

# **CUSTOMER AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

April 2023

crosscountry



# CrossCountry routes

Where can we take you?



CrossCountry routes — Summer weekend services —  
Please note: not all stations are shown

# Contents

- 1. Summary 2
- 2. Business Approach 2
- 3. Customer Expectations 3
- 4. Our Engagement Strategy 4
- 5. Our Tools of Engagement 6
- 6. Future Improvements 15

# 1. Summary

The CrossCountry franchise is the most extensive rail network in Great Britain, operating rail passenger train services to 112 stations in England, Scotland and Wales, and covering approximately 21 million miles per annum. CrossCountry services operate on radial routes from Birmingham New Street station. The Aberdeen to Penzance service is currently the longest journey covered by a single train anywhere in Great Britain, covering 773 miles taking 13 hours from start to finish.

Throughout the franchise, CrossCountry has continued to develop its products and services to deliver significant improvements for customers. We have placed great focus on finding new, innovative ways to communicate with our customers and stakeholders, ensuring that we understand their needs and expectations. This not only has included the creation of dedicated teams within the business to improve levels of engagement, but also embracing the fast-paced world of consumer technology and social media.

The purpose of the strategy is to set out how we will engage, communicate and involve customers and stakeholders in the development of CrossCountry's services and how we will work to improve customer satisfaction. The actions and approaches we will take are laid out in this document, along with the values and principles that underpin them.

This version of CrossCountry's Customer and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy is dated April 2023 and replaces all previous versions.

# 2. Business Approach

## Our Vision, Mission, Strategy, Values and Behaviours

In driving our business forward for the benefit of all our customers and stakeholders, we recognise the need to think clearly about what drives us:

- ✓ **VISION:** 'where we would like to be'
- ✓ **MISSION:** 'the principal business tenets we hold while striving to deliver our Vision'
- ✓ **STRATEGY:** 'the path we will follow to get there'
- ✓ **VALUES:** 'the principles that will guide us'
- ✓ **BEHAVIOURS:** 'the way we will go about our business'

At CrossCountry our Vision is "to be an industry-leading, customer-centric, dynamic and innovative long-distance train operator that customers trust to meet their needs"

Our Mission is reflected in the high-level objectives we set ourselves:

- ✓ To delight our customers every time they travel
- ✓ To be recognised as a top employer, supporting a skilled and enthusiastic workforce
- ✓ To ensure our processes are robust, underpinning our operation and managing safety and our environmental impacts
- ✓ To ensure business sustainability

Customer Excellence	Business Excellence		People Excellence
We will create a relationship with our customers so that we can anticipate all their requirements and take pride in delivering an excellent product that our customers trust, empowering those closest to the customer.	We will generate engagement and support from all stakeholders through proactive communications and we will work to deliver positive contributions to the societies and communities we serve.	We commit to a path of continuous improvements, building on the existing bases, improving our culture and processes while delivering value to shareholders.	Clear plans to develop, care for and challenge our people, retaining and attracting talent. Structures and processes that allows talent to thrive and succeed.

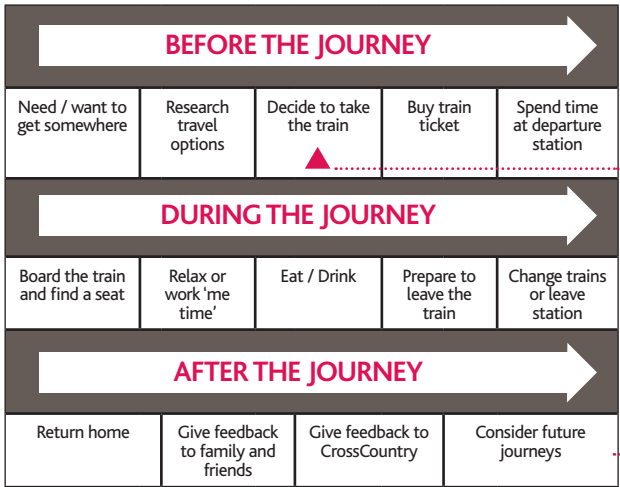
There are several dimensions to our overall strategy, and this document sets out our approach to managing customer and stakeholder needs.

We know that our people are driven by being *passionate, professional and people* focused in all that they do which is reflected in the values which guide us, and those engaged in every Arriva Group company:

- ✓ We Care Passionately
- ✓ We Do the Right Thing
- ✓ We Make the Difference

# 3. Customer Expectations

To ensure we understand and fulfil our customers' needs at all stages of their journey we use the following model to guide the development of our customer offer, striving for excellence at every stage.



