

Louise Beilby
Senior Access Executive



2 December 2025

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Dear Akaash and Sue

Approval of the 31st supplemental agreement to the track access contract between Network Rail Infrastructure Limited (Network Rail) and First Trenitalia West Coast Rail Limited (trading as Avanti West Coast (AWC)) dated 1 December 2022

We have today approved the above supplemental agreement submitted to us formally on 2 December 2025 under section 22 of the Railways Act 1993 (the Act). This follows an earlier informal submission of a draft agreement for our consideration. This letter explains the reasons for our decision.

Purpose

The purpose of this agreement is to provide AWC with the rights necessary to add Liverpool South Parkway station into the calling pattern of its existing service between Liverpool Lime Street and London Euston. The rights are to commence on the Principal Change Date (PCD) in December 2025 and will expire on the Expiry Date or earlier termination of AWC's track access contract.

Industry consultation

Network Rail undertook the usual industry consultation for one month from 7 October 2025. Comments in support or raising no objection were received from CrossCountry, West Midlands Trains, Transport Focus, Transport for Wales, Northern Trains, and Great Western Railway.

Virgin Trains raised an objection on two grounds. First, it believed that Network Rail had agreed to a surrender of some of AWC's Liverpool paths on the grounds of safety of the overhead line equipment, and that this implied that any additional services in the Liverpool to Crewe area would therefore be unsafe. It pointed out that stopping trains at stations rather than passing through uses more energy and drawing more power in this section of the route could lead to further performance and possible safety issues.

In response, AWC stated that it has always intended to call at Liverpool South Parkway since its successful franchise bid in 2019, and that passive provision for these calls has been included within the timetable since December 2022's implementation. As a result, any power supply modelling which Network Rail has undertaken since October 2022 has been based on AWC's proposed timetable, which has included all these services stopping at Liverpool South Parkway, and none of this has identified any issues arising from the introduction of the stop.

It further stated that the issue driving current concerns about traction electricity is the inability to safely transmit power to the overhead lines between Crewe North and Weaver Junction, which does not affect Liverpool South Parkway.

Virgin's second point was that Network Rail had cited the poor performance on the West Coast Main Line south of Rugby as part of its reason for rejecting any further access requests on this section of the network. It believed that adding any time for stops into the service would worsen the current performance situation and should therefore not be allowed by Network Rail.

AWC contested Virgin's assumption that additional station calls at Liverpool South Parkway would be detrimental to performance, stating that the data it was using was incomplete and provided no indication on performance of the wider system. AWC provided evidence that performance on the Liverpool service group is generally good compared to some of the other long-distance services. It also stated that AWC works collaboratively with the wider industry to improve systemic performance and has a Joint Performance Strategy and robust governance in place.

ORR review

ORR agrees with AWC's position on traction power supply and notes its assurance that Network Rail's modelling has accounted for these calls without identifying any issues. We also agree with AWC's assessment on operational performance that the additional stop at Liverpool South Parkway should not materially impact overall performance, given the passive provision in existing timetables and the improvement plans in place.

Our review of the application raised no other operational, performance or economic concerns. We identified some minor drafting issues and these were resolved when the agreement was formally submitted.

Our duties under section 4 of the Act and our decision

We have concluded that approval of this supplemental agreement strikes the appropriate balance in discharging our statutory duties under section 4 of the Act; in particular, those relating to protecting the interests of users of railway services (section 4(1)(a)), promoting the use of the railway network for the carriage of passengers (section 4(1)(b)) and enabling persons providing railway services to plan their businesses with a reasonable degree of assurance (section 4(1)(g)).



Conformed copy of the track access agreement

Under clause 18.2.4 of the track access contract, Network Rail is required to produce a conformed copy, within 28 days of any amendment being made, and send copies to ORR and the Train Operator. Please send the conformed copy to me at ORR.

Public register and administration

Electronic copies of this letter, the approval notice and the agreement will be sent to the Department for Transport and Network Rail's Policy and Access Team. I am also copying Phil Whittingham from Virgin as his objection was still outstanding at the time of our decision being made. Copies of the approval notice and the agreement will be placed on ORR's public register (website) and copies of this letter and the agreement will be placed on the ORR website.

Yours sincerely



Louise Beilby