

30th January 2003

No Surprises for Welsh Railways as Bowker Holds Firm

Richard Bowker today published the SRA's second Strategic Plan describing it as "a stepping stone" to making a Case for Rail in support of next year's submission to the Government's 2004 Spending Review.

The Plan reaffirms the SRA's commitment to the rail system in Wales, detailing a number of improvements either completed or underway in the Principality, amongst a series of measure across Britain. The Plan sets down short term measures to get a grip of projects and costs in the rail industry, but also underlines the importance of a longer term vision.

Richard Bowker, the SRA Chairman, said:

"The Strategic Plan is a stepping stone to making a Case for Rail in 2004. It shows short-term grip and long-term vision. It puts delivery and performance at the forefront of our agenda and provides an honest, certain and transparent account of what the industry needs to do to make our case successfully to Government next year. This is a plan that is already underway, on a major scale, day in day out, and investment is rising at record levels.

"The railway industry has its destiny in its own hands. We have set out a clear Route Map to 2004 which details the key steps we are already following to improve performance and drive down costs. This is all part of making the Case for Rail. Anything else will be seen as failure by the public, private investors and by passengers."

"Rail forms an important part of Wales' transport infrastructure. The coming years will see a new Wales & Borders franchise and other important investments in the Welsh rail network, in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government. I cannot isolate Wales from the sometimes difficult decisions that have to be made to get the rail industry back on track, but continued growth and better performance remain core objectives of the Plan." Strategic Plan 2 sets out clearly what the priorities are, in order to demonstrate a short-term grip and a long-term vision. In Wales, Strategic Plan 2 details:

2002/3 achievements: bilingual customer information system, 'Inform Cymru', introduced across Wales & Borders network; Station improvements at Haverfordwest; and a new platform opened at Cardiff Central

New Wales & Borders franchise to commence in Autumn 2003, bring a new focus and identity for the railways in Wales

New Greater Western franchise by 2006 incorporating current First Great Western services to South Wales. This enlarged and harmonised

franchise will enable capacity to be increased, to improve performance or allow additional services on the route

West Coast Main Line to deliver a higher quality, faster Holyhead to London service with new trains from Winter 2004, at least matching current service frequency.

Services to and from Wales will benefit from increased capacity at Swindon (fourth Platform) and at Filton (north Bristol)

In partnership with Welsh Assembly Government, enhancements started on Vale of Glamorgan line for new passenger service, and being developed for Valley Lines

Plans being developed with Welsh Assembly Government to provide services on the Ebbw Valley Line

Today's Plan also commits the SRA to delivery over 2003/4 of a number of initiatives already announced, including :

A major review of the utilisation of network capacity and timetabling to ease congestion.

A new fares policy

Joint public / private funding vehicles to deliver network enhancements

New customer focused contracts for passenger train operators

A concentrated programme of passenger franchise awards to replace those contracts expiring over the next two years.

Continued implementation of the joint-industry National Rail

Performance Plan to tackle the root causes of delay on the network (including service recovery, fleet reliability, line possessions and timetable planning)

Notes to Editors:s

1. SRA-driven achievements in 2002 include:
 - Network Rail, a not-for-dividend company established in place of Railtrack
 - Investment, almost all from the private sector, is at highest ever levels - and still growing
 - Passenger kilometres up by 2.4% and freight tonne kilometres by 7.1% above the previous 12 months
 - A solution for the West Coast project, reining back cost inflation and setting out a widely-supported strategy to enable implementation
 - Replacements for Mark 1 'slam door' rolling stock have been ordered and a plan is being developed for power supply upgrades
 - New Franchising Policy, improving customer service and value for money
2. The Office of the Rail Regulator will make its determination on rail funding raised through track access grant levels in the Autumn of 2003, taking due account of strategies provided by the SRA in accordance with the Transport Act 2000.

3. Tables depicting key rail indicators, including the record levels of expenditure on rail since privatisation, are available from the SRA press office.

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