It's important to base our business decision making on a good understanding of each element of the customer experience – from thinking about a need to travel right through to the appraisal process at the end of the journey – to ensure we fully appreciate what's required to improve the customer experience. We use our 'Customer Ambassador Group' to bring together key decision makers in the business to share and discuss this insight to inform future plans. The red dotted line shows how this journey planning experience can be a virtuous cycle for our customers, which is important to our understanding of customer researching, buying and travelling behaviours. However, we do also look at each phase of the model in isolation to identify specific customer needs relevant to these different customer mindsets.

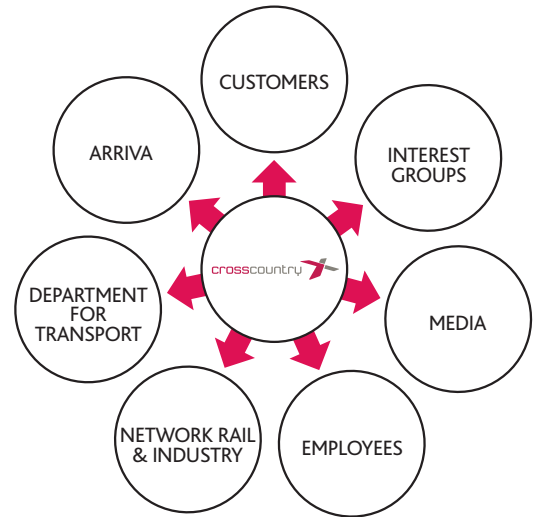
All of this insight is used to determine our approach to engagement with customers and stakeholders alike.

#### 4. Our Engagement Strategy

CrossCountry covers more of Great Britain than any other train company connecting our three nations and our customers and stakeholders therefore are diverse – geographically, in terms of journey purpose, and also in their relationship with the business. We deploy a number of strategies to overcome these challenges, such as.

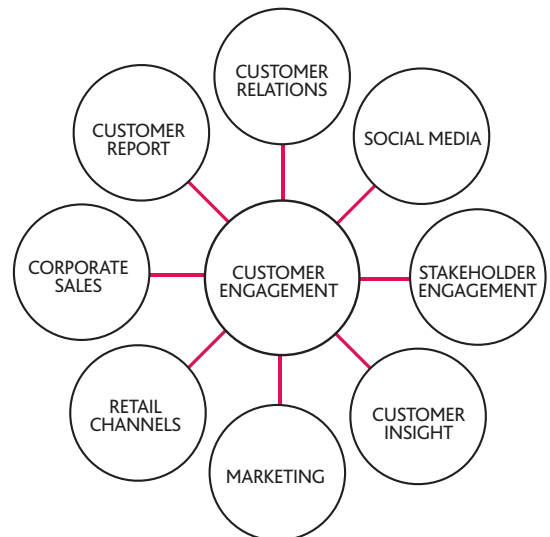
- ✓ Using digital communications channels to reach out to customers where we don't have a station presence
- ✓ Partnering with key national and regional organisations to extend the reach of our communications and to create new feedback channels
- ✓ Maximising our research channels and collaborating with other Arriva UK Trains businesses, as well as other industry partners, to share customer insight.

We have seven key groups of stakeholders who we actively consider and engage with as part of our day-to-day operations and in making improvement to services. These groups are shown below:



We have key representatives within the business who take responsibility for key stakeholders, so we have accountability, governance and escalation processes in place. Much of that engagement work is conducted via face to face meetings, calls and written reports. More details about these activities and the types of stakeholders this refers to can be found in section 5C.

We use the following channels to engage with our customers:



We want to make engaging with CrossCountry as easy as possible, so we endeavour to interact with our customers and stakeholders in the most effective and relevant way for them whether that's in person or via our digital feedback channels.

This is why we use a human focused first approach to our tone of voice, via our social channels and proactive digital customer communications, such as website and CRM to ensure our customers can be clear on how they can be best served information that is relevant for them and importantly contributes to a higher level of customer experience and engagement across our business and rail network.

