

**13th September 2001**

## **Separation of Wales and West**

The current Wales & West rail franchise is to be split into two managerial units, broadly covering its Welsh and English operations respectively, following agreement between the Strategic Rail Authority and National Express Group, owners of the franchise.

The Welsh services, along with the Valley Lines services, will be managed from Cardiff. They will operate under the 'Wales & Borders' branding.

The West Country services are to be managed from Exeter and will be operated under a 'Wessex Trains' branding. The 'Wessex Trains' HQ in Exeter is a new development, and staff are currently being recruited by National Express Group for positions there.

Passengers will begin to notice the new branding of services with the introduction of the Winter timetable on 30th September 2001.

### **Notes to Editors**

1. The Shadow SRA announced in June 2000 its intention to develop new franchises for Wales & Borders and Wessex. The SRA announced on 15 February 2001 that it had shortlisted four parties for negotiations to select a preferred operator for a new Wales & Borders franchise. On 2 March 2001 it announced that it had prequalified seven parties to prepare proposals for a new Wessex franchise.

The SRA will announce in due course how it will respond to the Secretary of State's recent draft statement on passenger rail franchising. Although the statement emphasises the importance of delivering short term benefits - essentially through existing franchises - as well as longer term improvements for passengers, this does not mean that there will be no early franchise replacements; it does not rule out the proposed Wessex and Wales & Borders franchises. The SRA will however, consider all the options for delivering benefits to passengers, and take a realistic view about affordability and what represents value for money.

2. The 'Wales & Borders' managerial unit will consist of Valley Lines' services and Wales & West services within Wales and to some English destinations. Discussions are continuing with National Express Group on an early transfer of services within Mid Wales (from Central Trains) to the new Wales & Borders management unit. Services in North Wales will currently continue to be operated by First North Western.

3. The 'Wessex Trains' managerial unit will consist of Wales & West services not transferring to Wales & Borders. London Waterloo-Exeter services and Reading-Brighton services will currently continue to be operated by South West Trains.

**For further details contact the Department for Transport Rail Press desk:  
020 7944 3108**