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Network Utilisation Strategy: First Ever Service Planning Framework for the Railway:

Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) today published its Network Utilisation Strategy (NUS), the first long-term service planning framework for the privatised Railway.

The NUS is the basic management tool that was missing at privatisation. It brings together all the choices on how the network is used, including train lengths, stopping patterns, rolling stock deployment and service types, into an integrated planning framework. Key features are:

- Better use of the existing network through measures including timetable adjustments and train lengthening, to allow significant increases in the existing railway's capacity to carry passengers and freight, alongside better punctuality;

- The creation of a 'Capacity Utilisation Index' that models the trade-off between the number of train services run and their punctuality. This identifies a threshold of 75% use of theoretical capacity, above which the benefits of extra services are typically outweighed by the costs of declining punctuality;

- The 'Long Distance Statement', the clear framework on which service levels will be based over the next 10 years, setting out planned frequencies route-by-route;

- A timeline and seven-point process for the production of 'Route Utilisation Strategies' (RUSs), the individual plans that will enable better use of capacity on every key congested rail line. The pilot RUS, for the Midland Main Line, is due to be published for consultation shortly. The West Coast Strategy, published today, follows RUS principles;

- A service specification for the 2004 Timetable, which sets out in advance of the RUS programme the proposed timetable changes during 2004.

The NUS is published ahead of the rail industry's timetable planning conference for the May 2004 timetable, which takes place from 23 - 25 June

For further details contact the Department for Transport Rail Press desk: 020 7944 3248