



# Yeowart... challenging the old guard

Ian Yeowart, for so long the driving force behind open access operator Grand Central, has ambitious plans for a network of open access train services.  
**STEVE BROADBENT reports**

Search the web for the phrase "persistence is the key to success" and you will find more than a million hits. The phrase is a key maxim in business, so the books and experts say, and one which certainly applies to Ian Yeowart, the long-time managing director of open access trailblazer Grand Central. Yeowart steered Grand Central to its highly controversial and oft-delayed success in securing three return daily journeys between London King's Cross and Sunderland. In expanding this to four, and then adding the service to Bradford Interchange due to start next spring, it might have been expected that Yeowart would seek to continue the company's

One of the destinations for Great North Eastern Railways is Hull. On March 5, an open access Hull Trains Class 180 leaves Paragon station for London. JOHN HUNT.

applications for services to other destinations. So it came as a surprise when in May he left the company "involuntarily". It was fired. At such a time, and under such circumstances, some would have turned their backs on the industry and gone elsewhere. Not Yeowart. In September, and under the name of his new (and totally independent) company, Alliance Rail Holdings, he applied for a network of open access services, planned to start at the end of 2013. The nature of this application is a first for Britain's privatised railway in several respects.

And it could, Yeowart thinks, herald a new way of doing things; a new way of bringing high-class services, and the benefits of proper competition, to inter-city routes. Yeowart's plans are largely based on the unusual scope and specific timing of the two Track Access Applications (TAA), lodged with the Office of Rail Regulation on September 22 2009 under Section 17 of the Railways Act 1993. Most TAAs are made under Section 22, which is the part of the Act which deals with amendments to existing track access

agreements, whether agreed by Network Rail or not. That is because most TAAs are submitted by existing train operators, usually franchised ones but it can be open access or even freight, to allow them to vary their services. Thus Chiltern Railways' recent application for a large-scale change to its service pattern, including the new route from Marylebone to Oxford, under its Evergreen 3 project, was a Section 22 application. Alliance's applications, however, were for Track Access Options (TAO), not firm rights to operate specific trains, and are long-dated. Most applications seek for a change to come into effect at the next available timetable change date (usually December, but it can be May), but Alliance is not looking to start services for another four years. This is to give the industry plenty of time to respond and discuss, and Alliance time to properly plan and procure.



**The Alliance train plan**  
Alliance plans to order a fleet of 23 six-car, hybrid, 125mph Chinese-built 'Polaris' trains through CSRE. The trains will have tilting capability and a power unit in the front and rear vehicles, as against distributed power. This gives a better travelling environment and allows the power unit to be changed should new technologies develop. The emphasis will be on comfort, with units even having separate male and female toilets. The four or five units for the Hull-Liverpool service will be 100mph 'Pacemaker' diesels, but electrification of sections of this route could enable the use of 'Polaris' DEMU trains, to give a common fleet. Yeowart hopes to work closely with the Northern franchise to help revitalise the Calder Valley route. The trains will need to be certificated to UK standards. The initial plan is for qualified UK engineers to work in China to ensure the design conforms to UK requirements, so that the trains, arriving in the UK after testing in China, will need very little work before they can be accepted into service. This could lead to a factory to serve the European market being established in the UK, although other train builders will also doubtless be keen for the order.



An artist's impression of the Chinese hybrid trains Alliance Rail plans to use on its open access operations between London and the north. CSRE.

Other open access operators have struggled to find suitable stock for their services, and those that have gone (often without choice) down the route of initially using second-hand trains have suffered from unreliability or passenger environment issues. Alliance has therefore decided to start operations with brand new trains, to be acquired through a Grand Central sister-company CSRE, Chinese Sourced Railway Equipment (it should be stressed that otherwise Alliance has no connection with Sula, Grand Central and CSRE's ultimate owner).

