

More trains for busy rail routes

More than 12,000 extra seats will be provided on some of the country's busiest rail commuter routes, Transport Secretary Douglas Alexander announced in April.

A package of improvements that includes expanding the Gatwick Express service, building new trains and leasing more carriages, will boost capacity from the end of the year. All the additional seats will be available by the end of 2008.

Mr Alexander announced that **Gatwick Express** will be retained as a non-stop service between Gatwick Airport and London every 15 minutes, following a campaign by airlines and travel agents.

But at the busiest times of day it will also run beyond Gatwick to Brighton, doubling the number of express trains between Brighton and London Victoria in the peak.

Unused coaches will be taken out of storage and reconditioned to provide the extra trains.

The **Thameslink** route - operated by First Capital Connect - will gain four class 319 dual-voltage trains which have been operating on Southern.

Bedford commuters point out that this will give back to Thameslink the trains built for the line by British Rail 20 years ago.

They rightly ask: "What about the growth on the route both pre- and post-privatisation? The 86 trains only restore a status quo from some years ago!"

It will however allow First Capital Connect to double the remaining four-carriage services to eight carriages during the peak. The company says that will allow it to add almost 8,300 seats during the busiest times. The extra coaches will be transferred from Southern.

Southern will replace the 319s with 48 new Electrostar coaches.

Mr Alexander said: "Not only are we adding more seats and more trains on some of the country's busiest rail routes, we are also keeping the fast, frequent Gatwick Express. We have done this by making better use of track-space, taking carriages out of storage and approving the building of new trains.

"The need to increase capacity is a real challenge facing the railway industry and it is a priority for my department."

The current Gatwick Express franchise will be ended early in May 2008 to allow the creation of a new franchise to include both Gatwick Express and Southern.

The new Gatwick Express service will begin in December next year under the same branding and with the same frequency to and from the airport. Six Gatwick Express trains in the 90-minute morning peak will start at Brighton, calling at Haywards Heath, Gatwick and London Victoria. The extra trains



LIMELIGHT: Merseytravel chief Mark Dowd with Jamie Ross at Liverpool

Picture: Geoff Roberts

Sprinters drafted in to give a boost to Liverpool

Merseytravel and Northern Rail have boosted services on the busy City Line from Liverpool Lime Street to Wigan and beyond, St Helens, Warrington and Manchester.

A complex deal with leasing company Angel Trains will replace four ageing Pacer class 142 trains with six Sprinter class 156 trains, which are more reliable and provide more seats.

The extra trains add more than 250,000 additional seats on the line every year.

Six key commuter services in the morning peak and again in the evening peak will benefit from the investment, with some services increasing from two to four carriages.

Councillor Mark Dowd, chair of Merseytravel, said: "The steps we have taken will also give us the extra capacity we are going to need for 2008 and the rejuvenated Liverpool city centre.

"The City Line is one of our real success stories but we need to make this investment if we are to deal with the growing level of demand on this line. This is our commitment to the people who use this service regularly and we hope they will see the difference this investment will make."

Cllr Dowd is pictured above left with Jamie Ross, area director at Northern Rail, at Liverpool Lime Street station with a class

156 train. Neil Scales, chief executive and director general of Merseytravel said: "Overcrowding can deter people from using the rail network and we don't want that. We want passengers to enjoy the service and use public transport wherever possible. This extra investment is intended to support that.

"We are improving services on the rail network wherever we can, for example the new St Helens Central Station on the City Line. "That investment is helping to attract new passengers all the time so we need to make sure we have the capacity and quality of services to ensure they are adequately provided for."

Heidi Mottram, the managing director of Northern Rail, commented: "We are delighted to have secured the additional trains for the City Line, enabling us to provide more capacity for passengers as demand for our services continues to grow.

"The introduction of additional trains to help us to meet that demand demonstrates the positive impact that working in partnership can have on improving the services we provide to our customers."

Around seven million passengers use the City Line every year. The number of passengers rose by more than 4.5% last year alone. Northern Rail has also acquired 29 class 158 trains, some of them recently withdrawn by South West Trains.

will also run in the evening peak. Extra capacity will also be provided by leasing several class 442 Wessex trains - recently withdrawn by South West Trains - which have been fitted with extra luggage space. The changes are the result of the Brighton main line route utilisation strategy, finalised in December after 10 months of consultation.

The background to the decisions can be found in a stakeholder briefing document <http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/closed/brightonmainlinerusconsultation/briefingdocument>. Southern is leasing 48 new dual-voltage Electrostar trains which will be owned by Porterbrook and built by Bombardier at Derby. As the vehicles

enter service Southern's remaining class 319s will be transferred to First Capital Connect.

The 319 units were specially built for Thameslink and are able to use the 25kv overhead wires north of the river Thames, the 750v dc third-rail electrification systems of the Southern - and also fit through narrow Central London tunnels.