

Ms D Rose
Railway Sponsorship Division
Dept for Transport, Local Government & Regions
Zone 3/33
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DR

31 July 2001

Dear Ms Rose

Re: Draft Franchising Statement

The South East England Regional Assembly welcomes the publication of the Draft Franchising Statement published for comment on 16 July 2001.

In keeping with published national planning guidance the South East England Regional Assembly places the highest priority on ensuring that spatial and transportation planning are properly integrated and notes the Government's support for RPG being the appropriate mechanism for delivery of this objective. In this context the Regional Assembly therefore wishes to express its serious concern and disappointment that the Regional Planning Bodies (RPBs) for the English Regions were not included in the list of formal consultees. It submits that delivery of the Government's policy framework set out in the Transport White Paper requires the RPBs to be included in all future consultations as formal consultees.

Turning to the draft statement itself, the Regional Assembly is deeply concerned by the shift in emphasis in favour of short term extensions of existing franchises. The rail network requires substantial investment if the capacity and network resilience necessary to meet future demands is to be provided at the earliest opportunity possible.

In this context it is difficult to understand what added value the short term extension of existing franchises has compared with the previous commitment by the SRA to replace all short term franchises at the earliest opportunity. Existing franchises were awarded at the time of rail privatisation against a background of maintaining the network at minimum cost. Against this background a programme of franchise replacement would appear to provide a more appropriate mechanism for ensuring that the

future development of rail franchises reflects fully the need to plan for substantial growth.

The South East England Regional Assembly remains to be convinced that the most appropriate way to securing the "substantial investment" required in the original short term franchises is through a short-term extension of two years. If it is the contention that a franchise extension of greater than two years could be granted, the Regional Assembly would wish to be reassured that the fundamental weaknesses of the original franchises referred to above, are fully addressed.

The South East England Regional Assembly welcomes the identification of the need for new franchises to be bid against a clear specification of core outputs. In this context the Regional Assembly considers essential that the core outputs for each franchise are developed in partnership with the appropriate Regional Planning Body(ies). Such a partnership would ensure that the development of the franchises takes fully into account the need to reflect and support the spatial planning strategy set out in RPG.

On a related issue, the Regional Assembly assumes that for each franchise considered it will be necessary to prioritise the list of benefits set out in the draft statement in paragraph 11. It may be appropriate to include such a prioritisation alongside the definition of core outputs. As such it would be appropriate for the Regional Assembly to advise accordingly.

The South East England Regional Assembly is concerned as to whether the emphasis given to focusing on the 10 Year Plan is appropriate in the context of developing new franchises that are potentially 15 or 20 years in length. Whilst the importance of relating new investment to the framework provided by the 10 Year Plan is accepted, care needs to be exercised to ensure that strategic long term investment in infrastructure or rolling stock is not unduly ignored in favour of the (comparatively) shorter term priorities set out in the 10 Year Plan.

I trust that above comments are of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Martin Tugwell
Head of Regional Transport Planning

Copied to: Charlotte Dixon - GOSE
Laura Wren - SRA