## 5. Our Tools of Engagement

### A. CUSTOMER RELATIONS

#### Overview

We welcome feedback in relation to all aspects of the service we provide, whether positive, negative or neutral, as we believe it helps us to deliver the services customers expect. Every telephone call, email, letter and online form we receive is logged in our Customer Relations case management (CRM) system and assigned a unique reference number. The Team will categorise each case as a complaint, comment/suggestion, praise, claim or enquiry. As the case is being 'worked', the agent will record additional categories based on the reason for contact (e.g. 'complaint regarding unavailability of seats' or 'enquiry about a marketing promotion') and customers' journey details where applicable. This allows us to analyse the data later by service, route and so on.

#### Training and support

We ensure our Team has the support to provide excellent customer service. This includes:

- Intensive inductions and training programmes for new starters and ongoing coaching
- Regular performance reviews and feedback sessions to ensure any training needs or coaching requirements are identified and addressed quickly
- Monitoring our Customer Complaints Handling Procedure to ensure it is effective and complies with industry changes (e.g. guideline revisions).

#### Monitoring performance

We also monitor live cases as they progress. This includes:

- Monitoring telephone calls to ensure they are handled professionally
- Recording and monitoring average response times
- Automatically quarantining a minimum of 10% of all activities for approval before they can be progressed, and responses issued to customers

- Team Coaches and Directors reviewing a sample of our written responses
- Regular (at least quarterly) reviews of third-party providers to ensure SLAs are being achieved
- Quarterly customer satisfaction surveys to determine how customers felt their enquiry was handled-this survey is carried out by the Office for Rail & Road (ORR)

The Customer Relations Team Manager(s) also monitor and review the information and responses communicated using our Social Media channels, ensuring consistency.

#### Communicating customer feedback

As well as maintaining our CRM database, we also keep hard and soft copies of all correspondence locally for a minimum of three months before they are sent for archiving. This allows us to use the data collected as sources of intelligence. Key steps beyond that include:

- The Customer Management team review the results of the Quarterly customer satisfaction survey to identify areas of improvement and implement action plans
- Every month we provide data to the DfT and ORR regarding the number of comments and complaints we receive and our performance in handling them
- We send Managers and Directors comments and complaints relevant to their areas of responsibility at least every four weeks. They use the information to identify areas for improvement and make necessary changes
- The Team actively contributes to post-incident reviews and strategic event planning to ensure that the voice of the customer is communicated, and feedback actioned
- All allegations of damage, loss or injury are sent to our Safety Team for their action as soon as we are made aware (either by the customer, on-board teams or a third party such as station staff). In the event that the incident is reportable to ORR under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR), this is done so in accordance with the processes and timescales agreed
- The Customer Relations Team is key in facilitating the Customer Excellence Board (see page 14 for further details).

## B. SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media continues to be an increasingly popular method for customers and potential customers to contact us. Our dedicated, in-house Customer Communications Specialist Team manages our Twitter and Facebook profiles, helping to respond to comments, complaints, queries and suggestions. As part of our franchise award, we operate a 24/7 team, who can respond in real-time.

Given that the vast majority of queries and contacts we receive via Social Media relate to train running and delays, the team of Customer Communications Specialists sit within the Control Department. This ensures that decisions made by the Control Team regarding train running, disruption advice and details of alternative travel are communicated as effectively and quickly as possible. Our followers can expect:

- A reply to their enquiry, comment or suggestion within 30 minutes, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day
- Live travel information including updates on incidents which will affect journeys on our network and live updates of any additional services we operate due to large events
- Promotional tweets for any offers, giveaways and competitions that CrossCountry are currently running. Updates advising of latest advance fare availability may also be made available
- We are also using this new team to proactively advise customers of their eligibility to Delay Repay compensation, where appropriate

Every tweet or post we receive is recorded on our database and the feedback we receive is used to produce both high-level weekly overview summaries and detailed monthly reports which are used right across the business, from Exec level through to Head of Departments, the managers responsible for specific areas as well as to our frontline colleagues and the wider organisation. This information allows us to take relevant action and to drive improvements where possible to enhance the customer experience. Since the inception of our 24/7 social media presence, we have enhanced the range of services the team are able to offer. This has included the ability for customers to make bicycle reservations on our services via Facebook and Twitter.

## C. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Our strategy hinges on building powerful relationships that focus on listening and responding to concerns and feedback so that we can create opportunities to strengthen our business. We also aim to build advocacy amongst stakeholders so that they champion our business and sector.

