

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND  
REGIONAL TRANSPORT BOARD**

Date: 24 January 2008

Subject: **South Central Franchise**

Report of: Planning Manager  
South East England Regional Assembly

**Recommendation:**

It is recommended that the Board notes the issues identified herewith in responding to the forthcoming re-letting of the South Central franchise in 2009 and engages with DfT Rail to ensure maximum alignment of the franchise specification with the South East's spatial and economic policies.

**Purpose of Report:**

To set out the context at the regional level within which the Board's engagement in the re-letting of the South Central franchise needs to take place.

**Key Issues:**

The preparation of the specification for the re-letting of the South Central franchise provides an opportunity for the Board to ensure that rail services support delivery of the regional policy framework as set out in the draft South East Plan and the Regional Economic Strategy.

This report provides a first opportunity for the Board to consider the issues it wishes to see included within the franchise specification. It also provides the opportunity to understand the process associated with the re-letting of the franchise.

## **I. Context**

- 1.1. The franchise covering South London, eastern Surrey, most of East Sussex and West Sussex is known as the “South Central Franchise”. Having recovered from the difficulties suffered in the 1990s and early 2000s, the present franchise, awarded in May 2003, expires on 31 December 2009. The incumbent franchisee, Govia, who operate under the trading name “Southern” had in fact taken over in 2000 because of the well-publicised difficulties suffered by their predecessor, Connex. The process for awarding the new franchise will begin later this year.

## **2. Developments since 2003 and the key issues arising**

- 2.1. Since Govia succeeded in retaining the franchise in 2003, further service changes and strategy updates have occurred, principally as a result of the much delayed Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy (BML RUS).
- 2.2. Southern Regional Planning Assessment (RPA)
  - 2.2.1. The role of the RPA is to provide a longer term strategic look at the issues facing the rail system over a 20 year horizon. As such it informs, and is informed by, the Regional Spatial Strategy. The framework set out in the RPA will be a key input into the preparation of the franchise specification. It summarises the role of the rail network in the regional context as being:
    - i) Supporting the growth of the central London economy;
    - ii) Supporting the spatial strategy of strengthening the regional hubs, by encouraging better use of existing rail services delivering access to and between those hubs;
    - iii) Supporting the delivery of the key locations for regeneration, housing and employment growth in the RPA area;
    - iv) Enabling orbital and cross-London movement;
    - v) Improving links to the rest of the country;
    - vi) Supporting planned airport growth and growth in use of rail services to the continent;
    - vii) Supporting port growth and accommodating growth in freight traffic;
    - viii) Supporting the integration of rail with other transport modes by encouraging the development of stations as interchanges;
    - ix) Supporting the focusing of new development at locations where convenient access to existing stations exists or can be relatively easily provided; and
    - x) Supporting delivery of social inclusion priorities
  - 2.2.2. The RPA identifies the impact of crowding at the London terminals (Victoria and London Bridge), the need to address capacity issues on the Brighton Main Line, and emphasises the importance of the Thameslink upgrade. It also highlights the importance of removing the bottleneck at Gatwick Airport station. Delivering the promised upgrade in services on the North Downs Line is identified as an objective in the longer term, as is the need to improve the quality of Coastway services.

- 2.3. Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy / Sussex Route Utilisation Strategy
- 2.3.1. Planning for more immediate demands than the strategic planning horizon of the RPAs are the Route Utilisation Strategies (RUSs). The work on the Brighton Main Line RUS had four key objectives for the route:
- i) To reduce overcrowding/accommodate current and anticipated future growth in passenger demand and increase carrying capacity on the BML, and suburban commuter services, where it can be achieved within the existing infrastructure;
  - ii) To continue to improve operational performance of BML services to give passengers a better service, and contribute towards national performance targets;
  - iii) To maintain a high quality London Victoria – Gatwick Airport service; and
  - iv) To achieve sustainable value for money within the constraints of the overall rail budget.
- 2.3.2. Following a protracted period of discussion and several iterations of consultation, a way forward for implementing the key elements of the RUS has been identified. Those elements that have yet to be implemented will no doubt be re-examined as part of the re-letting of the franchise.
- 2.3.3. Network Rail, which has now taken over responsibility from DfT Rail for the preparation of Route Utilisation Strategies, is expected to commence work imminently on the new Sussex Coast RUS which will supersede the current BML RUS. A consultation document is expected at the end of 2008 or early 2009.
- 2.4. Amended Gatwick Express and South Central Franchises
- 2.4.1 The mutually agreed early transfer of the Gatwick Express service (previously a separate franchise) to Govia will take place in May 2008. This will provide the opportunity to recast the service timetable with effective from December 2008. The new timetable will provide for the extension of up to six Gatwick Express services to/from Brighton (doubling the present services into London in the morning peak and back from London in the afternoon peak) in order to relieve overcrowded services both north and south of Gatwick.
- 2.4.2. Network Rail has commenced planning for a remodelling of Gatwick Station. This is presently programmed to begin in 2010, and is included within the Network Rail Strategic Business Plan proposals currently undergoing consideration by the Office of Rail Regulation. The proposals will result in an increase in platform and concourse capacity helping to relieve current congestion levels.
- 2.4.3 The works planned for Gatwick Airport station are important for two other reasons. Firstly, BAA Gatwick views rail access to the airport as fundamental to the airport's surface access strategy. With up to 90% of passengers

travelling from Central London planning to travel by rail, and ambitious targets having been set to increase further public transport patronage on the other corridors serving Gatwick Airport, the future of the station is central to the success of the airport as a transport hub. Also of importance is the station's role as part of the gateway to the UK which will be given added emphasis as part of the preparations for the 2012 Olympic Games.

### **3. Next Steps**

- 3.1 This meeting provides the Board with the opportunity to begin a dialogue with DfT officials as part of the franchising process.
- 3.2 It is particularly important for the Board to understand the parameters within which the franchise specification will be developed. Understanding the base case will in turn enable the region to identify the key issues that it may wish to put forward for consideration as additional options within the franchise specification.

**Andy Mak**  
**Planning Manager**

14 January 2008

Contact: Andy Mak, Planning Manager  
T: 01483 555215 E: [andymak@southeast-ra.gov.uk](mailto:andymak@southeast-ra.gov.uk)