As 125mph trains are needed for services on both the East and West Coast Main Lines, and as no suitable trains are currently available in the UK, brand new trains are required anyway. So Alliance sees its applications as not undermining anyone else's aspirations - other companies can apply for the same routes and pursue them as they wish, but they would need to order new trains, which takes time and money.

**Customers are king**  
A cornerstone of Alliance's philosophy is that customer service will be the best in the industry. It is possible that staff will be recruited for their attitude to this crucial aspect of any business, rather than being existing rail staff, and then sent on specific training courses before operations start.

Before such an investment can be made, Alliance needs to know it has the TAO in place, so it can go to its funders and say: "We have the contract that allows us to provide this pattern of services, can you now please finance this number of trains?" Alliance has applied for TAAs because it wants the Office of Rail Regulation to agree it may operate so many trains a day (the quantum) on set routes from a particular date, but not the exact timetable, which will be

“ The core idea is to bring a number of towns into the inter-city rail map, particularly providing them with daily services to London. ”

**Proposed services - GNER**

**Four trains a day to:**

King's Cross	King's Cross
Retford	Doncaster
Worksop	Thorne South Parkway
Sheffield	Scunthorpe
Meadowhall	Habrough
Barnsley	Grimsby Town
Penistone	Cleethorpes
Huddersfield	

A two-hourly service is proposed between Hull and Liverpool, which will run in the opposite hour to the proposed GNWR London Euston-Bradford Interchange service to give a fast hourly frequency between Bradford and Manchester Victoria.

Hull
Brough
Howden
Selby
Leeds
Bradford
Halifax
Hebden Bridge
Rochdale
Manchester Victoria
Eccles Parkway
Newton le Willows Parkway
St Helens
Liverpool Lime Street

→ negotiated later. In the application, the stopping patterns on the East and West Coast services have been selected to generate new rail journeys, offer least competition to existing services, to serve park-and-ride 'Parkway' stations, and to give good journey times between the north of England and London.

Consultations will start at a later date (the ORR will seek the views of all interested parties - the railway industry, local authorities, and other train operators) and should take six to months. The ORR will examine the responses, and there will be an interactive process to clarify views and seek a way ahead. Yeowart hopes the TAO will be agreed around the end of 2010 or early in 2011, giving Alliance almost three years to order and take delivery of its trains, and put in place all the necessary procedures before the first train can carry passengers.

The core idea of Yeowart's plan is to bring a number of towns into the inter-city rail map, particularly providing them with daily services to London. More and more local and regional authorities are realising that such links are key to prosperity in the modern world - in this regard, Yeowart sees Alliance's plans as a prime example of private investment adding to the wealth of UK plc.

With the new company formed, the search was on for brand names. "Yeowart Trains" or "Alliance Rail", while fine, have absolutely no cachet - what was wanted was something that would highlight the new brand. Established railway names such as LMS or LNER were clearly not available, but Yeowart soon found that 'Great North Western Railways' (GNWR) was, and Alliance registered it with

**Background**

**Ian Yeowart**



Ian Yeowart joined British Rail in 1973 as a clerk at Toton depot, rising to become area retail manager and then company safety manager for Regional Railways North East. In 1994/95 he was involved with bids for two early franchises, Midland Mainline and Regional Railways North East.

He then turned to consultancy and founded Grand Central in 1998. He was managing director until May 2008, and left the company when he was sacked in May 2009.

Companies' House. Then, to his surprise and delight, the former Sea Containers' subsidiary's name 'Great North Eastern Railways' (GNER) was found to have been relinquished, so Alliance snapped that up, too. Two great brand names to set the tone, for Yeowart's aim is to provide the very highest standards of customer service, "beating even the best that GNER offered under Christopher Garnett".

Discussions were then opened with the ORR, to decide the best way forward for such a mould-breaking and unusual application. The Section 17 process seeking TAOs was decided upon, and the application drawn up and submitted.

