide passengers with an additional option for environmentally friendly transport to London Gatwick Airport from the Midlands and North East of England, when compared to driving, or coach travel.

The new services will bring the benefits of competition, as experienced on the East Coast Mainline (ECML), to the cross-country route, which between the ECML and South East of England has no competition to the fare setter, other than premium fares via London.

This application will support the continued expansion of GC to the benefit of passengers, in particular introducing direct rail connectivity between the South Coast and the Northeast of England, where GC has a long track record of supporting underserved communities, while also growing overall revenue and patronage on rail services. In addition, this new proposed route will also directly connect England's second most populous city, Birmingham and surrounding areas to the second busiest airport in the UK, which in 2024 served 43.2 million passengers, and whose stated goal is to serve 75 million passengers annually by the late 2030s.

GC has already had discussions with London Gatwick, who welcome this application and are excited about the opportunities it creates for more direct connectivity to the airport. It also re-connects Birmingham with the largest British conurbation without a current direct rail service, in Brighton and Hove.

This application is made considering the future implementation of the East Coast Mainline (ECML) Event Steering Group (ESG) timetable, scheduled for implementation in December 2025.

These new direct GC services provide rail journey times between the Southeast and Birmingham/Oxford, which compete favourably with the fastest current rail journey times (e.g. Gatwick Airport – Birmingham GC 3h 00, compared to 2h 40), which involve at least one interchange, usually including a change between London termini. Direct journey times are also comparable with average road journey times (c3h 00 for Gatwick Airport – Birmingham by car, and 4h 00 by coach), without the added uncertainty from the use of the congested M25. This is particularly true of poorly served stations for these routes, such as Guildford (Guildford – Birmingham GC 2h 14, against current rail 2h 30 via Reading, or 2h 45 by car).

On longer journeys from the Southeast to the Northeast, the GC proposed direct journey times also compare favourably with car and coach journey times, although they are slower than the premium-priced services requiring a cross-London interchange. For example, beyond Derby, coach services



to Gatwick Airport require an interchange, which means the current cost-effective solution takes, for example, from York 8 hours by coach and 5 hours by car, compared to the direct proposed 5 hours by GC.

Access Rights Sought

Under this application, GC is seeking firm access rights under a new Track Access Agreement for up to six (6) return trains per day, 7 days per week, in each direction between Newcastle and Brighton, calling at Durham, Darlington, Northallerton, York, Doncaster, Sheffield, Derby, Burton-on-Trent, Birmingham New Street, Warwick Parkway, Banbury, Oxford, Reading, Wokingham, Guildford, Redhill, Gatwick Airport, Haywards Heath and Brighton.

This application is provided with a draft SX timetable.

3.2 Safety risks: Please explain any important safety risks that have been identified arising from the proposal and how these will be controlled (by reference to the facility owner's safety authorisation and the train operator's safety certificate).

GC has not identified any safety risks outside those encountered via the normal operation of the railway and managed appropriately via GC's safety management system.

3.3 Contract duration: For new agreements or extensions to existing agreements, please provide justification for the proposed duration and, if more than 5 years, with reference to the [Railways \(Access, Management and Licensing\) Regulations 2016](#).

GC is seeking firm access rights for 7 years, to be introduced from PCD December 2026. GC will seek to start the services using Class 180, or Class 22X rolling stock, depending on availability, noting Class 22X rolling stock is referenced in a significant number of open applications. GC currently operate both Class 180 and Class 221 rolling stock for its existing services. This experience will be a huge benefit when establishing these new services promptly.

GC has recently ordered new-build class 80X rolling stock, which will be at least bi-mode, bringing signification further decarbonisation of our services. We would like to do the same with this new route, but note from discussions with Network Rail, and information publicly available that introducing new electric traction services on the ECML could result in an increased performance risk. Therefore, we will begin operation using 100% diesel traction and seek to work with Network Rail to introduce new-build rolling stock, which will be at least bi-mode. To introduce this new build rolling stock, GC would seek an extension to its rights within this term to allow this order to be placed. This is consistent with Arriva's goal of supporting rail in becoming the undoubted leading, environmentally friendly transport mode.

3.4 Terms not agreed with the facility owner (for applications under sections 17 or 22A only): Please explain any areas of the application which have not been agreed, the reasons for the failure to agree and the reasons for seeking these provisions.

This application is made under Section 17 of the Railways Act 1993.

