

23rd November 2000

Wessex Franchise Announcement

A new franchise to meet the growing demand for rail services in South West England was announced today by the Shadow Strategic Rail Authority (SSRA).

The Wessex franchise has been designed to attract new investment and to provide management focus on the important interurban and local services in the West Country, as well as improving cross country links between the region, Cardiff and the South Coast.

Key objectives of the new franchise are:

- Increased track capacity to carry more frequent trains on the Waterloo-Exeter line to provide a better alternative to the busy A303.
- A new business unit for the Bristol travel to work area to encourage the franchisee to develop rail commuting and cross-city services in the Bristol sub-region.
- Provision of adequate capacity to meet the needs of holiday passengers in the region and good connections with inter city services.
- Better access to rail services and a step change in customer satisfaction with stations.

The prequalification process for companies interested in operating the new franchise, and submitting replacement proposals for it, starts today. Applications should be made to Nick Newton, Executive Director Commercial, at the Shadow Strategic Rail Authority, 55 Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0EU. Interested parties should contact him no later than Friday 15th December 2000 to register their interest. Once this process is completed, prequalifiers will be required to put together initial proposals.

For local rail services currently provided West of Plymouth by Wales & West, a separate business unit will be established to provide local management accountability and customer focus. It is intended that this **Cornwall and Plymouth Business Unit** will either be operated within the Wessex franchise or as an addition to the mainline franchises in the South West. Therefore, counterparties who have successfully prequalified for the Wessex franchise will be invited to submit proposals for the operation of this, as will the two mainline operators in the South West of England, First Great Western and Virgin CrossCountry.

It is expected that shortlisted counterparties for both Wessex and local services in Cornwall will be announced in mid 2001.

Announcing details of the new franchise and business units, Mike Grant, Franchising Director and Chief Executive of the SSRA said:

" The Wessex franchise, carefully structured after extensive consultation with user groups and key stakeholders, represents a breakthrough in the future provision of rail services in the South West.

" In franchise replacement, the needs of passengers always come first. We have drawn heavily on consultations with the Southern, Western, and Welsh Rail Passengers' Committees, the South West Regional Assembly, the Regional Development Agency and local authorities, to ensure the best possible outcome.

" By combining a number of Wales & West and South West Trains services into the core franchise and creating separate management units for Bristol and Cornwall local services, I believe that rail services in the region will become far better equipped to deal with the future demands and expectations of local communities."

SSRA Chairman, Sir Alastair Morton, welcomed the launch of the new franchise:

" The shape of the new railway is now starting to emerge from planning to implementation. The Chiltern and South West Trains service areas, Wales and the borders, and now Wessex, are seeing what lies ahead in terms of enhancements for their regional rail services.

" When a new Thames franchise, serving primarily commuters living relatively close to London, and negotiations to improve the existing long term First Great Western franchise are launched, we can go on to complete the procedure for the entire region west of London and south of Birmingham."

Wessex franchise

This will include the transfer from **South West Trains** of services on the following routes:

London Waterloo - Salisbury - Exeter (and beyond)

Reading - Basingstoke - Brighton

Southampton - Salisbury

And the transfer from **Wales & West** of services on the following routes:-

Barnstaple - Exeter

Plymouth/Paignton - Exeter

Exmouth - Exeter

Brighton/Portsmouth - Cardiff

Southampton - Bristol

Southampton - Swindon

Weymouth - Bristol

Portsmouth - Exeter - Penzance

Swindon - Gloucester/Cheltenham

Taunton - Weston-super-Mare - Bristol* (local services)

Bristol - Cardiff*

Bristol - Gloucester/Cheltenham - Worcester / Birmingham*, including through services to and from Taunton and Weston-super-Mare (local services)

Bristol - Severn Beach*

Bath - Filton Abbey Wood *

** Denotes part of Bristol business unit*

Cornwall & Plymouth Business Unit

This will include the transfer from **Wales & West** of services on the following routes:-

Plymouth - Gunnislake

Penzance - Plymouth (local services)

Liskeard - Looe

Par - Newquay

Truro - Falmouth Docks

Penzance/St Erth - St Ives

The West Country services provided by First Great Western and Virgin CrossCountry remain outside the scope for the new franchise, as does the Thames Trains franchise.

Notes to Editors

1. The SSRA has already announced its intention to create separate Wales & Borders and Wessex franchises from the current Wales & West franchise, amongst others. The intention is that, separately, these franchises can dedicate their efforts to serving the interests of those living in their regions more effectively. The scope of the Wales & borders franchise was confirmed by the SSRA in August. Eight companies have prequalified.

2. The Wessex franchise will include all passenger stations currently operated by Wales & West for the services specified above (apart from stations in Wales on the line between Bristol and Cardiff and those west of Plymouth), and all passenger stations currently operated by South West Trains along the Exeter route west of Basingstoke. The decision to include Waterloo to Exeter services was previously announced by the SSRA on 12 October 2000.

3. The Cornwall and Plymouth business unit will include all passenger stations west of Plymouth.

4. Consultation has taken place with the Rail Passenger Committees for Western England and Southern England, the Regional Assembly's transport committee, the Regional Development Agency, Government Office (South West), and County and Unitary Councils within the region.

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