Normally, such applications are displayed on the ORR's web site (or Network Rail's), so that interested parties can see what is proposed and respond as they wish - this is usually the first that is publicly known of an operator's desire to vary a service or start a new one.

But Yeowart, unusually for the rail industry, →

**Proposed services - GNWR**

**Alternate hourly trains calling at:**

Euston	Euston
Kings Langley Parkway	Kings Langley Parkway
Nuneaton	Nuneaton
Tamworth	Tamworth
Crewe	Crewe
Alderley Edge	Winsford Parkway
Stockport	Newton-le-Willows Parkway
Guide Bridge Parkway	Eccles Parkway
Huddersfield	Manchester Victoria
Dewsbury	Rochdale
Leeds	Hebden Bridge
Halifax	Bradford Interchange

**Up to four services daily:**

Euston
Kings Langley Parkway
Nuneaton
Tamworth
Crewe
Winsford Parkway
Preston
Lancaster
Carnforth
Barrow
Whitehaven
Workington
Maryport
Wigton
Carlisle

A TransPennine Express Class 185 passes a Northern Rail Class 144 at Huddersfield, while to the left another '185' awaits departure on February 26 2007. Trains could run from here to London via the Penistone Line. JOHN HUNT.



A Grand Central High Speed Train leaves York on February 26. Yeowart was instrumental in GC winning the right to operate its Sunderland-London, but left the company earlier this year (RAIL 621). CARL CHAMBERS.

**Proposed services**

The services being proposed (see table) may be subject to change over the coming two to three years. The list represents phases 1 and 2 of Alliance's plans; phase 3 is already being developed behind closed doors.

An example of how things might change is the proposed service from London King's Cross to the Penistone line. This has been warmly welcomed in that part of the world, now freed from the shackles of the tram train-trial and keen for the line's potential to be developed.

But practical difficulties remain. The current infrastructure between Penistone

and Huddersfield has little ability to carry extra services, and at Huddersfield platform space is at a premium. The planned 'Platform 9' is a possible solution to the capacity problems, but maybe the Alliance trains will have to run through Huddersfield to some other station where they can lay over and turn round.

Similarly, the ECML is known to be full in places. But by 2014 improvements to the 'Joint' line between Peterborough and Doncaster via Spalding, the Hitchin flyover and the new platform at King's Cross, will all help add capacity for new services, and a further hourly clock-face path should emerge.

**Proposed parkway stations**

A keystone of Alliance's application is the development of parkway stations, where the company is set to make significant investment averaging £2 million per station.

The application lists stations at Thorne South (close to the M18), Guide Bridge (M60), Eccles (M602 and Manchester Metrolink), Newton-le-Willows (M6/M62), and Winsford (A556), but the key one is probably King's Langley, which is almost directly underneath the M25 close to Junction 20.

While, for example, a large percentage of central London to central Manchester journeys are made by rail, few north

London to central Manchester trips are - they are largely on the M1/M6.

Car owners are increasingly reluctant to take their cars into city centres (one-way systems and limited, expensive parking). Instead they will choose to use the motorway, perhaps as far as the outskirts of London or Manchester. Thus a parkway at King's Langley will be beneficial, and create a new market for rail.

At its selected parkways, Alliance plans not only to provide a proper car park, but also improve facilities in the shape of ticket offices, waiting rooms and real-time train information as required. This investment would be available to other train operators at that station.

