

# Boris plans to 'Oysterise' overground rail services by next May

SWEEPING plans to get all overground railway stations in London to accept pre-pay Oyster cards were unveiled by Boris Johnson today.

The Mayor announced he was meeting private train operators for a crucial summit in the next few weeks in a bid to achieve a transport breakthrough Ken Livingstone had failed to deliver.

To underline his new approach, Mr Johnson revealed that he had secured a deal with First Great Western to allow pay-as-you-go Oyster cards at all its stations in the capital from September.

He is aiming to get the whole transport system using Oyster by May next year.

The agreement with Transport for London means passengers will be able to use the electronic smart card to travel into Paddington from stations such as West Drayton, Hayes and Harlington, Southall, West Acton and Greenford.

Oysters loaded with Travelcards are accepted everywhere but until now the pre-pay version has been available on a handful of overland rail services.

Today's deal is part of Mr Johnson's drive to accelerate plans to "Oysterise" the entire overland rail network serving London, aides said. Mr Livingstone wanted to extend the pay-as-you-go card, but ran into repeated rows with the private train-operating companies.

Transport for London chiefs have told the new Mayor that his less confrontational approach is already paying dividends with train firms and will as a result rapidly speed up the spread of the system.

Mr Johnson said: "This is excellent news

for thousands of First Great Western passengers and takes us a step closer to making Oyster the only ticket you'll need in London. TfL is investing £40 million in new Oyster equipment and I now urge the remaining companies to get on board."

Mr Johnson revealed that his plan to fast-track the Oyster scheme would be outlined in detail at his "summit" with private firms this summer. "In July, we will be able to set out a timetable for the full Oysterising of London," he told the Standard. "I hope very much that the other train operating companies will agree to deliver the same service across the capital by spring of next year." Improvements to services, station security and passenger safety

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would all be on the agenda, he said.

Transport Commissioner Peter Hendy said that the "new mood" brought to the job by Mr Johnson had proved crucial in securing the deal. "There's a change in spirit that is very welcome. I think that [the First Great Western deal] is a demonstration of it that," Mr Hendy said.

Andrew Haines, First Great Western's Chief Operating Officer, said: "This is good news for our Greater London customers, who will now be able to use Oyster facilities throughout their journey. The extension of Oyster onto the First Great Western network fits in with our considerable investment in the refurbishment of ticket offices and new ticket machines."

Mr Johnson, Mr Hendy and Mr Haines all appeared at Hayes and Har-

lington station this morning to mark the new deal. The pay-as-you-go system is currently accepted on London Overground, Chiltern and c2c services, Hackney stations on National Express East Anglia network and Clapham Junction to Watford services on Southern. Next year, South West Trains, which operates out of Waterloo, must accept Oyster under the terms of its new franchise.

About 78 per cent of all Tube and bus payments in London are now by Oyster card. In the five years since it was introduced, the proportion of cash payments on the Tube and buses has

fallen to three per cent. Auto top-up can be set up online to ensure that passengers never run out of cash to pay as they go.

When your balance drops below £5, it will automatically be topped up with either £20 or £40 the next time you touch in on any yellow card reader on the Tube, bus, tram, London Overground or Docklands Light Railway.

Mr Livingstone last year condemned London's private rail operating companies for refusing to accept all Oyster cards.

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