Stakeholder liaison activity is managed by CrossCountry's Head of Corporate Affairs and supported by four Stakeholder Liaison Managers, responsible for day-to-day stakeholder activity across

the network.

Our regional structure allows decision making to take place at a local level, in line with the importance of devolution and levelling up. Each Stakeholder Liaison Manager is assigned to a region so that they can prioritise stakeholders more effectively. We engage them via numerous channels including regular meetings and attendance at existing business and industry forums, as well as contributing to consultation processes so that the views of our customers are well represented in future transport plans.

We will maintain a database of key contacts nationally, which will be managed regionally by the relevant Stakeholder Liaison Manager and Regional Director. An engagement strategy will be put in place for each stakeholder group by region so that we engage them in a meaningful way and at the right frequency.

Key stakeholders include:

- UK Government and Department for Transport (DfT)
- Transport for Scotland
- Transport for Wales
- Metro mayors
- Network Rail
- Local Government
- Industry bodies including Network Rail, Rail Delivery Group, the ORR and Rail North
- Transport Focus
- Combined Authorities, Passenger Transport Executives and Integrated Transport Authorities
- Scottish Regional Transport Partnerships
- Chambers of Commerce, Business Councils and Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Trade Unions
- Lobby and Special Interest Groups
- Rail User Groups

This dedicated team enables a proactive approach to engagement with the many stakeholders seeking to work with and build relationships with CrossCountry. They will work closely with the Regional Directors to strengthen our relationships in the regions. Alongside physically attending meetings, the team creates opportunities for CrossCountry to become more actively engaged in local transport initiatives, allowing for greater understanding and recognition by stakeholders of the potential for services to deliver their transport aspirations. This is helpful in ensuring stakeholders can take account of the ability, or not, for CrossCountry services to deliver local aspirations without jeopardising the core long distance elements of the franchise's business. Greater engagement with stakeholders facilitates the wider sharing of industry plans and practices to external audiences, helping them to better understand the likelihood of the rail industry being able to deliver their

aspirations and the approximated costs and timescales for achieving these.

To ensure that the wider elements of the business are kept aware of stakeholder aspirations, feedback from meetings and consultations is provided to the relevant internal CrossCountry meetings. We also give regular updates at the periodic strategic Society and Strategic Pillar meetings and the Head of Corporate Affairs attends the weekly Regional Executive meeting with the Regional Directors and the Service Delivery Director. This ensures the stakeholder team remains close to emerging issues and priorities.

### **Stakeholder Newsletter**

The team produces a newsletter summarising news and information regarding the CrossCountry franchise. This also summarises information on how we have performed against our targets for customer satisfaction, operational performance and reliability, and for other key metrics contained in our Franchise Agreement. This newsletter will be circulated to stakeholders via email and made available to all stakeholders and customers through our website. We encourage feedback so that we further improve the newsletters.

### **Stakeholder Survey**

We have introduced an annual survey to better understand stakeholders' perceptions regarding how we have performed and where they would like us to focus. This is conducted by a third-party organisation and this information is fed into the annual review of our Customer and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (CSES).

The most recent survey conducted in January 2023 has provided some useful insights around what is working well and where we can improve. In February 2023, we received the results of our second annual perception audit, which showed an incremental improvement in stakeholder satisfaction (68% last year to 72% in 2023). Those who gave lower scores attributed this to dissatisfaction levels with reductions in service frequencies and stations served (22%), that occurred during the pandemic and have not been restored. Following on from this, capacity issues (21%) are mentioned, with the need for more carriages or more frequent trains. Still some calls for more frequent and proactive stakeholder engagement (17%), sharing of future plans (6%) and consultation on timetable changes (8%). These insights have been shared with the wider CrossCountry management board and the Customer team to shape future thinking. They will also be shared at the strategic pillar meeting for society and sustainability.

There has also been a net overall improvement in stakeholder engagement over the last 12 months of 17% across most sub-groups (regions and stakeholder categories), reinforcing that lower satisfaction levels chiefly relate to perceived service reduction after the pandemic. Stakeholders noted that CrossCountry's key strength

this year was cited as stakeholder engagement and relationships (64% compared to 52% in 2022, the largest increase that we see across all categories. This reinforces that the structures in place for engaging stakeholders are working well. We are also cited as leaders in community rail and there was also a desire from passenger groups to have greater interaction with us, with only 28% being supported regionally. This year we will also introduce pulse surveys every quarter to gain a more regular sense check of sentiment. These insights will help to shape the strategy for 2023. .