GC has commenced discussions with Network Rail before making this submission and will continue to work collaboratively with Network Rail to confirm our analysis, which demonstrates that capacity exists to operate these services in addition to those services already operating along, and interacting with, the proposed route.

3.5 Bespoke provisions (departures from ORR's model access contracts)

Does the proposed contract include any departures from ORR's model access contract:

Yes

☐

No

☒

If yes, please set out and explain any:

- areas where the drafting of the application changes ORR's published template access contracts (as appropriate, cross-referencing to the answers below). Please also explain why these departures have been made.

N/A

- instances where the proposal departs from the charging and/or performance regimes established by ORR's latest periodic review (or subsequent interim reviews) as reflected in ORR's model access contracts, including the financial implications (e.g. establishment of an access charge supplement or rebate).

N/A

- new processes (e.g. a self-modification provision) which have been added. Please also demonstrate fully how this new process is robust and complete.

N/A

3.6 Consolidated contract

For amendments to existing contracts, is the version of the consolidated contract on our [website](#) fully up to date? If not, please explain why not.

We have provided a marked-up copy of the model contract for passenger operators (open access) to operate the services within this application. We have used the latest version available on the ORR website as a starting point.

4. The impacts of the proposal

4.1 Benefits: please set out what specific benefits the proposal will achieve. Please describe the benefits to passengers and any impact on other operators, including freight operators.

Once introduced, these services will bring the benefits of competition to cross-country routes, introducing better value for money and driving up standards in terms of customer service and onboard quality, as has been seen on long-distance routes where open access competition exists.

GC will introduce a series of dedicated products, providing much needed fare competition with the additional services driving growth in the overall rail market.

The services will also provide much needed additional capacity on the Newcastle to Reading corridor, where service levels have not, and are not proposed to, return to pre-pandemic levels.

The services will also provide additional direct connectivity with Gatwick Airport, which in 2024 served 43.2 million passengers, and whose stated goal is to serve 75 million passengers annually by the late 2030s.

4.2 Capacity: How have you satisfied yourself that there is enough network capacity for the services in the proposal? Please include details on all relevant capacity considerations, including but not limited to track, platform availability, and power supply traction.

GC has undertaken significant timetable development work and will work with NR to demonstrate that capacity exists. Whilst we understand there is still ongoing work in relation to the December 2025, ECML ESG timetable, we believe that the services can be accommodated.

At this stage, GC is proposing to operate the services with diesel traction only and therefore does not anticipate NR to raise any power supply issues. GC will continue to engage with NR on the potential for utilising additional tri-mode rolling stock on this route, as the power supply upgrade works progress and NR can provide more certainty over the available capacity.

In 2023, the existing CrossCountry franchise reduced access rights between Newcastle and Reading to align with services which were operating at the time following the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst there is an intent to increase service levels as part of the May 2025 and December 2025 timetables (as part of the ORR's competing application process), it does not appear to be proposed that service levels will return to pre-Covid levels. GC is therefore proposing to invest in complementing the existing and proposed service offering between Newcastle and Reading, but with beneficial connections to Gatwick Airport and Brighton, returning service levels to pre-pandemic levels.

4.3 Performance: What is the impact on network performance? Please outline your assurance process that shows that any performance risk is tolerable in comparison to the benefits of the application. Please explain any risk mitigations. Please attach any associated evidence to support your case.

GC will continue to work with NR in order to demonstrate that the benefits of the new services will outweigh any anticipated performance impacts.

4.4 Maintenance and renewals: Are there any implications for the facility owner's maintenance and renewal activities?

There is no impact on the maintenance and renewals activity.

5. The expression of access rights

5.1 Changes to rights: please provide full descriptions of any new rights required, as compared to the previous contract (in the case of an amendment). Please attach a fully marked-up version or document comparison of any tables in Schedule 5 which are being modified as a result of this application.

This application is submitted as a new application and is therefore based on the ORR's Track Access Model Contract – Open Access.

The access rights sought are set out in Schedule 5 and reflect the following:

Route	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday
Newcastle – Brighton	4	4	4
Brighton – Newcastle	4	4	4
Birmingham New Street – Brighton	1	1	1
Brighton – Birmingham New Street	1	1	1
Newcastle – Birmingham New Street	1	1	1
Birmingham New Street – Newcastle	1	1	1

Services will have the following calling pattern or part thereof:

Newcastle, Durham, Darlington, Northallerton, York, Doncaster, Sheffield, Derby, Burton-on-Trent, Birmingham New Street, Warwick Parkway, Banbury, Oxford, Reading, Wokingham, Guildford, Redhill, Gatwick Airport, Haywards Heath and Brighton.

