

# Rail Services

Rail services are an important part of the public transport network in Oxfordshire. Rail services are provided through franchise contracts awarded by the Department for Transport. Oxfordshire County Council are not involved with the setting of service levels, fares or day-to-day operation of rail services.

## Franchises

Rail services are operated under contract to the Government. The Department for Transport sets the franchise specification, which includes service levels and stopping patterns, and awards the contract to operate the franchise to a private company. Franchises are awarded by competitive tender, with franchise bidders offering to either pay the Government to operate or to receive payment, depending on operating costs and revenue forecasts. Franchises include the operation of both train services and stations.

The Department for Transport consult when setting or changing franchise specifications.

There are three franchises which cover Oxfordshire:

- Greater Western: Operated by First Group, branded as “GWR” - Services to London Paddington
- Chiltern: Operated by Arriva, branded as “Chiltern Railways” - Services to London Marylebone
- Cross Country: Operated by Arriva, branded as “Cross Country Trains” - Long distance north-south services

In recent years, the franchise system has become discredited and will be changed in the future. While a new system is developed, short term extensions to franchises have been agreed with existing operators, known as “direct awards”.

## Train timetables

Train operators can change timetables in May and December each year, but have to keep within the guidelines set by the franchise agreement. There is no requirement for train operators to consult before making timetable changes, but will sometimes do so for significant changes.

## Infrastructure

All rail infrastructure is owned and maintained by Network Rail. This includes track, bridges, tunnels, stations and land.

## Fares

Rail fares are a particularly complex area. Broadly speaking, train operators can decide what fares to charge. Some fare types, such as season tickets, are regulated by the Department for Transport. Fare changes normally occur in January each year. There is not normally consultation.

## Stations

Stations are owned by Network Rail, and most are leased to train operators to run. For stations served by more than one train operator, usually the operator running the most train services will run the station. In Oxfordshire, stations are run by either GWR or Chiltern Railways.

## Oxfordshire County Council's involvement

Oxfordshire has a Strategic Rail Development Officer, who promotes the strategic views and aspirations of the Council for improved rail infrastructure and services within the rail industry and with other stakeholders.

The Strategic Rail Development Officer will be involved with strategic rail projects affecting the county, such as East West Rail. They will also provide the Council's response to strategic rail consultations such as on franchise specifications.

### What can PTRs do?

The County Council has very limited involvement or influence in the provision of rail services, which limits the support that can be offered by the Council to PTRs on rail issues. It shouldn't necessarily limit a PTR's involvement with rail issues though, it just means that these matters will need to be taken forward independently.

### User groups and train operators

Rail user groups cover some stations and lines and PTRs are encouraged to become involved with their local rail user group if there is one.

Issues concerning timetables, reliability, stations facilities, fares or service level aspirations should be raised with rail user groups or the appropriate train operator.

### Community rail and station adoption

Some stations have local community groups which look after their local station, through measures such as gardening or reporting of vandalism. This is known as “station adoption”. PTRs are encouraged to become involved where such groups exist.

More information: [www.communityrail.org.uk](http://www.communityrail.org.uk)

### Consultation

PTRs are encouraged to respond to any rail consultations affecting their parish. These may be from the Department for Transport, train operators or others, and are usually open to all. Oxfordshire County Council will normally respond to rail consultations, but don't have the resource to sub-consult parishes or PTRs. PTRs will therefore need to be alert for when such consultations happen.