

Edinburgh MP calls for East Coast rail franchise to be publicly run



East Coast Line franchise: Mark Lazarowicz MP calls for publicly operated company to be allowed to bid

In questioning the Transport Secretary today following the Government's announcement that it is going to put the East Coast Line franchise out to tender once again, Mark Lazarowicz MP called on the Government to allow the publicly owned Directly Operated Railways to put in a public sector bid to offer a real alternative to private bidders.

Mark said:- "Given the fiasco over the West Coast Line franchise, I would have preferred the East Coast Line to remain in public hands but at the very least the public operator – Directly Operated Railways – which has run the line successfully over the last 4 years should be allowed to bid. It makes no sense to throw away the practical experience of running the line successfully it has built up because of a blinkered ideology that private must always be best.

"The history of the line over the last 10 years just doesn't bear that out. Neither of the last 2 private operators have been able to meet the terms of their contracts having overbid, leaving the Government with no choice but to step in. In contrast, the public operator increased profits by 7% in 2011-12 in a difficult economic climate and returned £187.7 million to the taxpayer."

UK Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin, today unveiled long-term plans designed to drive improvements to rail services, deliver on major infrastructure projects, and put

passengers at the heart of a revitalised rail franchising system.

In addition to publishing for the first time ever a detailed transparent timetable for all rail franchises over the next 8 years, the Transport Secretary announced the immediate start of the competition for the East Coast franchise, currently directly operated, with the expectation the new franchisee will carry its first passengers by February 2015.

The new approach to franchising:

- will provide long-term certainty to the market
- support the Department for Transport's massive programme of rail investment
- deliver on the independent Brown review of rail reform ahead of the April deadline for implementation of its recommendations

In rolling out the programme the Department for Transport will work closely with the industry to negotiate further new services and more capacity in franchising contracts while delivering the best deal for both passengers and taxpayers. The new approach will see the interests of passengers strengthened within the franchising system, with passengers' views on train company performance playing an enhanced role in deciding whether to continue an operator's contract.

Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin said:

"This programme is a major step in delivering tangible improvements to services, providing long-term certainty to the market and supporting our huge programme of rail investment. Above all, in future franchise competitions we are placing passengers in the driving seat by ensuring that their views and satisfaction levels are taken into account when deciding which companies run our railway services."

Franchising has been a force for good in the story of Britain's railways, transforming an industry that was in decline into one that today carries record numbers of passengers."

Following the statement from the Department for Transport (DfT) regarding rail franchising, a spokesman for East Coast said:- "We always believed that a return of this franchise to the private sector was inevitable.

"Since we took over in 2009, we have repaid more than £640m to the taxpayer, achieved record-breaking customer satisfaction and the best performance on the route since records began in 1999. We are working on a plan for the next five years of the franchise which will consider some major decisions and projections for growth. This will be available to assist the future owner, whoever that is."

Photo of East Coast train courtesy of East Coast Main Line Company Ltd