5.2 Flexing rights: Please explain any limitations on the facility owner's flexing rights in the proposal and the rationale for such limitations.

GC is not proposing any changes to Network Rail's flexing rights and access rights are sought on a quantum only basis.

5.3 Specified equipment: Please explain any changes to specified equipment (rolling stock). Has the vehicle and route acceptance procedure in the Network Code (Part F) has been completed? Please explain whether you have, or will have, the rolling stock necessary to exercise the rights.

GC will operate the services utilising Class 180 or Class 22X rolling stock. Class 22X rolling stock is referenced in a significant number of open applications and therefore we continue to evaluate multiple opportunities. GC currently operate both Class 180 and Class 221 rolling stock for our existing services. This experience will be a huge benefit when establishing these new services promptly.

5.4 Contractual obligations: Are the proposed services necessary to fulfil obligations under a public service contract? For publicly contracted operators seeking additional access rights, we will expect to see evidence of funder support for the specific rights and of operators' intent and ability to operate the new services.

Not applicable. GC is an open access operator.

5.5 Public funding: Other than the DfT, Welsh Government or Transport Scotland, are the proposed services subject to financial support from central or local government including PTEs. If so, please give details.

No

5.6 Long Term Planning Process: Is the Long Term Planning Process (or similar devolved authority or regional service delivery project) relevant to this application? If so, please explain how the proposed rights are consistent or inconsistent with this.

GC continues to work with NR as part of the ECML ESG timetable process. Whilst these services have not been considered as part of the ECML ESG implementation and ORR's competing track access process, GC has evaluated its paths against the proposed timetable for December 2025.

6. Competing passenger services:

We would expect to apply the 'not primarily abstractive' test to:

- (i) a new open access service which would compete with franchised services and so impact on the public sector funder's budget;
- (ii) a new franchised service which would compete with an existing franchised service, where we would expect to focus the test on areas where the competing franchised services are operated on behalf of different funders or where for some other reason there are particular concerns over the impact on a funder's budget; and
- (iii) a new service, which might be open access or franchised, which would compete with an existing open access service and which, if it caused the existing open access operator to withdraw from the market, could reduce overall competition on the network.

6.1 Please state if your application is for a competing passenger service, and if so please describe the nature of the competition:

These proposed services will introduce new open access competition on a cross-country route.

The services will provide direct service and price competition to:

- CrossCountry services between Newcastle and Reading, where there is no price competition to the fare setter, other than premium fares via London.
- Also, LNER and TPE services on the ECML between Newcastle and Doncaster / York.
- Great Western North Downs line stopping services between Reading and Gatwick Airport

In addition to introducing new competition on these routes, GC will introduce new direct services between:

- Northallerton, Burton-on-Trent, and Warwick Parkway and stations on the CrossCountry network and south of Reading, creating new cross-country journey opportunities from stations which currently focus on other routes, respectively:
 - London and Trans Pennine
 - Beyond Birmingham to the Southwest
 - To London and Birmingham
- Stations on the CrossCountry network, including Birmingham New Street, to stations south of Reading, on the SW suburban network and the Brighton Mainline, including new links to the Midlands and beyond from Gatwick Airport.

GC notes that these services will be subject to the payment of the Infrastructure Cost Charge between Brighton and Birmingham and is confident that its services will pass the Not Primarily Abstractive (NPA) test. Details of this analysis will be provided to ORR under separate cover alongside details of its business case.

6.2 For competing services, please also confirm that you have attached as part of your submission to ORR the following:

- Business plan, including details of:



- forecasts of passenger traffic and revenues, including forecast methodology;
 - pricing strategies;
 - ticketing arrangements;
 - rolling stock specifications (e.g. load factor, number of seats, wagon configuration);
 - marketing strategy;
 - estimated elasticities of the services (e.g. price elasticity, elasticity with respect to quality characteristics of the services).
- Demand forecasting (including associated spreadsheet models) demonstrating modelled generation : abstraction ratio. ☐
 - Indicative timetables, including associated .spg files ☐

7. Incentives

7.1 Train operator performance: please describe any planned performance improvement initiatives and/or enhancement projects associated with the operation of the proposed services aimed at improving operator performance.