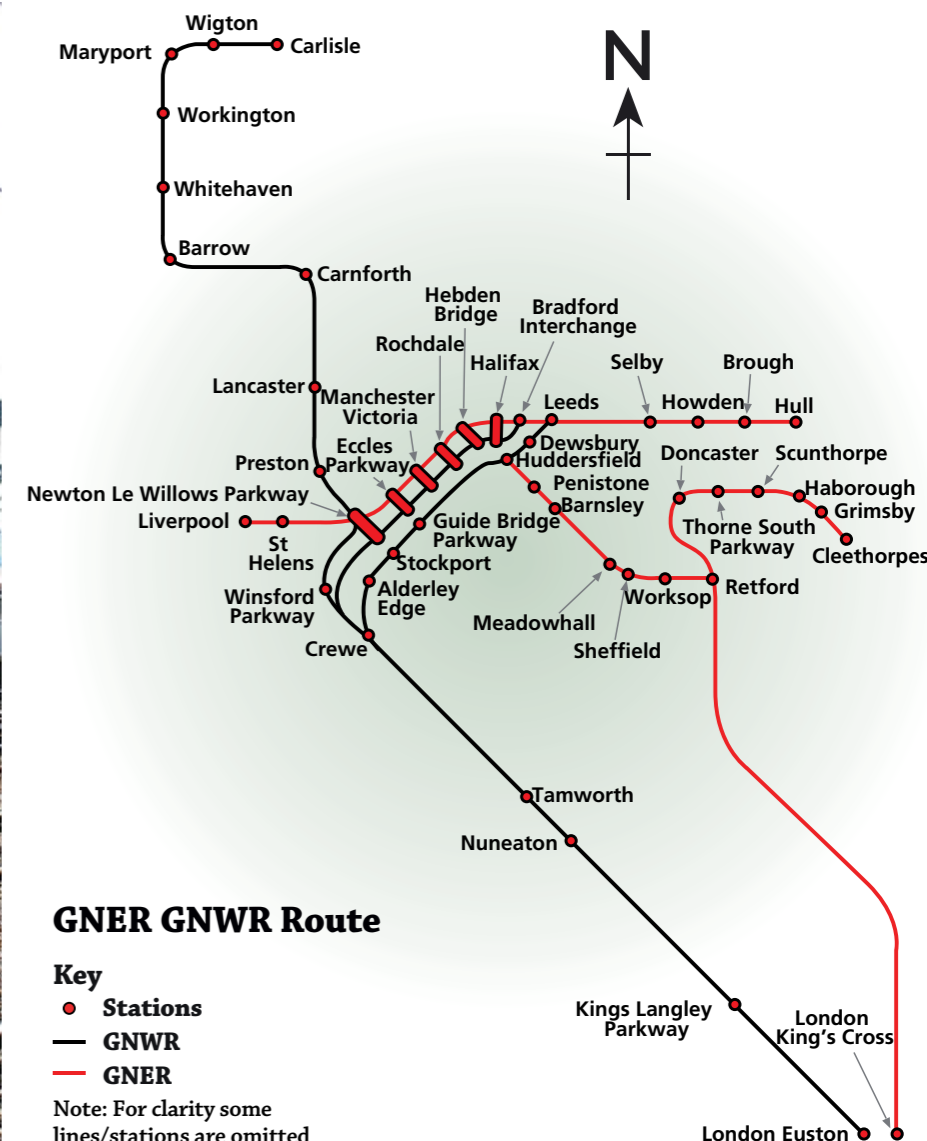
→ issued a press release outlining his plans as soon as the application was lodged. This allowed him to field calls from not just the media, but also from local authorities and other parties keen for a new railway service to come to their area, and to start the dialogue needed to build support. Yeowart is delighted at the support he has received and the number of invitations he gets to speak about Alliance, and not just from towns on his initial route map.

he has "a pedigree" in the open access process, a process which he fully realises others see as "an irritant".

Before that, however, the fallout from next spring's General Election may well change the railways. There may be a change in political colour, and with it a change in attitude, for or against, towards free competition. With the railway's budget one of the most likely to take a hit in any public spending cuts, there may be changes to investment plans for this Control Period or the next, and franchises, when it comes to re-letting, may change in many ways. Alliance's applications take account of all that (RAIL 631).

