

## **Joint Transportation Board**

**11<sup>th</sup> June 2013**

### **Rail Franchising – Position Statement**

The Chairman has asked that the Board receive a position statement on rail franchising as an opportunity for Board Members to discuss this issue and raise any points of concern for further consideration.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2013 the Transport Secretary, Patrick McLoughlin MP, announced the Department for Transport's (DfT) long term plan for rail franchising. This was issued in response to a review by Richard Brown which uncovered serious failings in the DfT's franchise procurement process following the problems with the Inter-City West Coast bidding process. The announcement stated that the plan was designed to drive improvements to rail services, deliver on major infrastructure projects and put passengers at the heart of a revitalised rail franchising system. The aim was to provide long term certainty to the market and support the delivery of the Government's £9.4billion rail investment strategy for 2014-2019. A detailed timetable for all rail franchises over the next eight years was published and, taking into account the recommendations of the Brown review, the new programme for rail franchising would deliver no more than three to four competitions per year and stagger the two principal Inter-City franchises (West Coast and East Coast) so that they would not be let at the same point in the economic cycle. In order to roll out the programme and stagger future competitions and franchise start dates, it was considered necessary to exercise a mixture of contractual extensions and direct award contracts with current operators. This included Southeastern where the franchise had been due to expire in April 2014, but has firstly been extended to October 2014, and is extremely likely to be further extended until June 2018.

With regard to the current Southern franchise, this expires in July 2015 and a revised invitation to tender will be issued to existing short-listed bidders this summer. This would be a management style contract due to the level of investment and change on the route during the latter stages of the Thameslink project.

Therefore, now that the future situation of local rail services and the two franchises that affect Ashford is a little clearer, and with the Southeastern franchise at least seemingly set fair for the next five years, it would seem a good time for Members to raise any points of concern or clarification that they would like to make. It is also worth noting other issues which this Board and Officers are keen to take forward or examine further: -

- An examination of parking charges at rural stations and the knock on effect this has on parking in surrounding streets.

- Suggestions that, in the future, parts of the Kent-London Metro services could be transferred to Transport for London and the impact this may have locally.
- Suggestions that, in the future, Local Authorities may be able to take on rail franchises themselves.
- The Ashford International 'spur' and signalling issues at Ashford which need to be addressed to continue to allow international trains to use the station in the medium/long term future.
- Possibilities for a direct Kent to Gatwick Service (potentially via Ashford, Tonbridge and Redhill) when the Southern contract came up for renewal in 2015. This was discussed at the Transport Forum on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2011 and the Forum wrote a letter in support.

It is intended that the Council's new Transport, Highways & Engineering Advisory Committee, which will also be chaired by Councillor Bernard Heyes, will take these, and other matters related to rail, forward. The new Advisory Committee would be the Council's liaison and interface with transport providers and attempt to co-ordinate a seamless and effective system locally, nationally and internationally.

**The Board is encouraged to give their views on the matter of rail franchising and other rail related matters and raise any issues they would like the new Transport, Highways & Engineering Advisory Committee to pursue.**