GC will undertake full performance modelling in due course, aligning the output of this modelling with Network Rail where possible. This will be made available to ORR as appropriate in support of this application.

GC will call upon its extensive experience as an open-access operator, in particular, currently utilising two of the proposed rolling stock classes that could be used. GC currently operates on a section of the north end of this route. Where possible GC will seek to make improvements to the passenger environment of the rolling stock proposed, ensuring that any performance-related mods identified will be made to the rolling stock, as appropriate.

7.2 Facility owner performance: please describe any planned performance improvement initiatives and/or enhancement projects associated with the operation of the proposed services aimed at improving the facility owner's performance.

Not applicable.

7.3 Monitoring of services: Will all proposed services be monitored for performance throughout their journey? If not, please explain.

Building on the organisational infrastructure already in place at GC as an established open access operator, performance will be monitored as we currently do, meaning there will be no learning curve of a new operator in this area.

7.4 Performance regime changes (for applications under sections 17 or 22A only): where applicable, please provide justification for any changes to Schedule 8 of the track access contract in the proposal. If necessary, please provide any relevant information in support of the changes proposed.

Not applicable.

8. Enhancement

8.1 Enhancement details: where the proposal provides for the delivery of any network enhancements, or the services in the proposal are subject to any planned network enhancements, please give full

details of the relevant enhancement schemes, including a summary of outputs from the scheme, timescales and the extent to which the network change procedure in the Network Code (Part G) has been completed (where appropriate, by reference to submissions made under ORR's enhancement reporting framework).

The proposal does not require any enhancements.

8.2 Enhancement charges: please confirm that the arrangements for the funding of any network enhancements are consistent with the [investment framework](#), and summarise the level and duration of payments, and the assumed rate of return.

Not applicable.

9. Other

9.1 Associated applications to ORR: please state whether this application is being made in parallel with, or relates to, any other current or forthcoming application to ORR (e.g. in respect of track, station or light maintenance depot access contracts). Where the application is being made in parallel with any other application from the same operator, please ensure the applications are consistent with one another. Where the application relies on another operator relinquishing access rights, please provide evidence that this process has been completed.

While GC currently has open applications with the ORR for expansion of our current services, this new service is separate, with no interdependencies between them.

9.2 Side letters and collateral agreements: please confirm here that the whole of the proposal between the parties has been submitted with this application and that there are no side letters or other documents which affect it.

The whole proposal has been submitted.

9.3 Confidential redactions: please list any information that you have redacted from any documentation sent to consultees. If there has been no pre-application consultation, please list any information you want us to exclude from publication. Please provide full reasons for any redactions.

No redactions have been made to the information provided.

10. Pre-application consultation

10.1 The consultation:

If consultation has not been carried out, explain why not. If it has, please list the consultees.

Consultation is due to commence, led by Network Rail. We anticipate from our discussions with Network Rail that this application will be issued for consultation w/c 28/04.

Outputs from the consultation will follow once complete.

Who conducted the consultation?

List all consultees who responded and include their responses and any associated documentation or correspondence between the parties.

10.2 Resolved issues: please explain any issues raised by consultees which have been resolved.

10.3 Unresolved issues: Please explain any issues raised by consultees which have ***not*** been satisfactorily resolved and why you think these issues should not stop ORR approving the application.

10.4 Subsequent Changes: Have any changes been made to the proposal following consultation?

11. Certification

Warning: Under section 146 of the Railways Act 1993, any person who, in giving any information or making any application under or for the purposes of any provision of the Railways Act 1993, makes any statement which he knows to be false in a material particular, or recklessly makes any statement which is false in a material particular, is guilty of an offence and so liable to criminal prosecution.

For agreed applications under section 18 or 22, Network Rail should complete the information below. For disputed applications under section 17 or 22A, the beneficiary should complete it.

I certify that the information provided in this form is true and complete to the best of my knowledge

Signed 

Date 25/04/2025

Name (in caps) Craig Nicolson

Job title Head of Business Growth

For (company) Grand Central Railway Company LTD

12. Submission

12.1 What to send: please supply the application form, the proposed contract or amendment and, where possible, any other supporting information, in electronic form by e-mail, **in plain Microsoft Word or Open Document Text format** (i.e. excluding any macros, auto-para or page numbering, or other auto-formatting).

12.2 Where to send it:

Email: track.access@orr.gov.uk