Take, for example, the West Coast franchise, currently run by Virgin and due to expire on March 31 2012, although it can be extended up to the end of that calendar year. The re-franchising programme will start in late-2010, but as Yeowart hopes to have the track options agreed by then, the bidders for the new franchise will be able to take account of Alliance's plans and be unable to claim revenue abstraction as an opposing factor.

Alliance's services will not, under any scenario,



The timing of the application, and how it sits with the franchised rail industry, is crucial. For the next few months Yeowart and his team will be fielding requests for more information from those with an interest in his proposals, and responding to the formal reaction to his application made to the ORR.

Already you can hear the metaphorical pencils being sharpened in those offices where open access is an anathema, and the phrases 'revenue abstraction', 'level playing field' 'unfair' and "threat to punctuality" ready to air. Yeowart has unrivalled experience of such objections, and having beaten them off three times already, is well prepared. As he puts it,

affect the current franchise. It is also hoped that the Moderation of Competition rules, which protect Virgin's services from even other franchised operators, will not carry forward into the new contract.

The new West Coast franchise, in the light of the need to "maximise funds available to the Secretary of State" could also be re-specified to minimise subsidy, thus gaps might appear which are attractive for an open access operator to fill (it is hardly likely that the 'New West Coast' will specify more services than at present, given the unlikelihood of higher subsidies and the cost and timescale of acquiring more trains to run such extra services). The timetable for re-letting the East Coast franchise, taken under government control last month, is not yet known, but similar arguments will apply.

The track access application includes much more paperwork, of course. While each application is 'only' 15 pages, it is supported by many hundreds of pages of documents,

Yeowart wants to work closely with Northern Rail on the Calder Valley. 144014 (right) leaves Leeds with a Halifax train on July 10 2008. Introducing new trains from Leeds would result in a half-hourly frequency on the railway. CARL CHAMBERS.

including business plans and details of revenue development.

A little further down the line the company will need to apply for a train operating licence (under Section 8 of the Railways Act 1993), and a safety certificate (under the Railways and Other Guided Transport Systems (Safety Regulations 2006). The process is far from simple, but it is a 'known', and while Yeowart has the experience, the ORR is also there to offer advice as the application proceeds. To permit the maximum investment to be realised, Yeowart hopes the application will be

granted for 15 years from the date of the first service, but in reality this may be just ten.

For now, the timetable is for TAA consultation to start soon and be complete by mid/late-2010, with the application determined by early 2011. That gives three years, firstly to secure the finance based on the security the granted Track Access Option gives, and then to place orders for the trains, with deliveries hopefully starting in spring/summer 2013.

Services will be introduced as the trains are delivered, with the first phase concentrating on the routes out of Euston. The full map is planned to be operational by the end of 2014.

In track access application terms that seems a long time, but this is not a usual TAA, and Yeowart's team will undoubtedly face strong industry resistance. If successful, the project

**About the author**  
Steve Broadbent, Contributor

Steve is an experienced transport writer with long roots in both railways and aviation, including a spell as press spokesman for the Peak Rail community rail scheme in the 1980s. He is a former editor of *Jane's Avionics Yearbook* and a former Technology Editor at *Jane's Defence Weekly*. He also founded SELRAP to campaign for the re-opening of the Skipton-Colne line and is a regular freelance news and features contributor to RAIL.



- "the most exciting thing I have ever been involved with," says Yeowart - will change the look of Britain's railways. Brand new trains of a very high standard, staffed by fully trained people dedicated to customer care, a fixed fare for a set journey, a 50% refund if no seat is available, and the opportunity for more people to travel, mainly to or from London, but also between other places en route, in style and comfort.

Time will tell if Yeowart's persistence pays off.

**“ The fallout from next spring's General Election may well change the railways. There may be a change in political colour, and with it a change in attitude, for or against, towards free competition. ”**



A Pendolino awaits departure from Carlisle on August 2 2008. GNWR could operate trains from Carlisle to London using new HSTs. CARL CHAMBERS.