

New Cross Country, East Midlands and West Midlands franchises

Railways: Invitations to tender for New Cross Country, East Midlands and West Midlands franchises

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Tom Harris): I am today announcing that we have issued bidders for the new East Midlands, West Midlands and New Cross Country rail franchises with an Invitation to Tender (ITT). Copies of stakeholder briefing documents, which give a synopsis of each ITT, have been placed in the House Libraries and are available on the Department for Transport website at www.dft.gov.uk.

On the 18th October 2005, (Hansard col, 52-53 WS) the Secretary of State announced that three new rail franchises would be created (East Midlands, West Midlands and a new Cross Country) from four currently existing franchises (Central, Silverlink, Cross Country and Midland Mainline). The new franchises will begin operation on Sunday 11 November 2007 and will provide over 2,000 daily rail services.

Each ITT has been informed by recent public consultations. Bidders have to provide the minimum service levels the ITT sets out and can propose additional services subject to any operational constraints and affordability.

Our aim is to build on the recent success of current operators, meet current and future passenger demand and facilitate increases in capacity. The changes proposed will increase the number of trains operated per day over the rail network. In many areas, timetables will change to help deliver more frequent and faster services. In particular the West Coast Main Line will see marked increase in capacity, following the significant investment on the route, with the implementation of a 2008 timetable. In the New Cross Country franchise, bidders will be required to price a 30% increase in capacity on key routes. The East Midlands franchise starts the process of segmenting the long distance and commuter markets on the route, which will make train lengthening simpler to implement.

Bidders must deliver value for money for both passengers and tax payers, and deliver improvements for current and future rail users. Performance will be contracted to improve significantly across all three new franchises.

In the East and West Midlands franchises, where the operators are responsible for stations, the busiest stations will achieve Secure Stations Accreditation to improve passenger safety. The winners of the three franchises will also accept interoperable smartcard ticketing across the whole of the franchise during its lifetime. Fares regulation will remain capped at a maximum average rise of RPI+1% on all regulated tickets.