THE DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT ('the Department') INVITES EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST IN THE SOUTH CENTRAL PASSENGER RAIL FRANCHISE.
The process will commence immediately with the new franchise scheduled to start in September 2009.

The Department
The Department's objective is to oversee the delivery of a reliable, safe and secure transport system that responds efficiently to the needs of individuals and business whilst safeguarding the environment.

Further information on the Department may be found on its website: www.dft.gov.uk Attention is drawn to the 'A Guide to the Railway Franchise Procurement Process' which can be found under “Rail Franchises” in the Railways section of the site: www.dft.gov.uk/railways/franchises. The Department is committed to a process of continuous review and improvement of the franchising process and intends to make the procurement process as simple and transparent as possible. The Department believes that this approach will most likely secure best value for money bids on behalf of rail passengers and taxpayers.

The Franchise
The franchise to tender for is the South Central passenger rail franchise. The term of the franchise is five years and ten months (expiring in July 2015), with the final year dependent on achieving acceptable performance levels. The franchise will include an ability to extend by up to two years from July 2015 at the Department's discretion. The new South Central Franchise will be formed from the existing Southern franchise together with the existing Gatwick Express franchise which is expected to be incorporated within the Southern franchise in June 2008, and the Tonbridge - Redhill element of the current Southeastern service that will be operated by Southern from December 2008.

The future franchisee should have sufficient financial backing to place a performance bond and a season ticket bond. These shall be in the order of 30,000,000 Pounds Sterling and 25,000,000 Pounds Sterling respectively.

The Accreditation Process
The franchise will be let by an Invitation to Tender ('ITT') process. Details of the process are available in the 'A Guide to the Railway Franchise Procurement Process' referred to above.

Interested parties are able to download an 'Accreditation Documentation Pack' containing further information on the franchise together with an Accreditation Questionnaire ('AQ') and a Franchise Letting Process Agreement, that includes confidentiality and non-collusion undertakings, from the Railways section of the Department's website. The purpose of accreditation is to select a manageable field of those to whom the Department would be content to award the franchise, subject to them submitting the best value bid. The applicants that are accredited will receive an ITT to operate the franchise.

Completed AQs must be delivered to Dale Ward, Department for Transport, 3/27 Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DR no later than 12 noon on 27th June 2008. Enquiries regarding this advert should be e-mailed to southern@dft.gsi.gov.uk