### **Stakeholder Conference**

We will run an annual stakeholder conference for community rail partners. We will invite guest speakers from different parts of our business to give insights and strike debate on the issues that matter to our stakeholders. We will conduct a post-survey feedback survey to further improve these events in the future. We also attend industry conferences organised by Network Rail and other TOCs, which stakeholders find beneficial as it shows a joined up approach to working.

### **Managing our stakeholder relationships**

We will track every stakeholder relationship in a Stakeholder Management System, Tractivity. This means that members of the wider Corporate Affairs team and the Regional Directors have a central reference point for understanding what has been discussed and who has dealt with each stakeholder. It also aids reporting.

## **D. CUSTOMER INSIGHT**

CrossCountry commissions and uses a range of ad hoc and continuous customer research methods. These include:

- The Customer Experience Survey (CES) The CES is a sophisticated and modern customer experience management system. The survey is 'always on' enabling customers to deliver feedback 365 days a year, 24 hours of the day. The results are fed into a live reporting system allowing for an up-to-the-second read on customers' feedback. A state-of-the-art text analytics engine mines customers' verbatim feedback to unearth findings, again, working in real-time.
- Customer Panel: we have an Online Customer Panel called 'XChange Views'. To date we have over 1000 members. We ask our panel members to complete surveys on a quarterly basis. Each time, the survey topic changes to reflect challenges and opportunities that are current to both the customer and CrossCountry. These last few surveys have focused on customer experiences on long journeys, the impact of crowding on customers' experiences and the extent to which industrial action impacts on customers' perceptions of rail.

We ask our panel members to complete surveys on a quarterly

basis. Each time, the survey topic changes to reflect challenges and opportunities that are current to both the customer and CrossCountry. These last few surveys have focused on customer experiences on long journeys, the impact of crowding on customers' experiences and the extent to which industrial action impacts on customers' perceptions of rail.

- CrossCountry is also an active member in industry research groups and contributes to the discussions surrounding research at national-level. Any such research outputs are reviewed and shared widely within the business.
- CrossCountry also uses panel survey data from the YouGov suite of insight solutions. YouGov BrandIndex enables CrossCountry to track brand health metrics over time such as brand awareness, brand consideration and reputation. YouGov Profiles is a tool that allows for the comparison of defined cohorts of customers; CrossCountry customers, for example, can be compared to non customers using a vast array of attitudinal and behavioural attributes.

Our Customer Insight Manager is responsible for managing customer research internally.

We also use operational data from a range of departments to continually monitor our performance. This includes:

- Revenue: data regarding bookings, seat reservations, passenger counts/capacity and sales & revenue
- Safety: data regarding defects and operational incidents
- Performance: data regarding Public Performance Measure (PPM), right time, significant lateness, delays, cancellations and incident records
- Fleet: data regarding defects and auditing, both internally and by depots
- Service quality audits: both on board and at station

Where possible all data and insight are combined to give us a 'single view of the customer'.

## **E. COMMUNICATING WITH CUSTOMERS**

### **Marketing**

Through the use of research, customer segmentation techniques and feedback channels, we have devised a tailored programme of communications for customers. This ensures relevance and personalisation to provide value to the customer rather than generic content applicable to all. This is a commitment to delivering information appropriate for the individual at a time most relevant to them through a channel of their choice and is the essence of our brand values.

### **Choice of retail channels**

Based on customer feedback and consumer trends, both within the travel marketplace and in other industries, we continue to develop

our communication channels to provide choice and convenience to customers. Our Train Tickets app, mobile site and website all provide information and purchasing facilities in an easy to use format enabling customers to engage with us in whatever way is most convenient for them.

### **Divisional approach to Corporate Sales**

We recognise the unique requirements of our core business market whose relationship with CrossCountry is through third party Travel Management Companies. Arriva UK Trains has invested heavily to better engage with customers and stakeholders through these channels, establishing a divisional team and key account structure to provide the resources and tools necessary to create two-way communication. This approach has created the opportunity to seek, identify and introduce innovative solutions for the benefit of both Travel Management Companies and their corporate clients as well as establishing long-term sustainable partnerships.

