



**RED FOR GO:** An artist's impression of the Chinese-made Polaris trains Alliance Rail plans to use on its open access routes

# Bi-mode trains to boost the North

Bradford and other cities in the north of England could gain new inter-city style links to London by 2013.

And it could mean that Chinese-made trains begin operating in Britain for the first time.

Alliance Rail plans to order a fleet of 23 six-car, tilting Polaris trains from the Chinese manufacturer CSR.

Alliance wants to use the trains to introduce a raft of open access services.

The ambitious proposals come from Alliance Rail which wants to run trains with diesel engines that can also use the power from overhead electric lines.

"There is nothing like this currently operating in the UK," said Alliance Rail's Chris Brandon.

The company, owned by Deutsche Bahn, has published proposals for direct services from Bradford to London Euston via Manchester Victoria, Crewe and the West Coast main line every two hours. Both Halifax and Hebden Bridge would benefit.

Calderdale Council leader Janet Battye said she would be offering Alliance Rail every assistance

to deliver improved rail services.

Another possibility is trains from Carlisle to London, calling at Carnforth, as well as at a £2 million parkway station at Kings Langley, Hertfordshire, and Watford Junction. The Midlands towns of Nuneaton and Tamworth could also benefit from the new services.

Virgin Trains' protection from competition expires in 2012 when its current franchise ends.

Alliance Rail also wants to start a Hull-Liverpool service, via Bradford and the Calder Valley, and a service from Skipton and Ilkley to London King's Cross via the East Coast main line.

Alliance Rail says it is undertaking detailed work to support its application to the Office of Rail Regulation.

Other companies are considering modifying existing diesel trains for bi-mode operations.

Bombardier has submitted plans to the Department for Transport in conjunction with three operators and two rolling stock leasing companies.

Their Project Thor would involve fitting pantographs to diesel

trains operated by Virgin West Coast, CrossCountry and East Midlands Trains.

The benefits would include eliminating diesel trains from London Euston and St Pancras station.

To a Government obsessed by cutting spending, the idea could be attractive because it would allow electrification of the Midland main line to be carried out in stages.

Bombardier hopes to build 123 pantograph cars and convert 21 cars to win orders worth £300 million for its factory in Derby.

What Britain's railways really need, of course, is Government approval for more electrification, including the Great Western and Midland main lines.

What it is getting is another review of the franchising system and the prospect of big fare increases next year and for years to come. Passengers already believe they do not get value for money and people who do not go by rail cite the high fares as the number one reason for not doing so.

Train operators are right that there are some bargains, but they

cannot dispute that the general level of rail fares in Britain is the highest in Europe and the world.

Railfuture believes franchise policy should increase the proportion of journeys made by rail, replacing journeys made by road.

Some operators have failed to deliver reliable train services and clean stations – or even provide clean, working, on-board lavatories.

In London, Transport for London sets strict requirements for the standard and cleanliness of stations and trains and monitors performance. The Government should do likewise for rail franchising.

The Government's review also fails to address whether the cost of franchising is worth the few benefits, considering the level of profits taken out of the industry.

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