

**9th October 2003**

## **Two Year Central Trains Extension**

The SRA has signed a two-year extension with incumbent franchisee National Express Group PLC to operate the Central Trains passenger rail franchise which provides services across the Midlands, North West England, and into South Wales and East Anglia. The current franchise will be extended from 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2006. A new franchise will commence in April 2006 following a competitive tender.

The terms of the extension ensures the continuation of current service levels, measures to address customer service issues and provide certainty through the implementation of the West Coast Mainline Strategy. The customer service measures include steps to improve information to passengers, train cleaning programmes, increased staff training and additional staff to manage timetable and engineering strategies.

SRA Chairman Richard Bowker said:

"The two-year extension will deliver stability for passengers while we go through the period of change leading to the full implementation of the West Coast Mainline Strategy. It will also allow us to consider the outcome of our West Midlands Capacity Study and develop our long-term plans for the franchise."

Rob Donald, Director General of Centro (the West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive) said:

"This extension will give Centro time to work with the SRA on plans for a new franchise to start in 2006 and for this to then take account of the longer term rail development needs in the West Midlands. In the meantime, we will be working with Central Trains to apply the additional public funds over the next two years to improve the quality of local rail services."

Notes to Editors

1. The subsidy payments for the two-year extension will be circa £221m in 2004/05 (dependent upon the final outcome of the financial arrangements for revenue and performance), an increase of £54m compared to 2003/04 levels and £236m in 2005/06, an increase of £69m compared to 2003/04 levels. National Express Group has committed £5m to fund some capital schemes.
2. Central Trains operates an extensive network of rural, urban and interurban services right across the Midlands, North West England and into South Wales and East Anglia. In the West Midlands, local services

are supported by Centro (West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive).

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