In December 2022 we launched a B2B retail platform designed specifically for the SME business market. This is a wholly new sales channel for CrossCountry which offers a bespoke retail service and allows us to provide an enhanced offering to our business travellers through a service not previously available directly from CrossCountry. The launch of the SME portal enables us to engage directly with our business travellers who often had a long-term relationship with our business but previously purchased their tickets from Third Party Retailers. Through our membership of Chambers of Commerce we will engage with business communities throughout the CrossCountry network, using Expos and Chamber events to raise brand awareness and improve direct communication with our current and potential business travellers.

### **Customer Report**

We'll publish a Customer Report twice each year, in April and October, and this will give you an update on how we are performing and how we are progressing with our plans.

We will let you know when a new Customer Report is published, via:

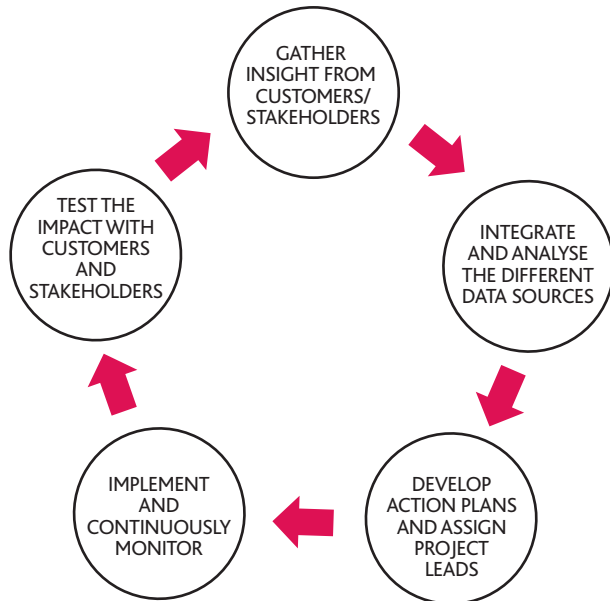
- Posters at staffed stations.
- Our on-train WiFi, where you'll be able to view the latest edition from the CrossCountry WiFi landing page.
- [crosscountrytrains.co.uk](https://crosscountrytrains.co.uk) – you'll be able to view and download from a clear link on our homepage

For those who'd like to hear about our performance and progress in a more personalised way, sign up to receive e-mail communications from us and we'll send you a quarterly e-mail with updates related to the CrossCountry route closest to you. This will include operational performance information, progress with our improvements and latest news and offers.



## F. IMPROVING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Our approach is to continually evaluate our business and the customer experience. We do this by collating and taking action in response to customer and stakeholder feedback. This is a continuous improvement process as demonstrated in the diagram below.



The steps in the cyclical process include:

- Data and research are collected from the sources identified above, including Customer Relations feedback, social media, stakeholder engagement and customer insight
- The data is analysed and discussed. The key audience is the Customer Excellence Board, which meets every four weeks and is attended by Directors and key Heads of Department and managers across the business
- If the feedback suggests improvements are required, then action plans will be created and Project Lead(s) assigned. This may involve cross-departmental working groups
- Success is managed through a governance process, including regular meetings to review performance against agreed KPIs
- Arriva UK Trains supports larger scale business improvement changes through the divisional project management office
- The last stage of the process loop is to test changes with customers and stakeholders. This is done by analysing feedback through the same sources listed above (customer relations feedback, social media feedback, customer insight etc).

## 6. Future Improvements

In May, we will see an uplift in services across the network, which is the next stage on the evolution of our timetable. It marks the most significant uplift in service frequency and connectivity since the changes made during the pandemic. Furthermore, it will provide improved connectivity and frequency where demand requires it while operating more efficiently and economically.

At a high level the changes include:

- An hourly Manchester to Bristol via Birmingham service.
- Hourly Manchester to Bournemouth via Birmingham and Reading.
- Hourly Plymouth to Edinburgh via Birmingham and Leeds.
- The reintroduction of some services on the Reading-Newcastle route via Birmingham and Doncaster.

We also recently received notification from the Department to bid for a National Rail Contract, which if successful could run for another eight-years. This will allow us to focus on the long-term and invest in the necessary resources to provide an excellent customer experience that is accessible to all.

Published by CrossCountry  
Registered Office XC Trains Ltd, Admiral Way, Doxford International Business Park,  
Sunderland, SR3 3XP. Registered in England and Wales No. 04402048  
Correct at time of print (April 2023).

XC2240 APR 2023

**For further information visit:**  
[crosscountrytrains.co.uk](http://crosscountrytrains.co.uk)  
or call us on 0344 736 9123