

West Coast Partnership franchise bidding

First Trenitalia

Overview

The UK Department for Transport (DfT) ran the West Coast Partnership franchise competition to select the next operator of the West Coast franchise. This franchise competition was unusual as it included the requirement to act as the Shadow Operator (ShOp) for HS2 between 2019 and 2026, and then operate HS2 from 2026 to 2031, with a possible extension for a further two years, totally 12 or 14 years. FirstGroup partnered with Trenitalia to produce a bid which demonstrated capability and deliverable plans to improve further the UK's flagship rail service, along with the high speed experience required to advise development of, and then run, the HS2 operation. This franchise competition saw the highest ever quality score requirements applied to the *most economically advantageous tender* equation. Delivery plan 2.2, Rolling Stock, formed a key part of the tender, enabling the bidder to offer their commercial proposition, and enhanced customer experience, through a deliverable train service.

Our client's challenge

Our client sought UK rail sector expertise to augment their existing fleet bid team, providing creativity and additional resource for the development of their fleet strategy, maintenance, train presentation, depots and stabling plans. Procurement advice was also an advantage as the tender required a "reduction in diesel emissions at railhead", which was understood by the industry to require the removal of the Class 221 Super Voyager fleet in their current configuration with replacement by a alternative traction solution either through modification of the Class 221s or by procurement of a new fleet.

Our response

IPEX provided two experienced rolling stock commercial engineers who embedded themselves within the FirstGroup team for the duration of the franchise bid. Our consultants worked closely with all sub-teams in the bid team to develop a cohesive bid, through an in depth knowledge of the supply chain, railway operations and the route. The team demonstrated that collaboration through embedding in the client team could be achieved not only by being present in the client's office but also through remote working being linked to the client through multiple avenues. Our team became a vital part of the First Group team representing them in meetings with Network Rail and the wider rail industry, negotiating on their behalf, developing fleet strategies beyond that originally conceived, working with the wider First Group team to develop an integrated customer focussed, operational, and engineering solution. While one of the Engineers developed a fleet strategy negotiating with manufacturers and maintainers alike, to deliver new trains, refurbished trains, and a new maintenance policy, the other carried out a research project demonstrating that the speed limits on the railway had been suppressed and that the line speed could be raised for non-tilting trains.

The value to the client

Our rolling stock engineers gelled quickly with the permanent team and were able to flex to the client's needs, providing 'short sprints' and 'lean burns' to maintain budget compliance despite extensions to the bidding duration. Our team brought diversity and creativity of ideas beyond the existing remit for the rolling stock, which led to a creative, forward thinking, innovative, fleet solution, developed alongside operational and customer requirements, matching the Department for Transport's high quality, flagship franchise brief.

Our team brought new concepts, new experience, and new thinking into the franchise bid process, particularly bringing leading research and development, and railway standards expertise to enable the solution proposed by First Group to be developed beyond the existing boundaries of the railway infrastructure.

First Trenitalia West Coast Rail was awarded the franchise in September 2019 and a team was then deployed to mobilise the franchise ready for first day operations in December 2019, and work within the project delivery team during the franchise delivery phase leading the line speed project, and the new trains procurement project.