

7th February 2002

SRA's Northern Rail Moves Ahead

The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) today announced the start of formal consultations with Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) on the specification for the new 15 year Northern Rail franchise, developed to provide a better pattern of regional and local services for passengers in the North of England.

The franchise has been structured by the SRA to focus on urban and rural services serving the whole of the North of England including the major population centres of Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, York, Leeds and Newcastle.

The SRA will now start formal consultation with the seven PTEs concerned on the detail and scope of the franchise. Once this process is completed, the pre-qualified counterparties will be asked to prepare proposals, taking account of the core franchise proposition and potential enhancement options identified during the consultation.

Welcoming the start of the process, Richard Bowker, SRA Chairman, said:

"We are pleased to be moving ahead with the Northern Rail concept, which the SRA has developed in tandem with its new TransPennine Express franchise. Northern Rail will deliver significant benefits to travellers in the North of England, with its focus firmly on the provision of urban and rural services. We are now moving forward to further refine the franchise proposition with the Passenger Transport Executives before inviting counterparties to compete to run this important new franchise".

Notes to Editors

1. The Northern Rail franchise incorporates the existing urban and rural services within the current Arriva Trains Northern and First North Western networks. Services currently provided by First North Western to and from North Wales will however transfer to the new Wales and Borders franchise upon its commencement, planned for Spring 2003.
2. In seven metropolitan areas Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) may specify the minimum level of service, administer subsidy and be co-signatories to passenger rail franchise agreements. The Northern Rail franchise will serve parts of the regions of all seven : Greater Manchester, Merseyside (Merseytravel), Tyne & Wear (Nexus), South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire, West Midlands (Centro) and Strathclyde.

3. Pre - qualified parties for the Northern Rail franchise are expected to be announced in mid March. It is expected that the franchise will commence in early 2003.

4. The SRA is moving forward concurrently with its TransPennine Express franchise to develop existing inter - urban services currently included within Arriva Trains Northern and First North Western franchises.

5. Today's announcement follows the issue of a Section 26 notice to the SRA from the Secretary of State under the Railways Act 1993. It triggers the statutory rights of PTEs to specify services in accordance with Section 34 of the Act.

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