

**9th May 2001**

## **ECML Replacement Franchise**

The Strategic Rail Authority stated today that its evaluation of the latest proposals for the replacement franchise for the East Coast Main Line had not yet resolved all areas of concern. Specific issues outstanding include technical feasibility and value for money, financial risk and the extent to which proposals are deliverable while maintaining and improving services on this key long distance route. The two proposals are from GNER Holdings and Virgin Stagecoach.

The SRA is completing a detailed examination of both proposals before a final decision is submitted to the Government returned early in June. The replacement East Coast Main Line franchise is planned to be of 20 year duration and is as significant to Britain's rail system as the West Coast Main Line franchise, held by Virgin Trains.

The final decision on the preferred bidder is not expected to affect progress on the upgrade of the East Coast Main Line infrastructure which, as already announced, will be a joint venture led by the SRA with Railtrack, the new franchise operator for the route when selected, and other private sector investors. Work on the upgrade is well under way.

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